Moral and Ethical Leadership:
One Principal's Beliefs and Practices

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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2017
Abstract

Moral and Ethical Leadership: One Principal’s Beliefs and Practices, Doctor of Philosophy, 2017, Kelly Manning, Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, OISE/UT.

Over the past twenty-five years, there has been an increasing body of literature exploring the principal and the teacher as moral agents. Along with a focus on the moral dimensions of teaching and administration, there has been growing emphasis on the ethical nature of schools. This research study considers how one elementary school leader resolves moral and ethical issues and challenges in her daily practice; it further explores the extent of her awareness of such issues and challenges as being moral and ethical in nature.

The primary research question is: How does one elementary school principal conceptualize her work in moral terms and engage in ethical practices? The secondary research question is: In what ways does one elementary school principal believe her previous professional experiences and prior life experiences have made her more aware of the moral and ethical dimensions of her role and influenced the way she conceptualizes and deals with ethical situations in her practice?

This study is a rich portrayal of who the principal is as a school leader and how she understands the ethical components of her practice as she strives to cultivate an ethical school. Components of her practice that are explored include fostering relationships, encouraging dialogue, formulating decisions that make reference to ethical virtues and moral values, and providing support for purposeful learning. Other dimensions include nurturing a climate of respect and trust, building awareness of the moral implications of words and actions, and fostering a safe and caring community within the school. The principal’s resolve to conduct her work in an ethical
manner is uncovered in a complex array of encounters and interactions with participants in the course of her daily practice.
Acknowledgments

I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to all the participants in this study who graciously offered their time and energy. Your thoughts and feedback brought clarity and contributed to a deeper understanding of the moral aspects of educational leadership. In particular, I would like to thank the main participant, Christine, whose courage, honesty and openness allowed for countless insights that form the basis of this work. I deeply appreciate the trust you placed in me in sharing your personal and professional life stories, and your willingness to do so with such humour and grace. Thank you for opening St. Abby school and your office to me, and for your genuine engagement and involvement in this study.

I extend my thanks to my external examiner, Dr. Keith Walker, from the University of Saskatchewan, for his thoughtful and constructive feedback, which will assist me in my future work. I also gratefully acknowledge my examination committee members, Dr. Rhonda Martinussen, Dr. David Booth and Dr. Karyn Cooper, for helping to make my final oral examination a productive and positive experience.

My deepest thanks are offered to the members of my thesis committee, Dr. Dennis Thiessen and Dr. Kathy Broad, for the time and energy they devoted to my research and writing. Your thoughtful feedback, words of encouragement, and sense of humour made this journey an enjoyable experience. With heartfelt gratitude, I would like to acknowledge my thesis supervisor, Dr. Elizabeth Campbell, who has been a constant source of strength and support. Elizabeth, your guidance and mentorship over the years have been invaluable. I am deeply grateful for your unwavering commitment to my growth as a researcher and as a scholar. I will always remember our meetings at Mercurio’s Café, and the thoughtful discussions we shared. I look forward to having many more conversations and future collaborations.

I would like to express my gratitude to my colleagues and friends, whose encouraging words and genuine interest in my work have made the journey so memorable. In particular, I would like to thank my colleague and friend, José, my cousin, Oliver, and my dear friend, Bob. To my late parents, Thomas and Lillian Manning, for their guidance and support, and the many ways in which they enriched my life and allowed me to become the person I am today. Their influence continues to guide me. I extend my deepest gratitude to my sister, Chrislyn, whose support, love
and patience have been unwavering throughout this process. I am truly grateful for the countless hours you dedicated in helping me express my ideas and for your honest and constructive feedback that always made my work better. Your consistent belief in me and your commitment to seeing me succeed has made it possible to pursue my dreams.

Lastly, on a somewhat light-hearted note, I would like to thank my furry, four-legged feline companions, who over the years have given me much unconditional love and support. In particular, I thank Rufus, my beautiful cat, who woke me up early every morning, motivating me to make maximum use of my time to write. He is dearly missed and never forgotten.
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Chapter 1

1 Introduction to the Study

The central or main purpose of this case study is to uncover how one elementary school principal conceptualizes her work in moral terms and to understand how she engages in ethical practices. There are three broad thematic aspects of this case study that inform the central purpose. The first thematic aspect includes understanding the dimensions of the principal’s practice that she believes have ethical relevance. The second theme involves uncovering how the principal thinks about the ethical elements of her work in relation to students, teachers, support staff, parents, and community members. The final theme explores the kinds of situations that the principal encounters on a daily basis that involve ethical decisions and actions. It considers how she deals with these ethical situations in her practice.

There are two additional purposes in this case study. The first is to investigate the ways in which an elementary school principal believes her previous professional experiences have made her more aware of the moral and ethical dimensions of her role. It is also to uncover how these previous professional experiences have influenced the way she conceptualizes and deals with the ethical situations that she encounters on a daily basis. The second purpose is to investigate the ways in which an elementary school principal believes her prior life experiences have made her more aware of the moral and ethical dimensions of her role. It uncovers how prior life experiences have influenced the way she conceptualizes and deals with the ethical situations that she confronts in her daily work. These two additional purposes serve to enhance and illuminate the central or main purpose of the study.

The result is a rich account of who the principal is as an administrator and how she makes sense of the ethical dimensions of her practice. These dimensions include building relationships, making decisions that draw on ethical virtues and moral principles, providing support to others and fostering dialogue. Other ethical dimensions of her practice include cultivating a climate of respect and trust, creating awareness of the ethical implications of words and actions and nurturing a safe and caring environment.
This case study contributes to the knowledge base of school leadership by furthering the understanding of what is presently known about the ethical principal. By advancing what is understood about the relationship between the ethical principal and the ethical teacher, and how each informs the other’s practice, this study adds to the knowledge base of school leadership and teaching. This research enhances our knowledge of how a principal cultivates an ethical school, leading to a deeper appreciation of the moral influence of school leaders.

This study is relevant to the literature on the ethical principal, the ethical teacher, and the ethical school, and attempts to show how they are interrelated. For some time, there has been disconnect between the literature on ethical leadership and the literature on ethical teaching (Campbell, 2003a, 2008a) and this study attempts to address this disconnect. Literature on leadership reveals that when people are included and are empowered to lead, they feel that they belong to a community (Sergiovanni, 2007). This study seeks to understand how a principal instills a sense of belonging and inclusiveness, and how her actions contribute to an ethical community. Studies have revealed that the ethical principal is aware that his or her actions and decisions can have an effect on others’ lives (Cranston, Ehrich & Kimber, 2006; Dempster & Berry 2003; Frick 2009). This research extends this literature by examining how the principal’s prior life and previous professional experiences have influenced her awareness of the ethical components of her work. It provides empirical evidence that when a school leader expresses ethical virtues and applies moral principles in her daily interactions with others, her moral influence can be observed in almost every aspect of school life.

It has been noted in the literature that principals not only need to be aware of the moral dimensions of their work, but they must also be prepared to deal with the ethical issues that confront them (Dempster & Berry, 2003; Frick, 2009; Langlois & Lapointe, 2010; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011; Wagner & Simpson, 2009). This study examines how one principal deals with ethical issues. It also considers the views of those who work closely with her, and their perception of the way she deals with these issues. Insights from participants in diverse roles provide a deeper understanding of the principal’s approach to the moral aspects of her practice. This deeper understanding extends what is currently known in the literature about how principals confront ethnically complex situations (Beckner, 2004; Duignan, 2006; Havard, 2014; Heslep, 1997; Rebore, 2014; Sergiovanni, 2001b; Wagner & Simpson, 2009) and about how others perceive their ability to deal with these situations (Beck and Murphy, 1992; Starratt, 2004).
There are several key concepts guiding my study that are discussed in a subsequent section of this chapter. They primarily relate to terms such as moral agency and ethical knowledge. Notably, the words moral and ethical are used interchangeably, which reflects the variable use of the terms in the educational administration and teaching literature. This has been defended in the context of applied professional ethics in education (Campbell 2003; Colnerud, 2006).

My study is unique in the contribution to the field of school leadership as it is a rich and detailed empirical case study of one elementary school principal. The uniqueness of my study is evident in the amount of time that I spent with the principal and with those who work with her. By observing the principal over five consecutive months in her interactions with teachers, support staff, parents, and community members, I obtained an in-depth understanding of how the principal conceptualizes the moral elements of her practice. Through daily observations I gained a deeper insight into the kinds of ethical situations she encounters that are often multilayered and at times, are fraught with uncertainty. Interviews with the principal and with those who work closely with her offer a vivid portrait of an administrator who experiences successes and setbacks as she works with others to build an ethical school. A unique component of my study is a series of interviews with a biographical focus that were conducted with the principal. Through these interviews, the principal was able to reflect on her prior life and previous professional experiences and articulate how they have influenced her awareness of the moral dimensions of her practice. These interviews provide a complex and rich account of the moments and events in her life that have brought her to where she is today and have inspired and guided her in her work.

1.1 Background to and Rationale for the Study

1.1.1 History of the Role of the Principal

The importance of knowing the history of school leadership is that it informs us of our unquestioned beliefs about effective leadership. Knowledge of the evolution of leadership provides us with a greater understanding of where the leadership structures that persist in schools came from and why principals behave as they do (Ryan, 2009, p.11).

To appreciate the present and to have a vision for the future one must understand the past. Most professions, including school administration, are defined by events and changes that occur over time. Principals in Canada share an interesting collective history that when understood can shed
light on their present practice. Their history is inextricably connected with teachers and the schools in which they work. Bogotch (2011) argues, “It is not a sign of good health for any academic field or discipline to have an uncontested and unexamined history, especially when that field is education” (p. 4). This section will include a brief overview of significant influences in society that have shaped and continue to shape the daily practice of principals, particularly as they pertain to the moral and ethical aspects of their work.

Ryan (2009) in offering an account of the system of public education in Canada explains that forms of leadership experienced today can be traced back to the early 1900s. From the 1920s to the 1940s the dominant societal view maintained that successful leadership depended on the personal traits of the leader. Known as the “Great Man Theory”, the way to ensure a strong leader was to watch others who were successful in leadership, discover what traits they had, and then hire people with those traits. Military organization in World War I and II and the achievements of the Canadian Pacific Railway were seen to have proven that when a group of competent leaders were in charge of a large group of people, successful results were achieved. The accepted notion was that good leaders were born, not developed over time.

In the middle of the twentieth century, the focus on leadership traits subsided and new interest developed in leadership styles and behaviour. This shift mirrored changes happening in psychological research that were concerned with studying observable behaviour (Mengel, 2007). Fiedler’s “Contingency Theory” (Hoyt, 2007) suggested that an effective leader in one situation might not necessarily be effective in a different situation. Fiedler believed the extent to which a leadership style was successful was reliant on how favourable or unfavourable the situation was, and this could be determined by the quality of the relationship between the leader and the follower, the way the task was structured, and power yielded by the position (Hoyt, 2007). Fiedler argued that an organization should try to place a manager in a situation where his or her leadership style matched the requirements of the situation. If this proved difficult, he suggested changing the elements of the situation so that the situation itself would be more favourable to the leader. The reasoning was that it might be simpler to try to change a situation rather than try to change a leader (Barbour, 2007).
Over time other leadership theories emerged. Transactional leadership was first recognized by the author and scholar James McGregor Burns and became a common approach for the study of leadership in schools. Ciulla (2007) offers a definition of transactional leadership. She states,

Transaction leadership rests on the values found in the means of an act. These are called modal values, which include responsibility, fairness, honesty and promise keeping, etc. Transactional leadership helps leaders and followers reach their own goals by supplying lower level wants and needs so that they can move up to higher needs (Ciulla, 2007, p. 61).

Transactional Leadership was limited in encouraging professional growth for both the leader and the follower. For example, teachers who taught well received evaluations leading to promotions and merit pay while those who did not perform to expectations were given warnings with suggestions on how to improve, sometimes leading to discharge (Ryan, 2009; Sergiovanni, 2001b). Transactional leadership entailed providing for one need in order to obtain a higher need, with little reason for people to remain committed to each other once everyone received what they desired. The goal was to acquire as much as one could for oneself without concern for the greater good (Ciulla, 2007; Mhatre & Riggio, 2014; Sergiovanni, 2007).

The transactional model, offered by the business world, was not adopted by all school administrators. Bogotch (2011), in giving an account of the history of public school leadership in the United States, describes changes occurring in the 1940’s when school administrators were faced with pressures to incorporate business and management ideals. Unwilling to yield to these pressures, many principals responded in an effort to maintain the integrity of their practice. They reenvisioned their role as managers. Having a deep knowledge of curriculum and instruction they, “used management as a tool in the service of teaching and learning. Their knowledge base was not centered on the latest business practices. They were articulate spokespersons for curricular reform across all subject areas and instructional methods” (Bogotch, 2011, p.5).

Over time it became evident that the transactional leadership approach was not effective in bringing about good teaching practices (Ryan, 2009). The business world was demonstrating that people who excelled at their jobs did so because they were motivated to succeed. This motivation could not be sustained using reward and punishment. People performed beyond expectations because they were fulfilled in their work (Ryan, 2009). Extrinsic rewards had limited power in bringing about meaningful and lasting improvement. When people seek these rewards, the
reasons for completing a task are few, and it is doubtful that their work is motivated from within. When obtaining rewards is the chief motivation, what gets completed is determined by what brings the reward. The system may function well for a short time, but eventually people lose the desire to be independent and self-driven (Fullan, 2011; Sergiovanni, 2007). An alternative style of leadership that could inspire people to work beyond the next reward was needed. The transformational leadership approach provided this alternative.

When James MacGregor Burns first conceptualized transformational leadership, he intended that leaders conduct themselves in a morally inspiring way (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This approach to leadership is oriented first to psychological needs of esteem, autonomy and self-actualization and then ultimately to questions of morality such as moral duty, moral obligation and the right thing to do. Sergiovanni (2007) states,

One of the attractions of transactional leadership is that moral relativism, objectivity, and rationality are devices that are used to avoid value conflicts and the burdens of assuming the role of moral leaders. When practicing transformational leadership, by contrast, dealing with values, covenants, and shared purposes prevents leaders from hiding in cozy places characterized by moral relativism. Moral action is unavoidable when transformative leadership is practiced. Ultimately, transformative leadership and moral leadership become one and the same (Sergiovanni, 2007, pp. 78-79).

Burns’ conception of the transformational leader was one who could raise the concerns of followers above and beyond self-interest toward something bigger, a shared desire or dedication to a cause or value (Starratt, 1996, 2005). Transformational leadership is founded on the idea that people’s awareness can be elevated to a higher level of morality, and that they can be motivated to aim for high ethical ideals (Mhatre & Riggio, 2014). The leader concentrates on raising school goals to a higher level of what Sergiovanni (2007) calls “a shared covenant that bonds together leader and follower in a moral commitment” (p. 67).

When there is a predominant feeling of inclusion, and people are given the authority to lead, they feel a sense of belongingness to a community and gain a sense of ownership for the workplace. They develop bonds with co-workers, their work takes on meaning, and others are motivated to lead. This requires a measure of trust as the leader must be willing to give up control and allow others to take risks and grow professionally (Sergiovanni, 2007). Havard (2014) states, “The
leader is always striving to grow, to improve, and is deeply concerned that those around him do the same. He or she has no nobler responsibility than seeing to the personal and professional improvement of others” (p. 25).

Burns proposed that the transformational leader had to have empathy in order to attend to other’s needs. Mulla and Krishnan (2011) conducted a study to find out if the values and empathy of a transformational leader made a difference in the way followers perceived their leadership. They wondered what influence, if any, this style of leadership had on the follower’s values and empathy. They explored whether or not the transformational leader raised the awareness of followers to higher levels of behaviour and morality. They discovered that leaders who scored high on transformational leadership gave more attention to being honest, responsible, and loving, but there was little evidence that their leadership enriched the moral development of those around them. The findings were more optimistic when the researchers measured the duration of the relationship between the leader and the follower. The impact on a follower’s moral development depended on the duration of time he or she worked with the leader; the longer the relationship, the higher the impact on moral development. Mulla and Krishnan (2011) concluded that only when people interact with transformational leaders over a long duration of time are the positive effects of transformational leadership (with respect to moral development) able to take hold.

Despite its shortcomings, the theory of transformational leadership has gained distinction. Ciulla (2007) describes it as “the most prominent leadership theory because it accounts for both ethics and effectiveness” (p.61). Leadership that is effective is about generating change. Ethical leadership involves a relationship between leader and follower who engage in regular dialogue about values. The leader and the follower are important to each other not necessarily because of what they can acquire from each other, as in transactional leadership, but because they make each other better in a moral sense.

Transformational leadership is not without its critics, some of whom claim that too much power is given to the leader which in turn can discourage followers from voicing opinions (Tourish, 2013). Decisions might be made in isolation by a leader who does not seek advice from others. A culture of fear can develop where people remain quiet because they do not want to be viewed as dissenters unwilling to work as a team. Instead of dissenting, people may use flattery to gain
approval from the leader who then never receives honest feedback. Followers remain powerless, and the leader continues to set a course of action without any input from those most affected by decisions. This lack of honest communication can eventually create an undemocratic environment and bring undesirable results. Tourish (2013) notes,

> Flattery constitutes a perfumed trap for decision makers. It improves the odds of organizational failure, separates leaders even further from non-leaders, institutionalizes dysfunctional power differences and ensures that leaders develop ever more elaborate plans and strategies with which their followers profoundly but silently disagree. (Tourish, 2013, p. 77)

In response to concerns that transformational leadership can foster an undemocratic workplace, Bass and Riggio (2006) offer a distinction between an authentic and inauthentic transformational leader. An inauthentic leader is someone who appears to be transforming the workplace but ultimately is concerned with self-interests. In contrast, an authentic leader surpasses his or her self-interests for either utilitarian or other more deontological moral reasons. If the reason is utilitarian, the leader wants to benefit the group as a whole or its members, while still enjoying a personal benefit. If the reason is deontologically moral, the leader’s intention is to do the right thing and engage in actions that are aligned with moral principles, responsibility and discipline, showing regard for authority and societal rules (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The aspect of transformational leadership that generally differentiates leaders who are authentic from those who are inauthentic is concern for the individual. Authentic leaders are genuinely interested in the needs and wishes of followers and show concern for their development as individuals (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999 as cited in Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Leadership theories such as the “Great Man Theory”, the “Contingency Theory”, the “Transactional Leadership Theory” and the “Transformational Leadership Theory” have all informed the research on the school leader and offer some insight into the moral and ethical elements of the principal’s practice. The preceding discussion provides a foundation for an understanding of the present day. More recently, theoretical and empirical studies suggest that when a principal exhibits moral leadership he or she is aware that decisions and actions can have a short and long-term impact on people’s lives (Campbell, 2003a; Cranston et al., 2006; Dempster & Berry, 2003; Frick, 2009; Langlois & Lapointe, 2007, 2010). Some principals,
however, may be completely unaware of the moral elements of their work, by not paying attention to or reflecting on the way they treat people or the way they make decisions (Campbell, 1997a, 2003a). Others may conduct themselves in an unethical manner, deliberately ignoring their ethical obligations. Principals who are unethical in the way they treat others will be unlikely to build an ethical school climate where virtues such as care, compassion, dignity and respect are developed and nurtured (Beckner, 2004; Sockett, 2012; Starratt, 2005; Wagner & Simpson, 2009).

It is incumbent on principals to behave in an ethical manner with all people, but particularly with those who, by virtue of their position, may not share equal power. Colnerud (2006) considers the moral dimensions of the relationship between student and teacher and makes it clear that the teacher, as a professional, is charged with the responsibility of behaving ethically, both in word and manner. I would suggest that principals have the same ethical obligation and should not take advantage of others by misusing their power and influence. They must be aware that their words and actions carry great import and can have a significant effect on another’s life. Along with awareness of the ethical elements of their work, principals need to be prepared to deal with ethical issues in their daily practice. Principals may be aware of the ethical aspects of a situation but find they have few skills or little confidence in navigating morally ambiguous situations. This lack of confidence and competence can create undue stress for the principal, and also for anyone who interacts with the principal (Dempster & Berry, 2003; Frick, 2009; Langlois & Lapointe, 2010; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011; Wagner & Simpson, 2009).

Rebore (2014) states, “It is possible to be a thoughtful and reflective administrator without an understanding of, for example, genetics, but it is not possible to be a thoughtful and reflective administrator without an understanding of ethics” (p. 8). From the perspective of my study, principals who are aware of the ethical complexities of their work, and have the skills to deal with these complexities, are more likely to build an ethical school, where staff and students work together to ensure a caring place. Awareness and skills can be fostered and nurtured in professional development opportunities for principals. Principals need to have opportunities to learn and discuss ethical theories as they relate to their practice and then be able to apply them with a measure of confidence (Beckner, 2004; Rebore, 2014; Wagner & Simpson, 2009). They also need to reflect on their life experiences and bring their wisdom and knowledge to bear on
the moral challenges they confront and the ethical decisions they make every day (Duignan, 2006; Havard, 2014; Heslep, 1997; Sergiovanni, 2001b).

The literature has not often explored in depth the ethical struggles that the administrator encounters, particularly with respect to decision-making (Cranston et al., 2006; Frick, 2009; Langlois & Lapointe 2007, 2010; Wagner & Simpson, 2009). This is unfortunate as the field of education is profoundly influenced by ethical struggles and moral considerations. As Nash (2002) notes, “education is above all a moral profession with a profusion of ethical choices that professionals confront on an almost hourly basis” (p. 64). Moreover, school leadership entails making numerous ethical decisions. As Sergiovanni (2001a) states, “Leadership is, after all, a struggle – a quest to do the right thing” (ix). Although moral leadership has been addressed in the literature on school leaders, until fairly recently it has not been widely discussed (Begley & Johansson, 2003; Campbell, 1997a, 1997c; 2003a; Fullan, 2003; Grace, 1995; Sergiovanni, 2001a, 2001b, 2007, 2013; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011; Starratt, 2004, 2005, 2013) nor has it been connected with the literature on teaching (Campbell 2003a, 2008a). This connection is vital as principals and teachers work together to fully realize the moral aspects of their roles. Starratt (2004) remarks, “moral educational leadership is thoroughly contextualized by the core work of the school – learning – and the teaching that cultivates its richest and deepest appropriation and expression” (p. 4).

Limited knowledge and understanding of the ethical complexities of a principal’s role has done little to dispel the traditional notion that a principal is first and foremost a manager, working apart from others. This view is beginning to shift as the principal’s role becomes increasingly demanding with the expectation that principals network with others to share complex challenges (Donlevy & Walker, 2011; Fullan, 2003; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002). A factor contributing to the perception that principals work in isolation is their tendency not to discuss ethical issues with colleagues, superintendents and mentors. Part of the difficulty could be a lack of a common moral language that is grounded in ethics and philosophy rather than one that is based on relativistic beliefs and values (Campbell, 2008; Nash, 2002; Scockett & LePage, 2002; Strike, 1995). A common moral language includes a vocabulary that is explicitly moral and ethical, with words such as respect and fairness (Scockett & LePage, 2002). A common moral language may afford principals the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and share their insights, thereby gaining a deeper awareness of the ethical elements of their practice. Using a common moral
language could lessen principals’ isolation and promote shared dialogue about ethical issues. Shared dialogue can offer a way for practitioners and stakeholders to work with principals in understanding and resolving the ethical issues that confront them every day in their practice.

1.1.2 The Moral and Ethical Principal

Current knowledge on the ethical principal reveals that the principal’s role is multidimensional, and involves dealing with complex ethical issues and making moral decisions (Beckner, 2004; Coombs, 1998; Cranston et al., 2006, 2014; Dempster & Berry, 2003; Duignan, 2006; Foster, 1986; Frick, 2009; Gross, 2014; Kirby, Paradise & Protti, 1992; Langlois & Lapointe, 2007, 2010; Marshall, 1992; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011; Wagner & Simpson, 2009; Willower, 1994). While it is important for a principal to be able to deal with technical problems, such as scheduling and budgeting, the changing nature of the principal’s work demands an understanding of the moral elements of their practice. This study shows a principal is confronted with situations on a daily basis that are morally nuanced and require careful deliberation on complex ethical issues. This research adds to current knowledge by offering an understanding not only of how the principal conceptualizes the moral elements of her work, but also how those who work closely with her understand the moral aspects of her practice. Detailed observations of interactions between the principal and teachers, support staff, parents, and community members over five months of fieldwork offer a glimpse into the moral dimensions of a principal’s practice that has not often been seen in the literature.

Scholars have pointed to the significance of school leaders having awareness of the moral values and ethical principles that inform their practice. In addition to awareness, school leaders need to be able to reflect on and communicate the moral values and ethical principles that guide their decisions and actions. This study corroborates the importance of a principal’s awareness by exploring how one principal conceptualizes the ethical elements of her practice. It examines her beliefs about how her words, actions, stated intentions, daily practices and rituals have a moral influence on how people learn and work in the school. This study adds to the literature by investigating the moral significance of daily rituals in a principal’s practice. These rituals include being present at the school busses every morning and afternoon, spending time in the school yard every day, and devoting her attention to others in conversation by refraining from looking at
electronic devices. These rituals offer an understanding of how the principal envisions the moral aspects of her work and how she believes she exerts a moral influence on others in the school.

Existing knowledge suggests that the ethical principal can have a moral influence on the school, by guiding people in the school community toward embracing ideas and perspectives that serve a moral purpose (Goodman & Lesnick, 2009; Rebore, 2014; Zubay & Soltis, 2005). This study confirms that an ethical principal is a role model who communicates to others the importance of treating one another with such virtues as care and respect. It adds to existing knowledge by revealing how a principal exerts a moral influence in her daily interactions that over time affect the ethical climate within the school community. This research brings to light the deep connection between a principal’s practice and a teacher’s practice by showing how the moral elements of a teacher’s work are guided by the ethical decisions and actions of the principal.

This study extends our current understandings of the contextual influences in the principal’s life that she believes have shaped the moral elements of her practice. Through biographical interviews, I explore with her how her prior life and previous professional experiences have influenced the way she conceptualizes and deals with ethical issues in her work. The result is a rich and detailed biographical portrait of the principal’s life and career that was formed out of a trusting relationship that developed between the principal and myself over five consecutive months of fieldwork. The caring and sensitive manner in which I conducted these interviews and the confidence that the principal placed in me, brought about an in-depth portrayal of an administrator’s practice that may be unprecedented in the literature to date.

There is evidence in the literature to suggest that principals are not always able to define ethical virtues, and that even when they are able to, they do not always know how to express those virtues when confronted with complex ethical decisions. Current understandings support the notion that principals would benefit from professional development opportunities that encourage them to discuss and reflect on ethical dilemmas (Beckner, 2004; Campbell, 2003a; Cranston et al., 2006; Dempster & Berry, 2003; Frick, 2009; Langlois & Lapointe, 2010; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2003, 2011; Starratt, 2004; Strike, Haller & Soltis, 2005; Wagner & Simpson, 2009). My study corroborates these understandings and adds to them by considering the isolated nature of the principal’s practice and the sense of vulnerability that can arise when a principal is faced
with ethical decisions with little to no support. The importance of professional development for principals that would assist them in making ethical decisions is highlighted.

Seminal studies in the field of education lend support to my study. Jackson, Boostrom and Hansen (1993) conducted *The Moral Life of Schools Project* and concluded that ceremonies regularly held in schools could be considered essentially moral due to the “atmosphere” they create. My research explores how assemblies and celebrations that consistently take place in the school community have an influence on the school’s ethical climate. It extends the work by Jackson et al. (1993) by examining the principal’s role in such events. By considering the principal’s decisions and actions in relation to these school gatherings, her influence in shaping an ethical climate within the school community is revealed. Jackson et al. (1993) also looked at the moral influence that teachers exert on their students through their manner. Manner consisted of tone of voice as well as body language, including facial expressions and gestures. Jackson et al. (1993) discovered that the manner in which teachers interacted with their students was important as it had a moral influence on them. My study builds on these findings by considering the principal’s manner and how it has a moral influence on students, teachers, parents and community members in her daily interactions with them. Her perception of herself as a role model as well as the perception by others that she is a role model is explored in an effort to understand the moral values that she conveys through her manner.

1.1.3 Assumptions of the Study

There are seven assumptions that underlie this study. The first assumption is that many elements of a principal’s practice have moral and ethical significance. Principals are called upon to be effective managers and also exhibit high moral standards in their daily work (Allison, 2003; Beckner, 2004; Donlevy & Walker, 2011; Fullan, 2003; Hodgkinson, 1991 as cited in Cranston et al., 2014; Grace, 1995; Sergiovanni, 2001a, 2001b, 2007, 2013; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011; Starratt, 2004, 2005; Wagner & Simpson, 2009).

Secondly, these moral and ethical elements can be recognized and empirically investigated (Beckner, 2004; Donlevy & Walker, 2011; Fullan, 2003; Grace, 1995; Sergiovanni, 2001a, 2001b, 2007; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011; Wagner & Simpson, 2009).
Thirdly, a principal’s awareness about why he or she makes certain decisions and about the moral and ethical impact of those decisions is important in understanding the principal’s approach to the moral elements of their practice (Beckner, 2004; Begley & Johansson, 2003; Campbell, 2003a; Cranston et al., 2006; Frick, 2009; Jackson et al., 1993; Langlois & Lapointe, 2007, 2010; Rebore 2014; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011; Zubay & Soltis, 2005).

The fourth assumption is that administrators require support prior to becoming a principal as well as after they assume their role in order to identify and respond to morally complex situations (Beckner, 2004; Campbell, 1997a, 2003a; Cranston et al., 2006; Dempster & Berry, 2003; Grace, 1995; Langlois & Lapointe, 2007, 2010; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011; Starratt, 2004). This support includes formal and informal professional development opportunities such as principal preparation courses, workshops, meetings and mentorship experiences.

The fifth assumption is that prior life experiences are likely to be of significance in understanding the principal’s approach to the moral elements of practice. These experiences can offer deep insights about the principal as a human being. They can also reveal how past and present moments are inextricably connected and can influence the manner in which a principal conducts his or her practice (Casey, 1993; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2000; Goodson, 2005; Goodson & Hargreaves, 2003).

The sixth assumption is that the ethical aspects of a principal’s practice can be understood within the context of the school. One can consider the moral influence the administrator has in establishing and maintaining an ethical school. This moral influence can be witnessed in words that are spoken, actions that are taken, and decisions that are made (Beck, 2003; Campbell, 2003a; Cranston et al. 2006; Sergiovanni 2001b, 2005b; Starratt, 2004, 2005; Zubay & Soltis, 2005).

Lastly the worlds of teachers and principals are inextricably connected. The interactions they have with each other can have a profound and sometimes lasting influence on each other and on the moral life of the school (Rebore, 2014; Starratt, 2004; Tuana, 2014). Although the teacher is ultimately responsible for his or her practice, the principal is accountable for increasing the moral awareness of the teaching staff. All of these assumptions have contributed to my study and I return to them throughout this thesis, both directly and indirectly.
1.2 Research Questions and Methodology

This study seeks to investigate the following primary research question: *How does one elementary school principal conceptualize her work in moral terms and engage in ethical practices?* Much of the data reported in this research emerges from the primary research question. Going into the study, and much informed by the literature, I would anticipate that I will be discussing various thematic aspects of this research question. These thematic aspects include uncovering the dimensions of the principal’s work that she believes hold ethical relevance. They also involve exploring how the principal thinks about her practice, in a moral sense, as it relates to various stakeholders such as teachers, parents and students. I also anticipate exploring the kinds of situations that the principal experiences that comprise moral decisions and actions and discovering how she navigates them. My study also investigates the following secondary research question: *In what ways does one elementary school principal believe her previous professional experiences and prior life experiences have made her more aware of the moral and ethical dimensions of her role and influenced the way she conceptualizes and deals with ethical situations in her practice?*

The secondary research question enhances, enriches, and illuminates what is revealed in the primary research question. It considers the principal’s recollections of her prior life and professional experiences and the extent to which she sees a resonance between past and present ideas and practices.

I examined the primary research question by conducting semistructured interviews and observations that explored the moral aspects of the principal’s daily work. Some of these moral aspects include student discipline, teacher performance, staffing issues and assisting families in financial need. By conducting informal interviews with the principal that focus on everyday situations and events that hold moral relevance, I was able to bring about a deeper understanding of the primary research question. Informal interviews consisted of conversations with the principal. These conversations were often a follow-up to my observations and allowed me to clarify details that were unclear, or to gain information that might not have been initially available. I also conducted semistructured interviews with participants who work closely with the principal. These interviews afforded participants an opportunity to provide insights into how they believe the principal engages in ethical practices. The interviews also enabled participants to
articulate how they understand the moral elements of the principal’s work to be connected to the moral elements of their work.

I observed spontaneous interactions between the principal and various stakeholders, and these observations formed a part of the methodology of my study. These observations allowed me to understand how the principal expresses ethical virtues and conveys moral values in her words, actions, stated intentions, daily practices and rituals. I observed the principal at meetings with various stakeholders such as teachers and parents, and I also conducted observations of her at school-wide events, such as assemblies and religious celebrations. These observations allowed me to better understand how the principal establishes a tone in the school that enables her to cultivate an ethical climate within the school community.

Part of the conceptual orientation to my research is based on developing an understanding of the contextual influences in the life of an ethical principal. As such, the secondary research question is best explored through interviews that create a biographical portrait of the principal’s life and career. These interviews have a biographical focus and explore stages of the principal’s personal and professional life including her childhood, her initial years of working before she became a teacher, and her experiences in teacher training. The trusting relationship that I developed with the principal facilitated an open dialogue that allowed a biographical portrait to emerge, bringing into focus how her life story has influenced her practice.

1.3 Guiding Perspectives and Concepts

The primary research question in this case study focuses is as follows:

*How does one elementary school principal conceptualize her work in moral terms and engage in ethical practices?*

1.3.1 Morals, Ethics, and Virtues

For the purposes of this study, the words moral and ethical are used interchangeably, to describe basic principles of right and wrong as they frame ideas, decisions and actions. Such a use has been defended elsewhere (Beckner, 2004; Campbell, 2008; Colnerud, 2006) and reflects the range of relevant literature in the field that uses both “moral” and “ethical” to describe the work of teachers and principals. The guiding perspectives and concepts of my study are found in the
belief that ethics and morality are grounded in notions of right and wrong and are rooted in principles such as truthfulness, compassion and integrity.

Ethics poses questions about what makes a good life, what makes a good person, and how moral people respond to daily incidents and events in their lives (Cranston et al., 2006; Fedler, 2006). Ethics is “a set of principles that guide our attitudes, choices, and actions” (Donlevy & Walker, 2011, p.1). Moral and ethical leadership, as it applies to principals and their practice, is sometimes defined as one and the same in the literature (Beckner, 2004; Campbell, 2008; Colnerud, 2006).

Frequently the term I use depends on how common a certain expression might be. To give an example, the terms moral agency, moral leadership and ethical leadership are more frequently used in the literature than ethical agency or virtuous leadership. Furthermore, I believe the terms virtues, morals and ethics are equal with the terms moral values and ethical values and therefore I occasionally use them as well.

It is not my intention to promote a particular ethical theory or stance, however my study has been affected by my views on what constitutes right and wrong. While striving to be open-minded, I realize it is inevitable that my ethical perspective will in some way inform my research. This perspective, which is non-relativist in nature, has been influenced by the theory of virtue ethics, most notably Aristotelian virtue theory, and informs the perspectives and concepts that guide my study.

My study is grounded in virtue ethics which means that it rejects moral and ethical relativism, which purports that objective moral truth does not exist, all values could have equivalent worth, depending on the context, and that what is deemed to be right and good is the subjective expression of opinion, feeling or preference (Athanassoulis, 2013; Campbell, 2003a; Driver, 2006; Kelly, 2001). Moral and ethical relativism is defined by Kelly (2001) as the notion that all values have equal worth, and that there are no morally conclusive and impartial standards to support the claim that some value positions are superior to others.

Virtue ethics is embedded in the writings of philosophers including Plato, Aristotle and Hume. Aristotelian virtue ethics is thought to be the most prevalent and significant interpretation of virtue ethics in the literature at the present time. Athanassoulis (2013) notes, “Unlike rigid,
inflexible rules, appeal to virtues can capture the contextual sensitivity of moral situations and the diversity of the moral life” (pp. 4-5).

Virtue ethics, as compared to other normative theories, stresses the importance of character. Actions, for the most part, do not come from isolated decisions but result from a person’s character, distinctive patterns of behaviour, and the values one embraces (Curran & Fullam, 2011; Fedler, 2006; Thompson, 2015). It is generally understood that one is not born a virtuous person but rather becomes virtuous over time by acquiring good habits by, for example, associating with virtuous people and seeking the virtues through moral development (Carr, 2007; DeMarco, 1996; Fenstermacher, 2001; Fallona, 2000; Sergiovanni 2005; Sackett, 2012; Wagner & Simpson, 2009). Virtues can also be taught by modelling and through instruction (Bohlin, Farmer & Ryan, 2001; Carr, 2007; Lickona, 2000; Sackett, 2012). As Fallona (2000) suggests, “the growth and habituation of virtue has been a concern for thousands of years” (p.682).

The word virtue originates from the Latin word *virtus*, which means “strength” or “power" (Havard, 2014, xvi). It is the English translation of the Greek word *arête* which means “excellence” (Fedler, 2006). Virtues are traits, habits and dispositions that allow us to behave according to the maximum potential of our character (Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, 2006; Reilly, 2008) and are “the perfection of the human person on the highest level of his being – his moral worth, which is to say, his humanity” (DeMarco, 1996, p.16). They are the “qualities of the mind, the will, and the heart that instill strength of character and stability of personality” (Havard 2014, p. xvi) and “habitual modes of conduct judged as exemplary” (Fedler, 2006; Leming, 2001). Virtues are not fixed, but are formed and reformed repeatedly by our actions, our reflection about those actions, and the significance these actions hold for us (Carr, 2007; Curran & Fullam, 2011).

When the virtues are practiced we become better people (Fallona, 2000; Fedler, 2006; Leming, 2001). Jacobs (2005) clarifies that what results in right behaviour is, “not rule-following as such, but the disposition to act fairly and honestly, for example, and on the basis of an articulate comprehension of what fairness and honesty require in the particularities of different cases” (pp. 156-157). In Aristotle’s view, virtues are chosen intentionally and for their own sake and are a
manifestation of the agent’s character. They are not a coincidence or an error or an action inspired by the wrong reason (Athanassoulis, 2013, Fedler, 2006).

If virtues signify strength and excellence, vices embody their opposite. As Demarco (1996) explains, “Virtue and vice are adversaries. Indeed, they are locked in mortal combat with each other. No virtue is complete that has not been victorious in its struggle with its corresponding vice” (p.16). Although there are many virtues, some are held in high esteem in the literature, and in the traditions and conventions of the great majority of world cultures. These virtues are: honesty, compassion, truthfulness, fairness, courage, moderation and generosity (Fenstermacher, 2001).

Virtue ethics has informed the body of knowledge on moral agency (Campbell 2003b, 2004, 2013a; Fedler, 2006; Fenstermacher, 2001; Heslep, 1997; Richardson & Fenstermacher, 2001; Sockett, 1993, 2012) and moral manner (Fallona, 2000; Fenstermacher, 2001; Richardson & Fenstermacher, 2001; Sockett, 1993, 2012). Although theoretically distinct, it has some similarities to literature on the ethics of care (Noddings, 2002, 2003, 2010). These sources are pertinent to my study and are referred to throughout this thesis. To be specific, they have helped to enlighten the guiding perspectives and concepts of my study and informed the collection of data and the data analysis.

The theoretical foundation of my study lies in the understanding that treating another with compassion is generally good and ridiculing another is generally bad. Again, this is compatible with much of the primary research literature in the field (Campbell, 2003a, 2003b; Colnerud, 1997; Fenstermacher, 2001; Osguthorpe, 2008; Jackson et al., 1993; Sockett, 1993, 2012). This perspective also underlies most professional ethical codes and reflects a philosophically traditional virtue theory orientation. This is not to say that one cannot disagree on the exact definition of compassion or how to interpret or demonstrate it. People will differ on issues of right and wrong and may not always be aware of the relevance of principles in any given situation. Disagreement and debate can be natural aspects of being in relationship with others. Educators can encourage open exchanges of ideas without determining that a decision cannot be reached because all values are personal and subjective. Ambiguous circumstances do not change the reality that some actions are inherently right, and some are inherently wrong. This argument has been defended and upheld elsewhere in the literature (Campbell 2003a; Colnerud, 1997;

Strike (1999b) refers to this ambiguity or lack of consensus as moral pluralism. The guiding perspectives and concepts of my study supports Strike’s argument that conflict can occur in ethical decision-making because moral pluralism is present. He states that moral pluralism exists when,

moral goods are irreducibly many and often conflict. It is part of the human condition that we cannot achieve every good fully in every situation. Moreover, there is no grand theory in which all moral goods are synthesized, weighted, and ordered (Strike, 1999b, p.21).

The theoretical basis of this study suggests that when a situation arises, requiring a principal to make an ethical decision or act in an ethical manner, tensions and ambiguities often exist, as a result of competing moral interests. Details of situations can vary greatly, complications can be layered, and there can be discrepancies with respect to understanding and living the virtues. In a hypothetical scenario, one principal might decide to suspend all students for being in a fight. The decision to suspend could be supported using the principle of fairness. The reason would be that it is not fair to suspend some students and not others, because they were all involved. Another principal who learns about a group fight in the school yard may decide to vary the length of suspension. Those students who instigated the fight would receive a longer suspension than students who did not instigate it. The decision to vary the length of suspension could again be substantiated using the principle of fairness. The reason would be that it is not fair to apply the same length of suspension for those who did not provoke the fight.

Neither principal, in these hypothetical scenarios, would question the merit of upholding the principle of fairness in making their decisions. The point of contention would be in how to honour the virtue of fairness and how to interpret what fairness means in that situation. Even though the administrators may disagree on the exact definition of fairness, or how it relates to the situation, it does not change the fact that fairness is a worthy virtue. The disagreement would not be morally relativistic because the principals are not questioning the inherent value of using fairness as a guiding virtue. Rather they are questioning how fairness relates to a given situation.
It is interesting to note that the decision to suspend is itself a moral matter because some families may suffer undue hardship from having a child home for the day. For example, in a single-parented family, a parent may not be able to take a day off work to attend to a young child at home. In some cases, a parent can risk losing his or her job for time taken off work. Some companies may not allow a parent to bring a child to work. The school principal may have to deliver a consequence that is fair but equitable, so that some families do not endure undue stress as a result of a suspension. This could mean delivering an “in school” suspension where the child can attend school but is removed from the classroom for the duration of the suspension. The child studies in a quiet space under the close supervision of the principal, and is suspended from privileges such as recess, field trips and eating lunch with peers.

Consequentialism, or teleology, is an ethical perspective that frames my study. It chiefly refers to moral outlooks or theories that establish their evaluations of acts exclusively on consequences. In modern-day philosophy the term is most often utilized to denote “act-consequentialism” which is the understanding that the rightness (or mandatory nature) of an act is dependent on whether the consequences are at a minimum as good (or better than) any other act accessible to the agent (Slote, 1992).

To the consequentialist, the place of moral value is found in the conditions created by the actions, rather than the moral fiber of the agent or the integrity of the motive or the action-type alone. For example, deceitful statements may be regarded as wrong, not because they are in and of themselves deceitful, but because of the unfavorable consequences they produce. Offering help to someone who is in distress would be considered the right action to take, not solely because it shows sympathetic involvement, but because the person is in a better state because of the intervention (Jacobs, 2005).

Utilitarianism, which is the product of merging consequentialism with welfarism, is the most widely recognized consequentialist theory. Welfarism claims that the goodness of a consequence is ultimately measured by the amount of individual well-being, counting all people equally, and consequentialism claims that an action is right if and only if it brings about the best consequences (Kagan, 1998, pp. 61-62). When these two claims are combined, it leads to the understanding that an action is right if and only if it brings the greatest total sum of well-being. Utilitarianism therefore is sometimes referred to as the greatest happiness principle, where the
right action is that which brings about the greatest total amount of happiness in general. It is also sometimes known as the principle of “the greatest happiness for the greatest number” (Kagan, 1998, p. 62). An ethical action is the one that offers the greatest good or does the least harm, or in other words, yields the maximum balance of good over harm (Kagan, 1998; Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, 2006).

The greatest happiness principle is applicable to the work of educational leaders in the sense that it can guide them in thinking about the conditions that might create a happy and prosperous school. When devising codes of conduct, for example, administrators and teachers might pay more attention to the general well-being of everyone when they use the greatest happiness principle as a guide. In striving to create a school climate that encourages learning, the happiness of the staff and students is an important aspect to contemplate (Rebore, 2014, p.124).

Rule utilitarianism is the combination of utilitarianism and Kant’s principle of universality. Rule utilitarianism pursues the maximization of pleasure and minimization of displeasure, but never by treating a person as a means to an end. Universality is a categorical imperative which is an objective truth that asserts that we act consistently on principle and that these principles are those we would choose consistently for everyone. Ethics founded on categorical imperatives are those that dictate not only how we act toward others but also how others are to act toward us (Gensler & Spurgin, 2008; Mastin, 2008).

Care ethics or the ethics of care has influenced my moral and ethical perspective. Carol Gilligan established the ethic of care in 1982 in her book *In a Different Voice* by examining a definition of justice that was a departure from her colleague, Lawrence Kohlberg’s definition. Kohlberg concluded that male participants solved moral dilemmas by deferring to rights and laws. In conducting her own research, Gilligan found that female participants resolved moral dilemmas using care, concern, and connection. The ethic of care emerged out of and in contrast with the ethic of justice and has been discussed extensively in the field of education by Nel Noddings (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011).

Care theory has its everyday origins in women’s history and customs (Noddings, 2002). Noddings (2003) defines ethical caring as, “the relation in which we do meet the other morally”. It develops out of natural caring which is “the relation in which we respond as one-caring out of love or natural inclination” (pp. 4-5). Natural caring is seen as the human condition that people
distinguish, knowingly or unknowingly as “good”. People desire and endeavour to be in this human condition, and it is this desire for caring, to be in a distinctive relationship, that gives them the motivation to be moral. People aspire to be moral so they can stay in the caring relationship and to improve the ideal of themselves as one-caring (Noddings, 2003).

While care ethics does support the concept of virtue to a certain extent, it does so only in the context of a relationship between people. It does not subscribe to the notion of living a virtuous life in isolation from others, and while a person who lives alone might indeed be virtuous, he or she would not be exercising the virtue of “one-caring.” As Noddings (2003) states, “The virtue described by the ethical ideal of one-caring is built up in relation. It reaches out to the other and grows in response to the other” (pp. 80-81). According to Noddings, when someone is making a moral decision, a person directed by the ethic of care considers the possible effects on the other person and on the relationship with that person. He or she would not be concerned with the greatest good for the greatest number or a universal principle or even his or her own character (Noddings, 2003).

This “ethical ideal of caring” is a memory people have of how they have reacted over time in “encounters” with others, whether in the role of the one who is caring or the one who is being cared for. This “ideal” is a series of events that have actually occurred, not events that one hopes will occur. Part of this “ideal” is in remembering these events through reflection and assessment. When people reflect on and assess these events they do not just wish they had cared more about someone but they plan for how they will improve in the future. The more positive experiences a person has had in caring about someone and in being cared for, the greater the “ethical ideal” will be. It is within this interplay of remembering, analyzing and preparing to improve that parents and teachers help children to develop the capability for empathy, to practice it in their own lives, and to consistently assess their own success in fostering caring relationships with others (Noddings, 2010, p. 79).

My ethical perspective, which is found in virtue ethics, care ethics and consequentialism, allows me to offer a broader and deeper interpretation of the moral and ethical complexities of the principal’s practice in terms of understanding intentions, decisions and actions. It also allows me to capture the moral and ethical elements of the teacher’s work as it relates to the principal’s practice with a wider scope of understanding. The climate and tone of the school can be better
understood in relation to several theories, as its complex nature lends itself to a deeper interpretation that is more comprehensive and thorough. My research embraces virtue ethics, the ethics of care, and consequentialism in understanding the way a principal conceptualizes the moral elements of her practice, and the way in which she deals with ethical issues in her work.

Many terms are employed in this study, which are discussed further in the literature review. In this section I will clarify the meaning of values, moral agency and ethical knowledge and their use as they pertain to my study.

1.3.2 Moral Agency and Ethical Knowledge

The term values, tends to take on different meanings in the literature. It is sometimes used interchangeably with the terms, virtues, morals and ethics. In the context of my research study, I distinguish values as apart from virtues, morals and ethics. From the perspective of my study, when the term value is preceded by the adjectives moral and ethical, it can be assumed to have moral or ethical significance. Otherwise, values are the non-moral partialities that individuals embrace in relative ways. Values encompass preferences, views, convictions, and attitudes that often do not tie in well with discussions of virtues, morals or ethics (Campbell, 2003a). Wagner and Simpson (2009) explain, “Many values have little or nothing to do with morals and are generally regarded as simple projections of subjective preference” (p.83).

The term moral agency is pertinent to the study of moral and ethical leadership. Notions of moral agency are rooted in educational leadership and “imply principles to which any and all persons engaged in educational leadership are logically committed” (Heslep, 1997, p. 74). Heslep argues that freedom, knowledge, purposefulness and deliberation are among the qualities that relate to the actions of any and all moral agents, and that educational leaders must support the rights of students, teachers, parents and the public to demonstrate these qualities in their lives. Principals must do whatever possible to uphold and cultivate these qualities in themselves and others. Tuana (2014) maintains that the school culture, including the wider culture in which the school operates, has an enormous influence on moral agency. Schools must provide principals and teachers, as well as all staff and students, with the opportunity and the means to exercise moral agency so that every person can help shape and improve the school’s moral culture.
Fenstermacher (2001) defines moral agency and moral development as, “that quality possessed by a person to act morally. Moral development is the bringing about in others of moral agency” (p. 650). He draws a connection between moral development and moral agency by arguing that in order for a teacher to be successfully involved in the moral development of students, it is necessary for the teacher to have some aspect of moral agency. Sockett (2012) offers a formal definition of a moral agent as, “someone who acts consciously in pursuit of valuable ends or according to the rules of conduct” (p. 159). If certain goals are constructed by someone else on whose behalf the agent acts, responsibility for the actions undertaken by the agent is his or hers alone. Agents, therefore, are presumed to be competent of making a choice and are in charge of their own behaviour. A moral agent acts out of concern for the interests of others as individual people or as communities, and this concern includes the interests of the agent.

Campbell (2003a, p. 2 & p. 24) conceptualizes moral agency as a “double-pronged state” and views the teacher as a moral person and a moral educator. Moral agency is double-pronged in that it involves both how teachers treat students and the moral and ethical lessons they impart to them. The core of moral agency is expressed through the knowledge the teacher has of what is ethically significant to do in their professional practice as well as what they want their students to adopt, attain and learn about principles of right and wrong. Moral agency is a double-pronged condition that comprises a dual commitment for the teacher (Campbell, 2003a). One prong involves the ethical standards that the teacher as a moral professional and moral person is accountable to, and the other prong involves the teacher as a moral educator, a role model and an example to students. The teacher’s goal is to direct students towards living a moral life. These twofold characteristics are unavoidably connected because teachers, through their attitudes and what they say and do, are seen as living their lives by the same moral principles that they wish their students would hold (Campbell, 2003a).

Also significant is the related matter that students acquire lessons about morality through their involvement with their teachers. A student knows when a teacher genuinely cares and knows when a teacher is being hypocritical or insincere. A teacher’s character is crucial to moral agency and in line with the Aristotelian tradition where a person’s character is developed by the ongoing acquirement of virtues in such a manner as to orient the person “into a virtuous life in which good thoughts and good acts become a second nature extension of the kind of person they have become” (Campbell, 2003a).
My study is primarily focused on a principal’s practice; however, I do believe there are elements of Campbell’s conceptualization of moral agency that are relevant to and can be applied to my study. My study is concerned with the awareness the principal has of the ethical complexities of her work and how this awareness is revealed through the daily interactions she has with teachers, support staff, parents, and community members. The principal, as a moral professional, must consider what is morally significant for her to focus on, and these considerations are often revealed in the formal and informal interactions she has with others.

The moral principles that the administrator upholds are made manifest in her general manner and behaviour, whether she is always conscious of this or not. Everyone who comes into contact with her is entitled to and should expect to be treated with the fundamental principles of honesty, compassion and truthfulness, and they should be confident knowing that the principal is knowledgeable and committed to her practice. Her priorities and what she attends to and does not attend to in the course of her daily professional activities reveal her implicit and explicit beliefs about her role as an ethical principal. As well, the manner in which she treats all those who interact with her uncovers how she sees herself as an ethical leader who leads by example and is a role model to everyone (Campbell, 2003a, Hansen, 2002).

The principal imparts moral lessons, sometimes deliberately and sometimes unintentionally, and just as the students can sense if a teacher is insincere, so can they, as well as others, sense when the principal is insincere. Campbell’s (2003a, 2003b) and Fenstermacher’s (2001) concept of moral agency is aligned with Aristotelian virtue theory, and shares much of its non-relativist perspective on the moral and ethical dimensions of teaching with the perspectives and concepts that guide my study. Significantly, Fenstermacher, drew a distinction between the concepts of teaching morally and teaching morality. Teaching morally means “to conduct oneself in a way that has moral value” and teaching morality “is to convey to another that which is good or right” (Fenstermacher, Osguthorpe & Sanger, 2009, p. 8).

My study explores how a school principal resolves moral and ethical issues and complexities in her daily practice. It takes into account the extent of her awareness of such issues as being moral and ethical in nature. My research situates her practice and awareness within the broader literature on school leaders’ ethical work and challenges more generally (Beck, 2003; Blumenfeld-Jones, 2004; Campbell, 1997a, 1997c; Day & Gu, 2010; Grace 1995; Kelly, 2001;

This study seeks to uncover the awareness the principal has of the moral and ethical elements of her work as expressed through her conduct, manner, words, and stated intentions. The knowledge she has of her conduct as a moral and ethical practitioner, particularly in her interactions with teachers, students, staff, parents and community members is revealed in her awareness of herself as a moral agent. Awareness and knowledge are inextricably connected in my study. I offer a brief explanation by drawing on Campbell’s (2003a, 2008b) work on ethical knowledge, a term that she developed and one that is central to this study. I also briefly discuss Hansen’s (2002) work on moral sensibility.

Teachers (and I would argue principals) display different levels of awareness of their moral agency as conveyed by Campbell’s term ethical knowledge (2003a). Campbell introduced the concept of ethical knowledge as the essential knowledge base in teaching. She defines it as that which “relies on teacher’s understanding and acceptance of the demands of moral agency as professional expectations implicit in all aspects of their day-to-day practice” (Campbell, 2003a, p.3) and “the focused and self-conscious recognition of how moral agency influences their daily actions and interactions” (Campbell, 2008b, p.603). Based on empirical data, Campbell offers an assessment of how aware teachers are of their role as moral agents. She argues, “This level of awareness is cultivated when teachers develop the capacity to identify how moral and ethical values and principles are either exemplified or undermined by their own actions, words, choices and intentions” (Campbell, 2008b, pp. 603-604).

Campbell’s work is focused on teachers’ practice and the ethics of the teaching profession but there are aspects of her theory that are applicable to my study. Principals, I believe, are moral agents who through their intentions, decisions and actions can profoundly influence the moral tone of schools. As leaders who direct many initiatives and procedures, the ethical knowledge they hold and their ability to apply it in a range of circumstances reveals the awareness they have of their authority as moral agents. Just as teachers exercise moral agency and moral purpose in the way that they foster a caring, trusting and respectful climate in the classroom, so do principals in the way they foster a caring, trusting and respectful climate in the school (Barth,
The concept of ethical knowledge has its roots in moral sensibility and instinctive perceptions of right and wrong (Campbell, 2008b). Hansen (2002) explains that moral sensibility constitutes a reflective capacity that enables one to create a distance from the situation in order to determine the issues at stake and understand different points of view. This reflection can occur without becoming disconnected or disengaged from the outcome of the situation. I agree with Hansen’s argument that moral sensibility can allow practitioners to gain different perspectives and can even be important in developing ethical awareness. However, Hansen (2002) continues to argue that moral sensibility is developed slowly and unpredictably, without being a direct result of the person’s attention or perception. It is fostered, he argues, indirectly by attending to people and to the situations in which they reside. Although I agree that moral sensibility may be developed over time, the theoretical assumptions of my study support the notion that most teachers and principals gain a deeper understanding of what they are doing and why they are doing it by directly attending to the moral elements of a situation. If principals and teachers are encouraged to engage in direct reflection about their practice, the perspective of my study suggests that they can often articulate reasons for their choices. Directly attending to the moral aspects of a situation and perceiving how these aspects are relevant, may be important in developing moral sensibility.

Ethical knowledge also connects with a considered awareness of one’s practice, and the practice of others, and in this way, it moves in the sphere of practical wisdom, a type of “professional virtue-in-action” (Campbell, 2008b, p.605). Kinsella and Pitman (2012), likewise define Aristotle’s notion of phronesis, or practical wisdom as, “an intellectual virtue that implies ethics. It involves deliberation that is based on values, concerned with practical judgement and informed by reflection. It is pragmatic, variable, context-dependent, and oriented toward action” (p. 2). Kristjansson (2011) explains that practical wisdom is, “an intellectual virtue guided by general moral truths as well as situation-specific observations” (p. 121). Ryan and Bohlin (1999) explain that practical wisdom involves understanding a situation, deciding on the right action to take in that situation and then engaging in that action. It is about making choices in all areas of one’s life that are based on an understanding of what is good and what is wise (p. 6).
From the perspective of my study, practical wisdom is essential to a principal’s practice and a teacher’s practice, and can help foster ethical knowledge. Principals and teachers can be moral people, but if they are not able to express the virtues in practical situations, then ethical decisions and actions may not be realized (Campbell, 2011; Duignan, 2006; Hansen 2002; Haynes, 2002; Havard, 2014; Heslep, 1997; Sockett, 2012; Stengel, 2013). As Havard (2014) indicates, “I might have a degree in psychology and work as a consultant, but if I lack prudence, I will have a hard time giving my clients sound advice” (xvii). Campbell (2011) concurs, “professionals need to cultivate their ethical knowledge by recognizing and making practice-based connections between conceptual perspectives on ethics or virtues and the intricacies of the practitioner’s work itself, knowledge of which is not necessarily intuitive” (p. 91).

Stengel (2013) maintains that when teachers use practical reasoning they are able to interpret a situation from a variety of viewpoints and can appropriately situate the source of tension or difficulty. Teachers can envision possible reactions from others and can foresee the effects of those reactions on everyone involved. Haynes (2002) explains that when teachers can recognize what elements of a situation allow them to express the virtues or moral principles they uphold, and can do this consistently over a variety of circumstances, then they are using their intuitive reasoning skills. This ability to use intuitive reasoning skills consistently in a variety of situations is what Aristotle termed “phronesis” or practical wisdom (Haynes, 2002, p. 116). It is interesting to note that while Haynes (2002) believes that intuition is central to practical wisdom, Campbell (2011) argues that practical wisdom does not “necessarily” entail using one’s intuition. Similarly, Ryan and Bohlin (1999) contend that a person makes decisions according to “what is good and what is wise” which suggests that practical wisdom is based on ethical judgment rather than intuition. These distinctions in argument make clear that intuition and practical wisdom might be connected but they are not the same, and that intuition is not necessarily enough in applying practical wisdom.

Campbell (2008b) clarifies that what makes a teacher’s practice morally and ethically significant, in relation to moral agency and ethical knowledge, depends on whether core virtues and ethical principles are embedded in intentions and actions. She offers examples of choices teachers make in their daily interactions with students from structuring group work so that it is fair to choosing curriculum resources with caution and wisdom. Campbell (2008b) explains that ethical
knowledge is also evident in a teacher’s voice in terms of tone, expressions of respect and warmth and in the differentiation between cynicism and humour.

From the perspective of my study, principals reveal knowledge and awareness of the ethical dimensions of their practice in their countless interactions with others and in their daily decisions. Ethical knowledge and awareness are evident in many ways, such as how principals structure staff meetings, to the manner in which they greet parents, to the decision about whether or not to suspend a student. Ethical knowledge and awareness is revealed in tone of voice and words used, and in the expectations that principals set for how staff and students speak to each other (Campbell, 2003a; Hansen 2001; Sergiovanni, 2001a, 2001b; Sockett, 2012; Starratt, 2013).

By way of introduction, the central terms moral agency and ethical knowledge that are employed in this study have been defined and discussed. Clarification was offered as to how values are differentiated from virtues, morals and ethics. These terms have been discussed with an attempt to clarify their meaning and use in this study. They are found throughout my thesis, both conceptually and empirically. In the section that follows, I offer the reader insight into some of the personal influences that guided me to undertake this study.

1.4 What Brought Me Here

As far as the research questions and the approach to methodology were built on having the principal reflect on her personal and professional life, I have found myself reflecting on my life. This section provides a summary of the insights I have made about how my own personal and professional experiences have informed this study. I believe that some of the most significant moments and events in my life have helped shape my orientation as a researcher. They have not only inspired my interest in ethics but they have also influenced the way I conduct research. I approached this research study with ethical sensitivity and care, and was mindful of the trust that the participants placed in me. My approach could be attributed to how prepared I was in an academic sense. I read many books on methodology and I attended courses on how to conduct qualitative research. Nevertheless, I believe the experiences that I have had in my life have made me the person who I am today, and have in turn, influenced the way that I approach research.
These experiences began when I was very young, which I realized in a discussion with one of my professors. Several years ago, this professor asked me to describe my worldview. I had never been asked that question before and I was not quite sure how to answer it. She asked me to write it down and then discuss it with my classmates. I was astonished to realize that, not only did I have a worldview, but that it probably began to develop at the age of four or five years old with my mother. Her influence on the ethical decisions I make continues to this day. It was in those early moments of my life that my interest in what motivates people to do the right thing began to develop. When I told my professor that my worldview was that anything and everything of significance in life has moral and ethical implications, she did not flinch. I realized when I said it aloud that I had held this worldview for almost a lifetime. This realization brought sharply into focus why I was sitting in that classroom decades later, discussing ethics.

I offer the reader a glimpse into my personal and professional experiences that have brought me to where I am today. My intent is to clarify why I chose this area of study and to substantiate my place as a researcher. My experiences are organized according to some of my roles in my life, including daughter, friend, student, teacher candidate, research participant, teacher and vice principal. They are not organized by importance but instead follow more of a chronological order. I believe the experiences I have had in these roles have either intentionally or unintentionally influenced my observations in my study and my interpretations of the data and presentation of the findings.

I have been learning about morals and ethics my entire life. It began with my mother. As far back as I can remember she talked to me about the right way to treat people. She cautioned that I must always be careful in how I treat my friends, and that sometimes I must set aside my personal desires and needs in order to do the right thing. She used hypothetical scenarios to demonstrate her point. The most memorable scenario was when she gave an example of a friend inviting me to a party. She reminded me that once I accepted the invitation I had to follow through, even if it meant declining offers from other friends who may be more popular or have more exciting proposals. She used terms such as fairness, kindness, loyalty and respect. I am sure she paid attention to what I wore to the party and the gifts I brought, but that is not what I remember. It is the moral lessons she taught that have remained with me. My experiences with my mother have brought me to where I am today.
I have been engaged in discussions about morals and ethics most of my life. In my pre-adolescent years, I spent countless hours debating issues with my father. He would invite my neighbour, who was like a grandfather to me, over for coffee and they both patiently listened as I gave my opinions on controversial topics of a moral and ethical nature such as euthanasia, capital punishment and abortion. Those discussions remain with me not because of what I said or what I did not say. It was the kindness and open-mindedness that my father and neighbour showed that I have never forgotten. Although they often disagreed with me, I was never silenced. They taught me to trust my opinion and to be comfortable in challenging authority. My experiences with my father and neighbour have brought me to where I am today.

I have been a teacher my entire life. It began with my childhood friend. When I was seven years old I set up a classroom in the basement of my house. I invited friends and wrote on a chalkboard, setting up chairs for those who were patient enough to listen. My best friend who lived down the street would frequently visit. We practiced language and math, but we also set ground rules to ensure that we were showing respect and fairness by listening closely to each other and taking turns being the teacher. I do not recall either of us ever talking about becoming teachers. Not long after that she moved away and we did not keep in touch. Not surprisingly, I heard she became a teacher. My experiences with my childhood friend have brought me to where I am today.

I have been passionate about moral issues most of my life. My grade seven teacher, a retired police officer, commented with humour that I should be a lawyer, so great was my desire to debate anything and everything that was morally contentious. He was strict and demanded hard work, but was also caring and compassionate. I thrived in his classroom and felt safe to argue with my classmates and to argue with him about current events and what was right and wrong in the world. He fostered an inclusive learning environment, and I never felt threatened or intimidated. At the end of the year I was given the class “Citizenship” award for being kind and caring toward others. Receiving that award was a pivotal moment for me. Someone I greatly respected took the time to notice the essence of my character. Just before the school was torn down, I returned to that classroom and stood there, silent and still. That feeling of safety returned. My experiences with my grade seven teacher have brought me to where I am today.
Not all experiences at school have been without struggle. When I was learning to teach at the faculty of education I was placed in a split grade six and seven classroom for the entire year. Nearing the end of the placement I learned from the students that the host teacher had convened a discussion with the students to gather their opinions about me. I was surprised both by the teacher’s actions and that I was hearing it from the students. I believed the teacher displayed a lack of courage and integrity. There appeared to be an element of deceit in her intentions.

Even though I was learning to teach, I was still an important authority figure to the students, and I had spent a great deal of time with them. Talking to the students about me in my absence seemed a violation of trust and undermined my authority in the classroom. The host teacher’s actions were particularly insensitive given that the students and I had developed trusting and caring relationships. I confronted the host teacher about the situation and she made clear that she saw nothing wrong with her actions. I reported the incident to my course director with some trepidation. I had worked hard that year, and I did not want my marks to suffer if it looked like I was just being an ungrateful student. Reporting the incident was a risk, but I believed I had a moral obligation to try to prevent other teacher candidates from being placed with this teacher.

My course director indicated that he was disturbed by the incident. He later told me that the matter was addressed with the host teacher but I never found out whether she received another teacher candidate. That experience was a reminder that students are not friends and should not be placed in the uncomfortable position of listening to comments about someone they have grown to respect. Students look up to their teachers as role models and it seems unfair to have them engage in seemingly negative discussions about people who matter in their lives. They are not in a position of power to truly express what they may be feeling. This incident remained with me and I was determined to create a safe and caring classroom where my students were encouraged to respect and honour the people that mattered to them. If it has made me a better teacher, I am grateful for this experience. My experiences with my host teacher have brought me to where I am today.

By the time I entered graduate school for a Master’s Degree I was teaching at an elementary school. I enjoyed my role in the classroom but I was excited at the prospect of meeting people from other schools and other boards. I did not realize that my lifetime interest in ethics would soon be reignited. Courses provided an opportunity to discuss the ethical aspects of teaching and
schools. Classrooms became places where I could consider new insights and deepen my understanding of what it meant to be an ethical teacher. The prospect of being an administrator seemed far off then. My professors challenged me to consider new ways of looking at concepts, and I knew I had found a place to build on my knowledge. I could bring my learning back to the classroom and offer a better learning environment for my students. My experiences as a graduate student have brought me to where I am today.

Several years after leaving graduate school I participated in a qualitative study entitled The Moral and Ethical Bases of Teachers’ Interactions with Students (Campbell 2003a, 2004; Campbell & Thiessen, 2000, 2001). I was a primary teacher at the time, and the research team invited me to reflect on my teaching practice. I was asked to consider the moral significance of my intentions, words and actions in the classroom. I saw many connections between my teaching practice and my personal life. I realized that my personal experiences greatly impacted my practice as a teacher and, inversely, my practice as a teacher was affecting how I lived my life. It was hard to separate the two worlds. I saw the benefits of research as a way of encouraging deep reflection on what I was doing as a practitioner to foster a caring, trusting, and nurturing environment for my students. I also began to think more deeply about how my words and actions influenced the moral climate of the school and how the school in turn influenced me. My experiences as a research participant have brought me to where I am today.

Over my career as a teacher I had several instances where ethical issues arose in my practice, particularly in my role as an ESL teacher. I recall times in that role when I advocated for ESL students who were at risk of being excluded from special events and activities in the school. In some instances, regular classroom teachers would send their ESL students to my room to complete their work at the same time as the rest of the classes were attending a school assembly or a sporting event. I respectfully confronted teachers and indicated to them that ESL students need to be included in these events in order to have a sense of belonging and connection. Teachers were generally receptive to my argument, and I was able to negotiate other times during the school day when the students could receive help and still be included in the same events as their peers. I believe my role as an advocate for ESL students raised awareness among staff about the students’ needs, and helped to ensure that they were included as vital members of the school community. My experiences as a teacher have brought me to where I am today.
I studied the moral and ethical elements of teaching for my Master’s Research Project and soon felt compelled to turn my attention to the world of the administrator. I hold a deep and abiding respect for teaching, however the vice principal role allows me to influence decision making and affect changes on a broader level than the classroom. I consult with various stakeholders to bring about positive changes for students and their families and I raise ethical considerations in discussions with the principal, staff, students and parents. I am afforded opportunities to help children and adults work through ethical issues in several areas ranging from discipline to scheduling to transitioning to a new classroom. The greatest challenge occurs in discipline situations where I believe that the consequence that the child receives is too severe, or in turn, that it lacks enough severity, and despite my opinion, I have to compromise due to policy or legal constraints. However, in the vast majority of instances, I find that if I stay involved with the child and the family following the suspension, I am able to help that child improve, and the greatest satisfaction in the role comes from being able to do that. My experiences as a vice principal have brought me to where I am today.

For my doctoral research, I wanted to probe deeper into the professional and personal experiences of a principal to try to uncover how she conceives of her practice in moral and ethical terms. A case study involving a sustained amount of time with one principal was intriguing to me. I could invite her to explore the experiences that have brought her to where she is today, and that help to sustain her over time. I could better understand the moral and ethical elements of her practice in her day-by-day and moment-by-moment interactions. My hope is that my research can inform the dialogue and contribute to a better understanding of why it matters for a principal to be moral, and why our schools need ethical administrators.

These seven roles as daughter, friend, student, teacher candidate, research participant, teacher and vice principal have brought me to where I am today. When I sat down with the principal who is the subject of this study to express my thanks for agreeing to be the main participant, I could not anticipate all the ways in which the ethical elements of her practice would be revealed. I observed many indications of a moral and ethical approach to her work as evidenced in her words, actions, decisions and numerous interactions with students, teachers, parents, support staff and community members.
I saw her moral influence in the most seemingly minor details of the school building from elaborate themed displays, to posters, to bulletin boards of student work. As I listened to my participants share their encounters with her, I knew I was studying a very human, imperfect person who was constantly striving to live an ethical life at school and at home. I am humbled and honoured by the trust that she and the participants placed in me. My only hope is that I can honour their trust by presenting the data in the most impartial way possible with the understanding that, as a qualitative researcher, my own experiences will inevitably influence my interpretations.

My Roman Catholic upbringing has undoubtedly shaped the person that I am, and in that sense, has had some influence on how I interpret what I observe in a research setting. I am a baptized Catholic and I have attended Catholic schools. I have been a teacher and a vice-principal in the Catholic school system that is also the site of my research. While I make every effort to remain impartial, it is inevitable that my religion will have some effect on the lens through which I view my research. Not surprisingly my faith has had an impact on how I make sense of the moral and ethical world and the biases and assumptions I bring to my experiences. I offer the reader a brief definition of the word ‘Catholic’ followed by a personal story of attending mass with my father and how that has brought me to where I am today.

When the word ‘Catholic’ is understood in broad terms, it shares a mutual understanding with other Christian churches and agrees on such principles as, “respect for human dignity, freedom and justice, a radical openness to all truth and every value, and salvation for all of God’s children” (Nsiah & Walker, 2013, p.6). Both my parents were Roman Catholic and were raised in the Catholic faith. To the best of my knowledge, my mother did not question the tenets of the Catholic religion but my father questioned them. Growing up Catholic on a farm in the South of Ireland during the 1930’s and 1940’s, he was hardly the person one would have expected to challenge the Church. By the time I was a young teenager, attending mass with him on a regular basis, he had been in Canada for about twenty-five years, long enough to have developed different insights.

Of the countless times I attended mass with him the most salient memory I have was one Saturday evening when he “took up the collection.” “Taking up the collection,” as it is commonly referred to in the Catholic religion, is a common practice at masses where money is
collected from those in attendance. This money is funneled into various Catholic charities and initiatives. In order to do these collections in an efficient manner, a group of people volunteer to pass baskets around to everyone at the mass. My father was one of the people who volunteered that evening to “take up the collection” along with several men and one woman. The group assembled at the back of the church, as is the usual practice, to get baskets and walk up together to the front of the church. Everything seemed normal at first until I heard my father’s voice, which was quite agitated. I turned to the back of the church and could see that he was having a disagreement with the priest. I did not know what was happening until I asked him about it in the car driving home. He told me that the priest had “grabbed” the basket out of the woman’s hands and told her that women were not allowed to “take up the collection.” My father voiced his objections to the priest, telling him that this was unfair and unjust. I was only fourteen years old but the incident is still etched in my memory.

I tell this story not to criticize priests. I have met and worked with many priests since then that I hold in high regard. Many are caring and committed leaders who show compassion and dedication to the people they serve. The story serves two purposes: one is to relay the pride I felt toward my father who had the courage to voice his objections and protect the dignity of the woman, who he felt was clearly embarrassed by the priest’s actions; the second reason I tell this story is to remind the reader that while I identify myself as a Catholic, it does not mean that I follow every tenet of the Catholic faith without question or reservation. This could not be further from the truth. My father was a role model who taught me to think critically and act with integrity.

It would be naïve, however, to think that my faith has not had an influence on my ethical views and on the guiding perspectives and concepts of my study. I have tried to stay aware of this influence at all stages of my study and to be as honest as possible about how it shapes, in any way, my data collection and data analysis. The study itself was conducted in a Catholic school which presented a further challenge. The challenge was to stay aware of any preconceived notions that might alter my perception of what I observed in the school, and to try to keep a sense of curiosity about even the most seemingly simple aspects of the principal’s practice. Approaching situations with a curious mind allowed me to stay as open as possible to everything that I saw and heard around me, resisting the temptation to make assumptions or draw hasty conclusions.
1.5 Conclusion

Chapter One explored the history of moral leadership by outlining various leadership theories that have informed the research on the school leader. While these theories do not in any way offer a complete picture of the moral elements of a principal’s practice, they do provide a context for understanding how the concept of moral leadership has evolved over time. This chapter also introduced the importance of principals being aware of ethical issues and having the knowledge and support to deal with such issues. Some of the struggles involved in ethical decision-making and the possible need for more dialogue rooted in a common moral language were outlined.

The research questions were introduced and a brief overview of the biographical methods were presented. This overview provides a context for understanding the biographical interviews that formed a component of the data collection. Assumptions of the study were outlined to offer a sense of the notions and beliefs that form the basis of this research. The guiding perspectives and concepts reflect my ethical perspective, which is located in virtue ethics, care ethics and consequentialism. Central terms employed in this study include moral agency, and ethical knowledge and were defined and discussed by way of introduction. Clarification was offered as to how values are differentiated from virtues, morals and ethics. Each term was explored in an attempt to clarify its meaning and use in this study. These terms are found throughout my thesis, both conceptually and empirically.

By sharing the personal and professional influences that guided me in undertaking this study, my intent was to reveal why I chose this area of study and to substantiate my place as a researcher. Lastly, the purpose and significance of the study offered a sense of why the study was conducted, revealing its promise for providing a rich and highly textured portrait of a principal that will inform the literature and discourse on ethical school leadership in a unique and compelling way.

1.6 Roadmap

The topics introduced in this chapter are fully explored in the chapters that ensue. The influence of applied, conceptual and empirical work on moral and ethical leadership on which this study is founded, is reviewed in Chapter Two. A review of the literature on the ethical teacher and the ethical school is also provided in Chapter Two. The intent of this chapter is to provide an in-depth discussion of what scholars have discovered to date, and to draw connections between
areas where they agree, disagree, or have additional insights. Chapter Three outlines the methodological approach and specific methods of investigation. It offers the reader a detailed discussion of how this study was conducted and the measures put in place to ensure reliability and credibility. Reasons for choosing particular methods, such as in-depth interviews and observations are outlined, and a vivid sense of the experience of observing a principal over five consecutive months is offered. Chapter Four has a purpose that is twofold. The first purpose is to provide excerpts from the biographical interviews that I conducted with the principal, with the intent of giving the reader a sense of the contextual influences that have shaped her practice. The second purpose of Chapter Four is to provide the reader with an understanding of the school where Christine works and where I conducted this study. Chapter Four concludes with a summary of the findings that were made from conducting the biographical interviews. Chapter Five examines how the principal leads ethically through the expression of four central virtues which include trust, care, respect and fairness. These virtues comprise the foundation for exploring the principal’s approaches to action and the personal operational paradigms that she relies on in her practice. Chapter Five brings to light how the virtues, approaches to action and personal operational paradigms are interconnected and mutually informing of one another. Chapter Six examines how the principal cultivates ethicality, and in so doing, helps to create an ethical climate within the school community. The chapter is separated by two sections: The School Community and the Ethical School Climate. The first section highlights how the principal establishes a community by cultivating moral values and expressing ethical virtues in her relationships. The second section focuses on the ethical climate within the school community. It explores how the principal cultivates an ethical climate by expressing ethical virtues and by communicating morally-laden messages that convey her expectations of how people should learn and work together. Finally, Chapter Seven reexamines the research questions, summarizes insights, proposes potential implications of the results, and offers recommendations for further research.
Chapter 2

2 Literature Review

The literature review is divided into three sections: The Ethical Principal, the Ethical Teacher and the Ethical School. The order of the sections is determined based on an understanding that because the study focuses primarily on the principal’s practice, it is instructive to first explore the origins of the principal’s role as a moral leader. The Ethical Teacher follows the Ethical Principal so that the relationship between them is made clear. The ethical influence of the principal in shaping teaching practice and in leading teachers to embrace a moral purpose is made evident. When the teacher and the principal work together to fully express ethical virtues in their daily work, over time their words and actions help to build an ethical school. The literature review concludes with The Ethical School in an effort to reveal the challenges and triumphs that are involved in building an ethical institution. The role that the principal has in meeting those challenges and in sustaining those achievements will be explored.

2.1 The Ethical Principal

Although school administration is now widely recognized and generally accepted as a moral endeavour, both in theory and in practice, the literature reveals two distinct struggles to arrive at this point. The first struggle is that despite a recent recognition that school administration embodies moral dimensions, the history of school leadership, as it unfolds in the literature, is fraught with challenges to bring this recognition to the forefront. For a period of time there was not much written about administration as a moral enterprise. When there was an attempt to do so, the literature tended to lack a language of morals and ethics, and instead comprised a language of values. The second struggle is that even though the literature on the ethical teacher was written in a parallel fashion with the literature on the ethical principal, they were never integrated with each other. The result has been a lack of cohesion and tension between these two areas that leaves a false impression that they are not connected. This chapter will address the first struggle by exploring literature that focuses on the fundamentally moral elements of school leadership, using language that is grounded in morals and ethics. This chapter will address the second struggle by drawing distinct connections between the literature on the ethical principal and the literature on
the ethical teacher, showing how each are inextricably connected and both inform and enlighten one another.

In the past two to three decades numerous scholars have argued the importance of moral leadership as it pertains to the principal’s practice (Beck, 2003; Beckner, 2004; Begley & Johansson, 2003; Branson 2014b; Dempster & Berry, 2003; Fullan, 2003; Greenfield, 2004; Hodgkinson, 1991; Langlois & Lapointe, 2007, 2010; Murphy, 2002; Sergiovanni, 2001a, 2001b, 2005b, 2007, 2013, Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2003, 2011; Starratt, 2004, 2005, 2011, 2012; Strike, 2005, 2013; Strike et al., 2005; Wagner & Simpson, 2009). There is substantial agreement that school leadership is a critical area of study and moreover is fundamentally moral and ethical. Scholars emphasize the centrality of the moral components of an administrator’s practice. Starratt (2004) suggests that a principal’s work should be “simultaneously intellectual and moral; an activity characterized by a blend of human, professional, and civic concerns” (p. 3). Hodgkinson (1991) asserts, “values, morals and ethics are the very stuff of leadership and administrative life” (p.11). Scholars stress that educational leaders should have integrity and demonstrate ethical congruence in their words, intentions, and actions. Donlevy and Walker (2011) assert, “In part, leadership is about making sure your ethical core permeates all you do, all you are and all you dare to be as a person of integrity” (p.19). Branson (2014b) insists that if a leader engages in unethical actions, then such actions cannot be considered leadership behaviours. Moreover, if leaders are not purposely and genuinely struggling to be ethical, then they are feigning leadership. Langlois and Lapointe (2007) consider ethical leadership to be “the highest level in the development of knowledge and skills in postmodern leadership” (p. 249).

This section of the literature review begins with an examination of the body of literature on the ethical principal. The moral challenges and ethical complexities of the principal’s practice are made evident when situated within a discussion of how the demands and responsibilities of the role have changed over time. For many years, the principal was conceived as having limited duties that were primarily technical and managerial in nature. Over time there was a growing realization that schools required leaders who could appreciate and respond to the moral demands of the work. What follows is a brief historical overview of the various forces that have shaped the principal’s practice, and continue to shape it to the present day. As Foster (1986) remarks,
knowledge of the history of the field is essential for the reflective administrator’s understanding of the present situation” (p. 36).

A subsequent discussion considers the evolving nature of the principal’s role in dealing with complex ethical situations, making moral decisions, and engaging staff in dialogue to raise awareness of the ethical dimensions of the school. It becomes clear that the multi-dimensional aspects of the principal’s practice are inherently moral and involve a host of duties that carry moral weight. Current thought on the influence of the ethical principal in shaping teaching practice and in leading schools to embrace a moral purpose is offered. Scholarly studies concerning the ethical principal are explored. Consideration is given to how these studies have helped further the understanding of the complex nature of the role. Some of the limitations of these studies are highlighted.

A review of the literature reveals that attention paid to the moral aspects of school leadership is often related to concurrent changes in society and schools. The principalship can be traced back to the early part of the nineteenth century when the term principal, originating from the title “principal teacher”, was given to the staff member whose duty it was to manage the school paperwork. This duty grew out of a necessity to better manage schools, which were becoming larger, as school districts joined together. The “principal teacher” was expected to teach while charged with administrative tasks. Although the term, principal, can be found in some educational reports during that time, the designation “principal” was not officially acknowledged until the latter part of the 19th century. “Principal teachers” were often located in small schools or one room school houses. The demands of the role were relatively simple, but by the second half of the nineteenth century, large increases in immigration and urbanization brought changes to schools which affected the role of the principal (Brown, 2011; Hart & Bredeson, 1996; Ryan, 2009).

These changes in society necessitated the restructuring of schools and a new focus on the duties involved in managing them. The notion of creating a system of publicly supported elementary and secondary schools, known as the Common School Movement, was gaining momentum. This led to the formation of an organized system of public schools. Previously, local school administrative decisions, ranging from staffing concerns to financial matters, had been the responsibility of school boards, but over time these boards became increasingly large and
unwieldy. Board members insisted they could no longer manage local school responsibilities. The mounting workload meant that one person needed to be in charge at each school and this responsibility was given to full-time managers, known as principals (Brown, 2011).

Between the middle of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century one aspect of the principal’s role was to “function as guardians and promoters of accepted values” (Beck & Murphy, 1992, p. 393). Principals had to ensure that teachers imparted a moral education to students centered on common virtues and the essential moral teachings of Christianity. Horace Mann, widely considered to be the founder of the common school, stated that these virtues had to include, amongst others: justice, benevolence, frugality, piety, moderation and temperance. Students were expected to hold common outlooks on societal matters, in alliance with the dominantly held views of the time (Beyer, 1997). Principals, the majority of whom were white Anglo-Saxon men, were considered to be people of admirable character, who could safeguard social and political order, and ensure that common moral and political values were instilled in the school’s curriculum (Brown, 2011). Official preparation programs for principals were not yet in existence, as schools were viewed as relatively simple organizations. Principals received the same training as teachers with no formal courses in administration and were expected to learn their responsibilities on the job (Brown, 2011).

The beginning of the 20th century witnessed sweeping changes in society, brought on by the Industrial Revolution and the rise of the business corporation. Education was increasingly viewed as a means to prepare students for work, and principals played a significant role in the creation of a new social and economic order. There was a societal tendency to revere someone perceived as an expert, and gathering expert opinions was a commonly practiced method of analysis (Brown, 2011; Tom, 1984). The prevailing view was that professionals should be in positions of authority, sparking a desire to see principals become professionals, or specialists in their jobs. As the principal role became increasingly multifaceted and separated from teaching, there was a greater pressure to have principals officially trained in university graduate programs. As a result, there was a significant rise in administrative preparation programs in the United States, that offered training in management and business skills (Brown, 2011).

At the turn of the century, the beginning of the scientific movement had a profound effect on education in general, and specifically on the role of principals. By the 1920’s, the principal was
considered to be a scientific manager, but there still were many religious and value-laden images associated with the role (Beck & Murphy, 1992). Principals were expected to be competent in their managerial skills but also had to demonstrate character traits reflective of the dominant values of the communities in which they served. The centralization of the education system meant that these values generally reflected middle class cultural and religious beliefs. The Protestant work ethic, emphasizing principles of thriftiness and efficiency, was the prevailing paradigm guiding school practice (Beck & Murphy, 1992; Brown, 2011; Tom, 1984).

In the 1930’s the Great Depression created new economic burdens, and partnerships between business executives and educational administrators were strained. Businesses sought to reduce their financial support for administrative preparation programs. A significant rupture occurred in this long-standing partnership. Religious metaphors, such as the Protestant work ethic, which had been prevalent in the 1920’s, essentially disappeared from the literature on school leadership, replaced by images borrowed from the corporate world. The principal was primarily viewed as an executive manager, rather than a moral leader, a perception that would occur repeatedly, as different notions of the principal arose (Beck & Murphy, 1992; Brown, 2011).

Interest in the moral dimensions of leadership more broadly resurfaced in scholarly writings as early as 1938 when Chester Barnard published his work entitled The Functions of the Executive. Barnard suggested that the administrator’s main role was to create a cooperative system and cultivate moral leadership in the organization. He stressed the significance of the manager's duty to operate as a moral educator to employees. Administrators were accountable for establishing a culture where people shared the workload and cooperated with each other. His writings were viewed as a radical change from previous literature that had stressed the importance of reward and punishment in the workplace (Crowson, 1989; Foster, 1986). T.B. Greenfield (1986), in describing Barnard, states that he was, “essentially a moralist, and for him the heart of administration lay in the leader’s creation of cooperative effort and commitment to institutional purpose among members of an organization” (p. 58). Barnard’s writings were significant as he highlighted the role of the administrator as being moral in nature. The administrator was beginning to be portrayed as a leader who motivates staff with collective purpose. An emphasis on the moral elements of the principal’s leadership were beginning to emerge.
The onset of the 1940’s brought greater focus on democratic values in schools. The role of the administrator now involved accommodating the individual and collective needs of staff (Brown, 2011). In stark contrast to the demands placed upon principals in the past, where the general trend was to place the needs of the organization above the needs of staff, principals were now expected to do everything they could to motivate their staff by meeting their personal and professional needs. Brown (2011) remarks, “The new focus on faculty and staff morale caused the supervisory role of the principalship to shift from monitoring to providing assistance to teachers to improve instruction, from educational specialist and bureaucrat to facilitator and counsellor” (p. 92). Principals were now more engaged with teachers, parents and members of the community. Following World War II, there was growing appreciation that successfully training principals required a focus on something more than completion of technical and administrative duties. Conceptual skills and a growing body of theory in educational administration received greater focus in preparation programs. Prevailing beliefs about the principal’s work were shifting. It was understood that it entailed struggling to comprehend and clarify situations rather than simply performing tasks. There was a growing emphasis on decision-making as an important aspect of the principal’s practice (T.B. Greenfield, 1986; Foster, 1986).

In 1947, the focus in the leadership literature changed substantially with the publication of Herbert Simon’s Administrative Behaviour. In his seminal work, Simon considered the inner, rational decision-making processes of administrators. Based on the philosophy of positivism, he contended that ethical assertions were meaningless because they could not be confirmed by empirical proof (Foster, 1986). Simon conceptualized administration as a science that should be concerned with facts rather than ethical questions. Administrators were encouraged to prioritize the efficiency of the organization and not allow their values to affect their decisions (T.B. Greenfield, 1986; Foster, 1986). T.B. Greenfield (1986) explains that Simon’s process of inquiry into decision-making was devoid of values, containing only facts, and it drastically restricted what could be counted as “administration”. His ideas supported an understanding of school leadership that was based on control, impartiality and the effectiveness of science. Simon’s work was in stark contrast to Barnard’s writings in the 1930’s, and it represented an entirely new method of interpreting and investigating the field of administration. T.B. Greenfield remarks, “Simon’s science undermined the interpretation of experience as a means of understanding
organizations, and it deflected attention from the moral questions about purpose and commitment highlighted by Barnard” (T.B. Greenfield, 1986, p. 59).

Hodgkinson was among the scholars who took issue with Simon’s ideas, maintaining that administration is concerned with values and is not a science. He proposed that administration should be thought of as one of the humanities, very much like the study of philosophy (Evers, 1985; T.B. Greenfield, 1980). Other scholars point to the interplay of philosophy and school leadership. They argue that even the mundane actions that principals take reflect a personal philosophy, developed through instruction and experience (Foster, 1986). Heslep (1997) takes the argument one step further and suggests that when principals use philosophical reasoning in their ethical decision-making, they are applying practical wisdom to its fullest measure. Haynes (2002) contends that administrators who use perception and intuitive reason to see the salient features of a situation, and then act accordingly, are applying practical wisdom. The guiding perspectives and concepts of my study support the notion that principals exert moral influence in their work when they use practical wisdom in their daily practice to resolve ethical dilemmas. This is evident when a school leader can articulate why some moral principles are upheld over other moral principles, due to the particular details of the situation. For example, a principal who recognizes the need for care over justice, or compassion over fairness, might be said to be exercising practical wisdom.

According to T.B. Greenfield (1986), one of Herbert Simon’s notable contributions was that he established decision-making as the substance of administration. Simon’s work was misguided, however, in its inability to concede that decisions contain elements other than facts that cannot be easily regulated by science. He discounted human elements such as desire, limitation, belief, hope, resolve, courage, vice and virtue. Simon’s work tended to perpetuate a belief that decisions that lacked a regard for values were not only necessary but were achievable. Adopting this perspective could allow administrators to distance themselves from the moral and ethical elements of a decision. Subscribing to this belief may ease an administrator’s anxieties and uncertainties in decision-making and unfortunately take away the principal’s sense of accountability (T.B. Greenfield, 1986). While Simon’s work was controversial, Hart and Bredeson (1996) point out that it advanced the theory and discussion in the field of school leadership. Efforts were made to improve instructional programs for prospective administrators.
New avenues for inquiry about educational administration became available, including the creation of new scholarly journals.

As the 1950’s approached, society was grappling with effects from the landmark *Brown vs Board of Education* decision. This landmark case made it incumbent upon educators to recognize each student as a citizen, with equal entitlement to respect, and equal opportunity to engage in the school community (Strike, 2013). Issues of racial prejudice, social class, and discrimination created growing tensions. Schools were dealing with the repercussions of this unrest but despite these tensions, and mounting pressure to make schools globally competitive, principals were often portrayed in the literature as disengaged from societal concerns. According to Brown (2011), “principals often vacillated between taking highly theoretical perspectives on their work and dwelling on mundane issues of practice” (p. 93). Beck and Murphy (1992) offer the following insightful comment, “scholars and practitioners have tended to stress the principal’s role in facing solvable problems – and even if these relate to trivial issues – and that they often ignored the reality that principals must deal with troublesome situations not amenable to quick solutions” (p. 393). Following the Brown vs. Board of Education decision, principals were likely dealing with complex and morally laden issues, however there was an apparent disconnect between what was likely happening in schools and the predominant view of the principal’s role. This disconnect occurs repeatedly in the literature as illustrated by Starratt (2004) who observes, “the issues that school leaders face tend to be presented and interpreted primarily as technical, rationalizable problems resolvable by technical, rational solutions. The human, civic, and moral challenges nested in many of those problems are not surfaced” (p.4).

During the 1950’s and 1960’s schools swiftly expanded, becoming increasingly bureaucratic. Management skills were of greater significance to principals than educational knowledge and proficiency (Goodlad, 1990). Societal unrest continued and principals focused on creating stability and calm in their schools (Brown, 2011). Efforts were underway in the scholarly literature to portray the principal’s role as multi-dimensional with a deeper appreciation of its complexities (Greenfield, 2004). In 1965, Neal Gross and Robert Herriott’s comprehensive study, *Staff Leadership in Public Schools*, considered the effectiveness of staff leadership in schools. Situated in public schools, this study was embedded in a controversy concerning the appropriate role of a school administrator. Disagreements ensued about whether a school leader should offer routine administrative support or attempt to direct teacher performance, which the
researchers termed ‘staff leadership’. The findings revealed that principals positively affect staff morale, teacher performance and student learning. Since then the majority of studies on school administration have built on the notion of staff leadership as a conceptual framework (Greenfield, 2004).

Despite the findings of the Gross and Herriott study, the literature in the 1970’s still portrayed the principal’s role as largely supervisory. The principal was depicted as someone who engaged in routine tasks, preoccupied with managerial concerns. Foster (1986) notes, “A short examination of the topics of almost any introductory text in educational administration would bear this out; culture, politics, morals and ethics receive, at best, scant attention” (p. 9). The study of administration focused on how school leaders could employ measures to bring about satisfactory results from their staff and keep them increasingly motivated. Management theory was the operational paradigm for administrators. However, it was not addressing essential aspects of a principal’s work which involved a multitude of human interests, conflicting values, and ambiguous judgments (T.B. Greenfield, 1980; Sergiovanni 2001a, 2001b). Logic and rationality were not always satisfactory tools in the decision-making process. Management theory focused on logic and rational decisions and neglected to give consideration to the importance of values. Hodgkinson (1978) states, “The intrusion of values into the decision making process is not merely inevitable, it is the very substance of decision” (59).

Murphy (2002) points to the shortcomings of a bureaucratic model of leadership stating that principals, “must learn to lead not from the apex of the organizational pyramid but from a web of interpersonal relationships – with people rather than through them. Their base of influence must be professional expertise and moral imperative rather than line authority” (Murphy, 2002, p. 188). Marshall (1992) asserts that administration is concerned with values, and that principals have the influence to guide their schools in a direction that will reflect those values. Portraying the principal as simply a bureaucrat does not capture the complexity of the role. Day and Gu (2010) and Sergiovanni (2001b) caution that leadership formed under a bureaucratic model may invite situations where principals who are not closely supervised comply to rules only when necessary. Similarly, teachers who work under highly bureaucratic authority may react as technicians, and their accomplishments become narrowly defined. Unable to use their skills and talents, they may become trapped in routine, and disengaged in their teaching practice (Day & Gu, 2010; Sergiovanni, 2001b).
Starratt (1994) suggests that a management approach to administration tends to portray the principal as a bureaucrat rather than as a leader. A principal who is portrayed as a leader, rather than a bureaucrat, might be able to exert moral influence on a school. He clarifies the difference between leaders and bureaucrats,

Leaders, in contrast to bureaucrats, get people to try things, change, move into something new, expand their perspectives. Besides the clarity of thinking, which enables others to grasp what it is they are being encouraged to try, leaders exert a morally compelling force, something that persuades others to believe that what they are being encouraged to try is a moral good. (Starratt, 1994, p. 101)

In keeping with the theoretical conception of my study, school leadership can be defined more broadly to include the moral influence of conduct, manner, words and stated intentions. The view of the principal as solely a manager who simply maintains the status quo does little to capture the complex and morally nuanced nature of the role. Christopher Hodgkinson was among the scholars who believed that scientific views cast far too narrow a picture of what educational leaders do in their daily practice. Hodgkinson suggested that administrators were mainly concerned with making value-laden decisions and with finding ways to solve moral dilemmas. He maintained that educational leadership is first and foremost concerned with moral issues. The effective educational leader is one who is able to combine technical competency with an understanding of moral complexity (Allison, 2003; Evers, 1985; Grace, 1995; T.B. Greenfield, 1980; Greenfield, 2004). Educational leaders were engaged in work fraught with moral questions. The quality of their leadership could be determined by whether or not there was a moral climate in the school. Hodgkinson encouraged people to reexamine existing preparation programs for administrators, arguing that it was not enough to provide technical instruction. Moral dilemmas were a persistent aspect of an administrator’s work, therefore there needed to be opportunities to reflect on and obtain greater understanding of these dilemmas. Hodgkinson believed administrators had to show an understanding of the moral complexities of their work and be able to draw connections between the values they held and the actions that they took (Grace, 1995).

Notable scholars have emphasized the importance of principals being aware and articulate about the moral values and ethical principles that guide them in their daily decision-making (Begley &
Johansson, 2003; Beck & Murphy, 1994; Campbell, 1997a, 1997c, 2003a; Cranston et al., 2006; Crowson, 1989; Dempster & Berry, 2003; Duignan, 2006; Donlevy & Walker, 2011; Frick, 2009; Haynes, 2002; Langlois & Lapointe, 2007, 2010; Marshall, 1992; Nash, 2002; Rebore 2014; Shapiro & Stefkovich 2003, 2011; Starratt, 2004; Strike, 2013; Strike et al., 2005; Wagner & Simpson, 2009; Zubay & Soltis, 2005). Wagner & Simpson (2009) claim that principals have a moral obligation to make decisions about what ought to happen and cannot pretend to avoid such decisions. Crowson (1989) argues that to a large extent all administrative decisions are based on moral codes and therefore they all contain an ethical element. Studies have explored the effect of the principal’s decisions on stakeholders and on the institution, as a whole. One may wonder how significant ethical decision-making is in the daily life of a school administrator. Cranston et al. (2006) found it so prevalent in their study that they declared, “ethical dilemmas, usually concerning issues to do with staff or students, are so common now that they have become the ‘bread and butter’ of educational leaders’ lives” (p. 106).

In 1974 Thomas B. Greenfield made a significant impact on the literature on school leadership when he challenged the dominant view of organization and management. He claimed that the organization is a social concept, formed through human resolve and determination. Greenfield insisted that the organization is not an objective entity that can be analyzed in the same manner that a material object can be analyzed (Foster, 1986; Hart & Bredeson, 1996). He claimed that in order to grasp the meaning of an organization or to understand administration, one had to first understand the reasons and intentions people have for their actions. Greenfield argued that greater appreciation of values was necessary because it was the values people held that made organizations meaningful to them (Foster, 1986).

James Macgregor Burns, who was writing around the time of T.B. Greenfield, was one of the first scholars who noted that leadership and ethics are connected. In his 1978 book, Leadership, (as cited in Branson, 2014a; Foster, 2005; Greenfield, 2004; Sergiovanni, 2001b, 2007) Burns made observations that marked a change in the study of educational leadership; a change that would continue for the next twenty years. Burns’ main argument was that leaders must meet the needs and desires of their followers without surrendering their own fundamental principles. The purpose of leadership was to serve the best interests of those who worked under the direction of their leader. Leaders had to be aware of the motivations and principles of their followers and incorporate that knowledge into their mission.
Burns introduced the concept of transformational leadership (as previously described in Chapter One). Briefly, transformational leadership compels leaders and followers to come together to fulfill mutual objectives and chart a new course for their schools. This style of leadership increases the leader’s and follower’s expectations and inspires both of them to greater levels of obligation and accomplishment (Branson, 2014a; Foster, 2005; Greenfield, 2004; Sergiovanni, 2001b, 2007). Transformational principals are role models who provide guidance to teachers and support them in taking leadership roles, thereby improving their teaching performance (Ryan, 2009).

Transformational leadership, according to Burns, is ultimately moral because it raises human behaviour and ethical aims to a higher level for both the leader and the follower. This style of leadership addresses the human need for find meaning and purpose in one’s work. Burns contributed to the development of the concept of leadership as a moral and ethical endeavour, refusing to portray leadership as merely a managerial device (Foster, 2005; Sergiovanni 2001b, 2007). Sergiovanni (2007) explains that in the transformational leadership model, staff are committed to a vision of the school and to a set of ideas about teaching and learning; they assume the role of followers, rather than subordinates. The critical difference between a subordinate and a follower is that a subordinate reacts to authority while a follower reacts to ideas. The effective leader, dedicated to ideas and beliefs, fosters leadership in others, and is also willing to be a follower. When the leader becomes a follower, bureaucratic power is surpassed by moral authority.

In 1979 Erickson and Reller issued The Principal in Metropolitan Schools (as cited in Greenfield, 2004) which comprised the work of notable scholars including: Joan Meskin, Rodney Reed, Francis Schrag and William Wayson among others. These scholars set the stage for discourse over the next thirty years with respect to the study of school leadership, specifically the notion of moral and ethical school leadership. Francis Schrag’s contribution conceptualized the principal as a moral agent and suggested that when a principal embraces a moral point of view, the following four notions about decision-making are evident: a moral agent establishes decisions on principles that benefit everyone and these principles are impartial enough that even the moral agent would follow them; a moral agent considers the well-being of everyone affected by a decision, including one’s own well-being; a moral agent is obligated to establish decisions based on the most comprehensive information possible; a moral agent accepts that moral
judgments are authoritarian, meaning that once a decision is reached, he or she must act in accordance with that decision. Failure to act signifies a weakness of will or an inability to appreciate the importance of the moral obligation (Greenfield, 2004).

Francis Schrag’s (1979) contribution is noteworthy as he was one of the few scholars at the time to offer a clear definition of moral agency as it pertains to the principal’s practice. Many scholarly publications have since conceptualized the role of the principal as a moral agent (Barth, 2013; Beckner, 2004; Begley & Johansson, 2003; Campbell, 2003a; Fullan, 2003; Greenfield, 2004; Haynes, 2002; Sergiovanni, 2001a, 2001b, 2005b, 2013; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002; Starratt, 2004, 2005; Stengel & Tom, 2006; Strike et al., 2005; Tuana, 2014; Wagner & Simpson, 2009). The literature on moral agency informs my research and provides guidance and understanding in revealing the moral influence of the principal.

The 1980’s continued to evidence a change in the literature on school leadership. Publications increasingly focused on challenges inherent in administration and scholars demonstrated increased interest in this area (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002). The prevalence of scientific models of education were being challenged by the teaching world. Tom (1984) noted that the promise of a science of education and the underlying imagery of teaching as a functional science had fascinated scholars over the course of the twentieth century. In his view, research on teaching, which was largely embedded in images of applied science was unproductive, and desperately in need of a change of focus. Tom (1984) proposed alternatives to the conceptualization of teaching. In his book entitled Teaching as a Moral Craft (1984), Tom challenged what he saw as “the weaknesses of the applied science view of teaching” and proposed a different image of teaching as “a moral craft” (p. 4). Schwartz (1998) agreed that the positivist-behaviourist view of the profession of teaching, which stresses certainty and quantifiable results, diverts from the examination and encouragement of ethical practice. Goodlad (1990) remarks, “The concept of teaching takes on a hollowness when it is defined in this limited way” (p. 18).

As the 1990’s approached there was a significant increase in the attention policymakers paid to school leadership. In part this occurred because teacher supervision and evaluation were mandated in some parts of the United States. Research held that there was a best way to teach, and best practices could be recognized and assessed (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002). By the mid 1990’s there was an emphasis in schools on advancing teacher development and creating
professional communities for teachers. Principals were expected to help teachers become leaders who in turn would be accountable for their instructional practice. As the 1990’s came to a close, an influential standards movement advanced a new way of conceptualizing accountability. Accountability was no longer solely about students and the content they learned but about teachers and the way they taught. It was widely believed that in order to improve schools, teaching had to improve. School districts were more committed to using teacher evaluation as a device for improving their schools. Professional development for teachers received significant attention and it shifted from isolated experiences outside of the classroom to a more cohesive focus on improvement inside the classroom (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002).

The scientific approach to school administration, prevalent throughout the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, has given way to a model of the principalship that is based on moral commitment. The literature has forged a path towards reexamining the role of the principal as an ethical leader who exerts a moral influence on the school. It reveals an inability for the scientific approach to school administration to sufficiently capture the moral ambiguities and complexities of the principal’s practice, and to recognize the school as an ethical institution rather than as a bureaucratic organization. More recently the literature has sought to reestablish the principal as a moral agent whose decisions have ethical influence, and whose words and actions carry significant moral weight. I now turn to the literature that explores the more contemporary role of the principal, in an effort to show how school leaders uphold moral principles and express ethical virtues in their daily practice.

There is an increasing recognition that intuition and sense experience are important tools for ethical reasoning in educational administration. This signals a shift in how school leadership is viewed. Conventional ways of knowing, such as science and deductive logic, are valuable means for making decisions, but are not the only tools school leaders need in their practice. Professionals consider the context and gain knowledge and awareness through their actions, rather than through a standard or prescribed formula (Beckner, 2004; Begley, 2006; Begley & Johansson, 2003; Branson, 2014b; Coombs, 1998; Cranston et al., 2006; Foster, 1986; Grace, 1995; T.B. Greenfield, 1980; Haynes, 2002; Notman, 2014; Sergiovanni, 2001b, 2007; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2003, 2011; Strike, 2013; Strike et al, 2005; Zubay & Soltis, 2005).
Strike et al. (2005) caution that while intuition is significant, an administrator must not believe that every intuitive thought is important. Principals must be prepared to clarify the ethical notions they hold that create their sense of right and wrong. They maintain that it is important to weigh one’s moral intuitions against a moral theory. Once the theory is examined, one may have to reconsider intuitive thoughts, possibly altering a decision or a course of action. Intuition and theory intermingle and impact each other in this reflective process. Strike et al (2005) explain,

The trick is to achieve some point of reflective equilibrium between our moral sense and our moral theory. By reflective equilibrium we mean reaching a point in our deliberations where we feel that our moral intuitions and the moral theory that accounts for them are satisfactorily consistent and where the decisions we reach and actions we take can be objectively justified by our moral theory (Strike et al., 2005, p.111).

Haynes (2002) adds that many times what people believe to be intuitive thoughts have in fact been influenced by past customs and rituals, including those that are non-verbal. Coombs (1998) agrees with Haynes (2002) that examining the ethical principles embedded in one’s intuitive feelings is an essential characteristic of moral reasoning. Begley and Johansson (2003) similarly suggest that administrators must reflect on what they understand to be right or wrong and good or bad. School leaders, they argue, must be aware of how and why they make decisions.

Haynes (2002), Coombs (1998) and Begley and Johansson (2003) call attention to the importance of a principal staying aware of the influences that underlie reason and action. Awareness might also mean that a principal is cognizant of how personal values are influencing his or her behaviour when confronted with a dilemma. Branson (2014b) argues that by bringing what he calls “inner influences” on our behaviour into conscious awareness, an ethical leader can restrict and guide these influences and focus them on pursuing possibilities of greater significance that will serve the interests of everyone. It is in serving the interests of others that ethical results can be realized. When “inner influences” remain unconscious they automatically seek mainly self-interests, and leaders are left with limited choice in how to deal with ethical dilemmas (Branson, 2014b, p.206).

In keeping with the theoretical basis of my study, I would suggest that awareness may develop with reflection. Reflecting on ethical dilemmas may allow principals to gain an understanding of the personal and professional factors that influence them in their decision-making. Asking the
principal in my study to reflect on moral situations during interviews and informal conversations gave her an opportunity to articulate how she arrived at decisions. It also helped uncover what elements of a situation caused uncertainty for her when problems were multi-layered and ambiguous. Cranston et al. (2006) agree that training in reflection is crucial for teachers and principals. They state, “An important challenge for us as developers of school principals and educators is to assist them to become more reflective practitioners who can reflect upon their practice and context and therefore be in a better position to make defensible decisions” (p. 118).

Scholars have pointed to some challenges involved when principals attempt to build reflection into their practice. Grace (1995) cautions that while the importance of critical reflection is not in dispute, the increasing workload of principals and teachers creates a significant obstacle for them to find time to critically reflect on their practice. Likewise, Begley (2006) states that self-reflection is not adequate, and as a principal one must be able to engage the school community in a shared and continuous dialogue on the dilemmas in professional practice, as well as in the social challenges of the community. This process of shared dialogue brings about a common understanding of how to achieve justified social aims for the school.

Reflection, in the context of my study, is often an organic process that is ongoing and continuous. It may not always be contingent on finding time. The reality of the school where I conducted my study, and I suspect it might be the same in many schools, is that there is often little time for reflection. In order to contend with the constant stream of demands, school administrators are challenged to reflect anytime, and to accept that reflection can be as muddled and messy as the situations in which they often find themselves. While I agree with Grace (1995) that a principal’s work is overwhelming and that time constraints can be a significant obstacle, reflection is important, as it can help a principal gain more awareness of the ethical elements of a situation and gain new insights about an ethical concern.

Consistent with the theoretical orientation of my study, administrators need to be able to articulate the moral and ethical virtues or principles upon which they base their actions and decisions. Developing an ability to articulate ethical reasons for their choices may require support. This support could be offered in a variety of ways from coursework, to a provision of resources in seminars and conferences. Support might also involve opportunities for principals to
be mentored by and share experiences with colleagues or superintendents, on a formal or informal basis.

The need for educational leader preparation programs and ongoing professional development opportunities that allow principals to engage in thoughtful reflection and discussion about ethical issues has been defended elsewhere in the literature (Beck & Murphy, 1994; Beckner, 2004; Bricker, 1993; Campbell, 1997a, 1997c; 2003a; Cranston et al., 2006; Dempster & Berry, 2003; Frick, 2009; Greenfield, 1995; Grace, 1995; Hodgkinson, 1991; Kirby et al., 1992; Langlois & Lapointe, 2010; Marshall, 1992; Murphy, 1992; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2003, 2011; Starratt, 1994, 2004; Strike et al., 2005; Wagner & Simpson, 2009; Willower 1994).

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) maintain that instructors who train prospective principals in ethics should have a sense of who they are and what they believe. This self-awareness is brought about by engaging in the same reflective assignments that they give to their students. Similarly, Starratt (1994) argues that those who instruct prospective principals should reflect on how their own life experiences have affected their professional practice through personal narratives and then encourage their students to do the same. Reflecting on personal narratives might lead prospective principals to understand their own ethical decisions as well as develop a richer consideration of the ethical complexities of the schools in which they work. Starratt (1994) comments on the merit of presenting aspiring principals with ethical scenarios that seem to have several solutions, or at times, no solution at all. By exploring various interpretations, instructors can assist in expanding the ethical views these future administrators carry into their practice.

Coombs (1998) contends that the biggest challenge in solving an ethical problem is not simply understanding the ethical principles involved, but in knowing how to interpret a problem in such a way that applying those principles is justifiable. Even when someone understands the definition of the ethical principles, he or she may not know how best to interpret them, especially when confronted with an unfamiliar problem. Likewise, situations with competing moral interests demand not only an understanding of ethical principles, but also an ability to interpret the situation in such a way that applying those principles is defensible.

One way for principals to develop an ability to deal with ethical situations, according to Willower (1994), is to provide training. Training could include specific courses on ethics or the infusion of ethical issues into existing courses or assignments. If courses on ethics are developed,
the content could take many forms, including ethical arguments rooted in philosophy, ethical dilemmas revealed in literature, such as novels and plays, or case studies that present the need to make difficult decisions when competing interests are a factor. Campbell (2011) cautions that “embedding the teaching of ethics across other curricular areas may be comparable in reality to hiding it” (p. 84). She argues that non-elective courses that concentrate primarily on the ethical aspects of teaching as a necessary “foundation” of the practice are rarely offered. When these courses are offered, they are very different in intensity and focus from courses that infuse the ethical aspects of teaching throughout their content (Campbell, 2011, p. 84). Although Campbell (2011) is focusing on the preparation of teachers in her argument, it is reasonable to apply the same argument to the preparation of principals. Her cautionary words remind the reader that when ethics becomes embedded in coursework, there is a very real possibility that it will be subsumed under concepts that bear little or no relation to the moral complexities of being a teacher or a principal.

Educational leaders consistently find themselves confronted with ethical dilemmas, where situations are complex (Beckner, 2004; Coombs, 1998; Cranston et al., 2006, 2014; Dempster & Berry, 2003; Duignan, 2006; Foster, 1986; Frick, 2009; Gross, 2014; Kirby et al., 1992; Langlois & Lapointe, 2007, 2010; Marshall, 1992; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011; Wagner & Simpson, 2009; Willower, 1994). Dilemmas are a reality in the world of administration, and it can be difficult for school leaders to know how to best uphold moral principles. This difficulty is particularly apparent when confronted with a variety of situations involving different factors and competing interests. Beckner (2004) defines an ethical dilemma as a situation where there is more than one right choice, and where all choices can have positive consequences or all choices can have negative consequences. The choices are firmly entrenched in one of the basic core values that we hold, which is why dilemmas can be hard to solve. He asserts, “the choice is not easy, although the ‘positive-positive’ choice is not so difficult to handle. It’s the ‘negative-negative’ choices that are tough” (Beckner, 2004, p. 90).

Willower (1994) argues that most educators, including principals, have good intentions and want to make decisions that bring about positive situations for children, however, good intentions do not always secure positive results. Willower believes that principals do need to be cognizant of human ideals and virtues such as compassion, care, responsibility, reflective awareness and knowledge. Nevertheless, the competing interests that are often found in ethical decisions makes
the articulation and application of these ideals and virtues a formidable task. Carr (2007) concurs in stating, “principles cannot anyway be applied without sensitive interpretation and adaptation to context” (p. 376). As Reilly (2008) explains, “to be fully virtuous is to be effortlessly responsive to the requirements of the situation one is in without any self-regarding motive” (p. 73). The arguments made by Willower (1994), Carr (2007) and Reilly (2008) all point to the difficult task of dealing with an ethical dilemma in a way that is sensitive to the particular elements of a situation. Marshall (1992) points to the importance of further research in this area. She suggests that the purpose of conjecturing on decision-making in organizations is that it might prompt researchers to explore moral and ethics and to question what provides direction and support to leaders as they confront moral dilemmas (Marshall, 1992).

The arguments put forth by Willower (1994), Carr (2007), Reilly (2008) and Marshall (1992) lend support to the guiding perspectives and concepts of my study that subscribe to the belief that most administrators have the intention to do the right thing, and that the ethical principal is first and foremost an ethical person. Yet despite the best of intentions, principals often find themselves facing ethical dilemmas with no clear direction on what to do, and a lack of resources to guide them. The results can be less than ideal when decisions are made that are morally questionable and over time can profoundly impact students, staff, parents and the community-at-large. Foster (1986) states, “Each administrative decision carries with it a restructuring of human life: that is why administration at its heart is the resolution of moral dilemmas” (p.33).

Cranston and Kusanovich (2014) conducted a study to find out if role playing in dramatic performances could help school leaders understand the complexities involved in ethical decision-making. Their study drew on the work of various scholars, including Tuana (2007), who contends that while school leaders might be able to identify that a situation has an ethical issue, this does not necessarily mean that they feel any personal investment in the decision–making process (Cranston & Kusanovich, 2014). The intention of the study was to promote greater reflection on the ambiguities involved in making ethical decisions and on the complex dynamics that often occur (Cranston & Kusanovich, 2014). Cranston and Kusanovich’s (2014) study took place in Manitoba, Canada and involved sixteen school leaders who took part in a two-day interdisciplinary drama workshop. The workshop was entitled “Drama in the School Leadership” and the aim was to investigate how participation and involvement in dramatic performances can bring about “self-awareness, relatedness, and understandings of the ethical dimensions of
enacting leadership” (Cranston & Kusanovich, 2014, p. 14). This qualitative study obtained data through participant journals.

Cranston and Kusanovich’s (2014) study followed from an earlier study they conducted using “dramatized fixed-scripts” in a professional development workshop for school leaders (Cranston & Kusanovich, 2013). “Dramatized fixed-scripts” meant that the scripts were written prior to the workshop, and the text was never improvised or altered. Participants were directed in their acting and were not allowed to simply role-play. The “fixed-script” approach was analyzed to find out if participants could make a transition from simply being aware of the ethical aspects of making a decision, to an emotional appreciation of the complexities of their work (Cranston & Kusanovich, 2013, p. 30). Participants in this study reported that by acting out scenarios and watching others act out them out, it allowed them to reflect on “relational trust” and consider the effect it has on the school culture and climate (Cranston & Kusanovich, 2013, p. 48) The researchers conducted a second study because they were interested in knowing what kind of learning might happen if participants used an alternative dramatic approach that might lead to a more “felt understanding of the ethical dimensions of decision making” (Cranston & Kusanovich, 2014, p. 3).

The “applied drama” approach involved school leaders acting out dramatic scripts that reflected ethical situations administrators confront in their daily work (Cranston & Kusanovich, 2014, p. 10). “Applied drama” draws on the work of Dorothy Heathcote and is based on the premise that drama can “instruct and change society and its social institutions” (p. 4). “Applied drama” incorporates cognitive as well as social and emotional aspects of gaining knowledge. It is often used by participants who are not trained in theatre arts and involves audiences that have a personal interest in the issues addressed in the performances (p. 4).

Cranston and Kusanovich’s (2014) study involved participants spending several hours at a time interacting with each other to create and rehearse dynamic plays. These sustained interactions appeared to have a profound effect on the participants as evidenced in their journaling. School leaders reported that they felt changes in their bodies after working through a challenging ethical decision. These changes involved sleeping more soundly and feeling more at ease. The interpretation was that when school leaders were given the opportunity to collaborate with each other on ethical decisions, they experienced a change in their inner selves.
Following the one-act plays, participants discussed, analyzed and reflected on the cases. School leaders were asked to journal about the impact of the “applied drama” approach and were given prompts at four different times over the course of the workshop to guide their reflections and facilitate a growing understanding of ethical decision-making. The aim of journaling was to develop the perceptions that school leaders have of their capacity to be empathetic to people who are impacted by ethical decisions, and to strengthen their awareness of the ethical dimensions of administration (Cranston & Kusanovich, 2014).

Also significant was the fact that the participants, not being experienced actors or performing artists, noted elements of personal risk-taking and “a kind of personal courage” that was needed to perform the plays, and that they had been “pushed beyond their comfort zone” (Cranston & Kusanovich, 2014, p. 26). The researchers attributed these journal responses to the possible building of “relational trust” that had been fostered through a “communal” workshop process that entailed intense interactions amongst participants (Cranston & Kusanovich, 2014, pp. 26-27).

At the beginning of the workshop there was a predominant emphasis on serving the interests of children first in the educational leader discourse, but over time this shifted to a recognition that school leaders often took into account the interests of adults when making ethical decisions. This finding, although interesting, was considered beyond the capacity of the study, and was therefore not generalizable. The researchers concluded that there was great potential for using a combination of theatre, case scenarios and qualitative methods to prepare prospective administrators to be ethical leaders (Cranston & Kusanovich, 2014, p.28).

Both Cranston and Kusanovich studies have implications for my research. They stress the importance of empathy, reflection, dialogue, and trust in a principal’s practice. The studies explore how empathy might be developed in administrators when they listen and dialogue with stakeholders who are impacted by their decisions and actions. When participants in the workshop devote time to talking and listening to each other, they develop a connection that heightens their ability to trust each other and to consider one another’s feelings. The studies highlight the importance of reflection in developing awareness of ethical issues, and also in understanding the dynamics that occur between people in complex ethical situations. The drawback to Cranston and Kusanovich’s (2013, 2014) studies is that the workshops are time-consuming, and may be
unrealistic in the context in which I conducted my study. While a two-day workshop would likely allow for deep learning, the reality is that principals are not always afforded opportunities to leave their schools for sustained periods of time. Creative solutions, such as offering workshops for principals after school or on weekends, are possible ways to deal with the reality of these time constraints.

A further study exploring ethical decision-making in a principal’s practice was that conducted by William Frick. Frick (2009) was interested in knowing more about the internal struggles that principals experience when they make ethical judgments. He drew on principals’ individual reflections about the professional decisions they make that involve a discrepancy between personal and organizational or professional codes of ethics. Professional codes were based on a model for promoting students’ best interests (p.50). Frick (2009) used participant interviews as the primary method for collecting data. He drew on literature that emphasized that the decision-making process for principals demands more than knowing how to mindlessly apply rules, regulations and policies (Hoy & Miskel, 2012) and that the crucial elements of the principalship require more than having technical skills to ensure the school is managed efficiently (Sergiovanni, 2001b). He also referred to Hodgkinson’s (1978) work that stresses that a principal’s decisions and actions are “value-laden, even value-saturated enterprises” (p. 51, as cited in Frick, 2009). Frick (2009) discovered that principals experience a clash between their personal values and beliefs, and the organizational expectations found in their professional codes. This clash was often frequent, although it varied amongst the participants. Frick (2009) described the struggle that principals experience as, “a phenomenon of intrapersonal moral discord experienced as part of the process of deciding ethically when faced with difficult moral choices” (p.50).

Frick (2009) was curious to know if principals used the maxim to “serve the best interests of the students” as the moral ideal on which to base decisions. He discovered that it was not evident that principals make decisions with the best interests of the students as the central focus. Frick (2009) found that any internal moral discord experienced by a principal was not eased by decisions based strictly on values, beliefs or moral dispositions. Principals reached a resolution by following gut instincts or by adhering to a personal guiding principle (Frick, 2009). Frick’s (2009) study lends support to my research as it emphasizes the highly contextual nature of ethical situations and the lack of guidance principals sometimes experience when dealing with
ethical concerns. The questions that remain involve what guiding principles the participants in the study used and whether or not these guiding principles were ethical in substance. This aspect of Frick’s (2009) findings was not made clear and it leaves room for further research.

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) also write about the “best interests of the student” and argue that “there is a moral imperative” on the part of the administrator to attend to these interests, and that “this ideal must lie at the core of any professional paradigm for educational leaders” (p. 25). From the perspective of my study, the difficulty lies in determining what exactly the “best interests of the student” means. The interests of the student could be confused with the interests of the parent or the teacher. Furthermore, it may be difficult to know when the interests of some students should take precedence over the interests of other students.

Langlois and Lapointe (2010) were interested in finding out how prepared principals are to confront the challenges that come with making complex ethical decisions. After observing principals in the course of their daily work, they found that principals experienced difficulty justifying their decisions and comprehending ethical issues. In response to what they observed, Langlois and Lapointe (2010) created a training program for principals aimed at developing their ability to reflect on moral concerns and make ethical decisions. They studied the impact of the training program over three years. The program involved thirty principals, and included pre-training and post-training questionnaires, as well as individual and group interviews.

Langlois and Lapointe (2010) discovered that the training program brought about increased ethical awareness, a heightened sense of responsibility, and an improvement in overall professional conduct. The implications of their findings were that principals could develop expertise, knowledge and skills in dealing with ethical issues and become better leaders through training (p. 147). Looking at how the principals dealt with ethical dilemmas, Langlois and Lapointe (2010) discovered that, “both dialogue and discussion were key to providing a sounding board to guide their reflection and exercise their judgment” (p.156).

This research lends support to my study as it reveals the importance of observing principals in their daily practice. Observations can reveal the complex and ambiguous nature of a principal’s work and can uncover the challenges principals have in striving to be ethical leaders. Langlois and Lapointe’s study (2010) however leave questions unanswered, such as whether the dialogue that occurred was rooted in consideration of ethical virtues such as honesty, fairness and
compassion, or whether it was based on personal values or beliefs. While they maintain that the dialogue between the principals was used to “guide their reflection and exercise their judgment” (p. 156), the focus of the dialogue is not made clear.

Dempster and Berry (2003) studied changes affecting the contemporary climate of schools, and their impact on a principal’s ability to make an ethical decision. Their findings reveal that many principals feel ill-prepared to make ethical decisions, and that they are under intense and increasing pressure to do so. The researchers conclude that the educational landscape that principals navigate is filled with decision-making dangers, and as such, may be characterized as “an ethical minefield” (p.457). The lack of focus on developing school leaders who understand and apply ethics in their decision-making leaves principals “to navigate this minefield blindfolded” (p.457). Likewise, Cranston et al. (2006) lament that previous research has been essentially “silent” on identifying successful ways to support principals in resolving ethical dilemmas. My study intends to contribute to the literature and the discourse on how principals can be supported in dealing with ethically ambiguous and morally contested situations.

Navigating ethical dilemmas can be a muddled process filled with uncertainty. It may be tempting for a leader to subscribe to ethical relativism, concluding that no decision can be reached because there is no right choice; all options are relative. For the ethical relativist, deciding what is right and good is an extremely subjective action, as values are of similar worth. There are no ultimate ethical principles to evaluate some beliefs or standards as better than others. The prevailing belief is that universal moral certainties do not exist, as morals are distinctive to a given culture or society in which they are found (Athanassoulis, 2013; Bricker, 1993; Colby, 2008; Driver, 2006; Kelly, 2001; Singer, 2011). Strike et al. (2005) consider how ethical relativism can impact accountability in a principal’s practice. They suggest that administrators who are predominantly concerned with the technical aspects of their roles may not consider themselves accountable for exercising judgment about the ethical worth of policies imposed by others. The principal who subscribes to ethical relativism may be prone to viewing administration as chiefly a technical endeavor, whose main objective is to carry out tasks efficiently, without engaging in moral considerations (Strike et al., 2005).

Colby (2008) points out there is no evidence to prove that someone who subscribes to moral relativism will engage in immoral acts. However, consistent with the guiding perspectives and
concepts of my study, I would argue that a school leader who routinely employs a relativist outlook may be relinquishing accountability for choices that impact the school community. Applying policies and procedures with no prior thought or deliberation could have a profound and lasting impact on others. Although a principal is constrained by district directives, and has only a certain amount of flexibility on how a rule is applied, to routinely give policies no thought or deliberation, and to take no responsibility for their implementation, may prove harmful to a school community over time.

Critics of moral relativism point out that it can be used by leaders as a means to justify the avoidance of conflict, as one can retreat from the sometimes burdensome task of making a decision. If all values are relative, then there is no need to resolve value conflicts (Sergiovanni, 2007). Singer (2011) argues that when confronted with an ethical decision, moral relativism is of no help, because it is not enough to be aware of what society believes one ought to do. Ultimately one must decide for oneself what is the right course of action to take. Customs and traditions of our upbringing can be considered, but at some point, one has to choose whether to embrace these traditions or challenge them. Sockett (2012) explores the irony in relativism when he explains, were self-respecting relativists to ask the question,

‘Is relativism correct?’ they would find themselves in the *peritrope* trap. That is, asking whether it is correct, they are presumably appealing to some super-system in terms of which it can be judged, and for relativists no such system exists. Put the other way around, relativists are claiming that their view of epistemological systems is true for all systems and they are therefore themselves claiming at least one overriding truth – of some non-relative kind” (Sockett, 2012, p. 99).

Campbell (2003a) clarifies that even though people may differ on their understanding of what is involved in being fair or caring, it does not mean that the necessity of fairness or care are in dispute. She states, “Uncertainty and complexity are inevitable aspects of adjudicating between right and wrong in one’s personal and professional life. However, this complexity does not invalidate the concept of ethical right and wrong” (p. 16). Bates (2005), in reflecting on the work of MacIntyre and Habermas, clarifies that ethical situations cannot be resolved simply by making random choices, and that navigating ethical matters requires well thought out reasons which are open to argument and debate. The open consideration of purposes and intentions leads to the
gradual expression of recognized principles and the exercise of reasonable action. It is this open analysis of motives or rationales that brings one closer to justice and truth. Strike (2005) concurs that school administrators practicing today must be accountable for reasoning through defensible stances on challenging ethical issues.

The ethical principal leads by being morally accountable for programs and procedures in place in the school community. Moral accountability involves resisting pressures and demands from higher authorities in an effort to safeguard the well-being of teachers, students, and the school community (Branson & Gross, 2014; Campbell, 2003a; Crowson, 1989; Greenfield, 1995; Hart & Bredeson, 1996; Haynes, 2002; Hostetler, 1986, 1997; Noddings, 2003; Place, 2011; Rebore, 2014; Sergiovanni, 2007; Starratt, 2004, 2011, 2012). Hart and Bredeson (1996) assert, “Principals must protect their schools from distractions that threaten teaching and learning time. In this instructional role, principals often act as buffers to protect learning time for teachers and students and to uphold program integrity” (p.203).

Noddings (2003) suggests that rules cannot direct people unfailingly in circumstances of conflict, and insists that people do not have an ethical responsibility to accommodate laws, especially when they might implicate them in unethical procedures. She advises that people use their own judgment when faced with difficult decisions and carefully consider the ethical ramifications of directives before imposing them on others. This insight has implications for the principal as a leader who can exercise judgment and flexibility about the timing and application of directives in the community. Likewise, Hostetler (1997) argues that even though the law has some moral import, there are circumstances where ethical considerations must override the law, for example when the safety of children is at stake. My study looked at the moral responsibility of the principal in being an intermediary between external influences and the school, in an effort to safeguard the well-being of teachers and students in the classroom.

Principals are expected to lead schools through change and support teachers in their practice and in their professional development. In this sense, they are viewed as facilitators, rather than managers (Canadian A.O.P & Alberta, T.A., 2014; Fullan, 2003; Greenfield, 1995; Sergiovanni, 2001b). The moral aspects of leadership need to shift from the sidelines to the center of analysis, dialogue, research and practice (Starratt, 1994; Sergiovanni, 2007; Willower, 1994). Starratt (1994) explains,
In short, the moral force of leadership comes from a lifetime’s search for meaning and purpose in human existence. It is this deeper search that I want to highlight, for the literature on leadership tends to deal with behaviours or skills and competencies and is silent about the deeper quest that fuels and energizes leadership. Research needs to probe the complexities, ambiguities, and depth of such a life search (Starratt, 1994 p. 102).

The ethical principal conceptualizes his or her work in moral terms, and understands that many elements of practice have moral considerations. While completing technical tasks is one aspect of the role, the ethical principal understands that considerable time is devoted to addressing ethical challenges and engaging in dialogue about moral issues. The ethical principal approaches decision-making with careful attention paid to the morally nuanced and ambiguous elements of a situation. The influence of the ethical principal in shaping teaching practice and in leading schools to embrace a moral purpose is evident. The relationship between the principal and the teacher is significant. It is in this relationship that the principal and teacher are able to fully express their moral obligations and to realize their influence in building an ethical school. The next section of the literature review explores the concept of the ethical teacher.

2.2 The Ethical Teacher

The ethical nature of the principal’s work is intricately informed by and informing of the ethics of teaching. The ethics of teaching is relevant to my study and the interconnectedness of ethics of teaching and ethics of leadership is significant even though the literature has traditionally treated them as separate entities. As principals were formerly teachers and now work with teachers, it is instructive to understand the literature on the ethical teacher, and to consider how it informs the principal’s practice. This section of the literature review explores the moral orientation of a teacher’s practice as it is informed by research on teaching and teacher education. It examines notable scholarly studies and scholarly publications concerning the ethics of teaching in an effort to show how they make evident the moral elements of the teaching profession. These elements encompass a range of responsibilities from dealing with complex ethical situations to exercising care in how a subject is taught. As the literature review on the ethical teacher unfolds, it becomes clear why it is important for teachers to understand and respond to the moral demands of their work. Exploring the relationship between the principal and teacher reveals how they both work together to fulfill their moral obligations to students, parents, colleagues, and the community.
The concept of the teacher as a role model and the moral demands of the teacher-student relationship are explored. The support that the principal can offer in helping teachers meet these demands is discussed. The need for dialogue and a moral language that brings teachers together with the principal to discuss moral issues is highlighted.


What makes teaching a moral endeavor is that it is, quite centrally, human action undertaken in regard to other human beings. Thus, matters of what is fair, right, just, and virtuous are always present. Whenever a teacher asks a student to share something with another student, decides between combatants in a schoolyard dispute, sets procedures for who will go first, second, third, and so on, or discusses the welfare of a student with another teacher, moral considerations are present. The teacher’s conduct, at all times and in all ways, is a moral matter. For that reason alone, teaching is a profoundly moral activity (Fenstermacher, 1990, p. 133).

The literature contains rich and varied images of the fundamental ethical nature of teaching. Jackson (2012) claims that education is a moral endeavor as its purpose is to improve the lives of teachers and students, leaving the world in a better condition. Wagner and Simpson (2009) maintain that teaching is about pursuing widespread human benefit. Zubay and Soltis (2005) offer, “teaching and learning of ethical awareness in the intellectual and social learning environment of school is as critical as the three R’s” (p. 8). Clark (1990) contends that it is “both a pedagogical and a moral imperative” for teachers to build and maintain an environment where each and every student is encouraged to learn (p. 261). Boostrom (1998) argues that the teacher creates a moral atmosphere in the classroom that constantly has an influence on students. Noddings (2003) suggests that “the greatest obligation of educators, inside and outside formal
schooling, is to nurture the ethical ideals of those with whom they come in contact” (p.49). Day and Gu (2010) claim that good teaching is characterized by care, passion and integrity and state, “moral purposes are an essential part of the identity and efficacy of many effective teachers” (p. 190).

Over the last thirty years, scholarly publications have increasingly focused on the moral substance of teaching and teacher professionalism. Earlier works in the field sparked renewed interest in the ethical dimensions of teaching and helped to advance it to the forefront of educational discourse. In his article entitled “Teaching Professional Ethics,” Soltis (1986) suggested that prospective teachers be taught the skills and strategies needed to diagnose ethical issues and make sound moral judgments. He reasoned that because ethical problems involve one or more principles, such as fairness and respect, teachers need to acquire the knowledge and skills to identify ethical issues. Soltis maintained that aspects of ethical conduct such as nurturing a sincere commitment to do what is right, and having a concern and respect for others could not be ignored in teacher preparation. Strom (1989) similarly raised awareness of the fundamental ethical nature of a teacher’s work, arguing that, “It is generally recognized that teaching is intrinsically moral” (p. 268). In her article entitled “The Ethical Dimensions of Teaching,” Strom explained that moral choices include contemplation of principles such as rights and responsibilities, and values such as respect for persons, justice and reciprocity.

A pivotal change occurred after 1990, with a substantial increase in research focusing on the ethical aspects of teaching and on how preservice education could prepare teachers to embrace the ethical dimensions of their profession (Campbell, 2008a). In that same year, the highly regarded book, entitled, *The Moral Dimensions of Teaching* (Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990) focused on a range of issues including the role and purpose of public education in America, the reconceptualization of teaching as a profession, and the intrinsic moral and ethical relationship between the teacher and the student.

*The Moral Dimensions of Teaching* is a compilation of scholarly writings that emerged out of a study entitled “Studying the Education of Educators.” The study sought to answer fundamental questions such as: “What are public schools for in a democratic society? What should they be for, and for whom? Whose interests are served and whose should be served in a system of compulsory education? [emphasis in original]” (Goodlad et al., 1990, p. xi). The researchers
wanted to know if there were essential normative stances emerging out of moral and ethical debate that could provide a basis for acceptable responses to these questions. The intent was to bring the moral elements of teaching to the centre of the discourse on schools, as these elements had been overlooked as simply philosophical concerns (Goodlad et al., 1990).

At this time there was a heightened concern amongst reformers in education who wanted to secure professional status for teachers. Goodlad and his colleagues noted that there was very little discourse and little written about the moral and ethical complexities of teaching and the teaching profession. At the same time, the media was reporting rising anxieties over moral decline in all parts of society. Educational reformers advocated that teachers needed technical skills, and that the primary mission of schools was to prepare students for the workforce, yet this seemed incongruent with the apparent need to focus on morals in society (Goodlad et al., 1990).

Following interviews and after distributing surveys in many faculties of education, the researchers discovered that few of these faculties focused on the purpose of schools in a democracy. Moreover, little attention was paid to the process of becoming a compassionate person, and only in a small number of these faculties was there any structure in place for moral inquiry. Goodlad et al. (1990) concluded,

> Given the general absence of the development of moral character as a goal of teacher education and the dominance of a behavioristic and technical approach to formal and informal socialization processes for those about to enter teaching, one would be surprised to find in schools ongoing dialogue and decision making in the moral domain (Goodlad et al., 1990, p. xiv).

*The Moral Dimensions of Teaching* sought to bring ethical aspects of teacher professionalism to the forefront of the discourse on education. Since that time various scholars have explored elements of the teaching profession in terms of philosophical and applied ethics (Campbell, 2003a, 2003b, 2008a, 2008b, 2011; 2013a; Colnerud, 1997, 2006; Nash, 2002; Strike, 1990, 1995; Strike & Soltis, 2009; Strike & Ternasky, 1993). Other scholars have focused on ethical virtues that are cultivated in the teaching profession, which include, amongst others: care, compassion, empathy, fairness, honesty, trust, as well as generally held principles such as non-maleficence and beneficence (Coombs, 1998; Haynes, 2002; Sockett, 1993, 2012).
Professional ethics in teaching encompasses questions and concerns ranging from how teachers solve ethical dilemmas to how they allocate resources to students in a fair and equitable manner (Campbell, 2008b; Strike & Ternasky, 1993). Professional teachers need knowledge and skills, but their responsibilities are extensive, requiring more than technical expertise. Teachers who are professionals must show a collective awareness of being ethically obligated to the people they serve (Sockett, 1993; Wagner & Simpson, 2009) and be willing to elevate the interests of others above their own self-interest (Carr, 2000). Strike and Ternasky (1993) state, “professional ethics concerns those norms, values and principles that should govern the professional conduct of teachers, administrators, and other educational professionals” (p.3).

Campbell (2011) argues that even though professional ethics in teaching are often associated with official codes, they should not be viewed simply as a limited group of rules or criteria. Professional ethics extends beyond codes to “embody the moral nuances of the practitioner’s professional world” (p. 82). Carr (2000), Haynes (2002) and Sergiovanni (2007) concur with Campbell that professional educators are expected to have the expertise to make enlightened decisions about distinct situations and unique student needs. They do not routinely apply established rules and guidelines, but instead allow them to inform their practice, while carefully considering the needs of those affected by their decisions. Haynes (2002) and Strike (1990) maintain that teachers need to be aware of the ethical principles that are essential to their collective experiences, particularly those that are fundamental to teaching as a profession. Honesty is an example of an ethical principle that teachers must maintain in their classrooms (Haynes, 2002; Strike, 1990).

Professional ethics in teaching encompasses literature that views the teacher as a moral agent (Campbell, 2003b, 2008b; Sockett, 1993, 2012); and as someone who personifies virtues in their “manner” of teaching through choice of words, tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, posture, and overall demeanor (Fallona, 2000; Fenstermacher, 1990; Stengel & Casey, 2013). Colnerud (2006) has cited three notable and key studies in the field that have framed the discourse on ethical teaching. They include The Manner in Teaching Project (Fenstermacher, 2001; Fenstermacher et al., 2009; Richardson & Fenstermacher, 2001), The Moral Life of Schools Project (Jackson et al., 1993) and The Moral and Ethical Bases of Teachers’ Interactions with Students (Campbell, 2003a, 2004; Campbell & Thiessen, 2000, 2001). I offer the reader a brief summary of each of these studies, drawing attention to how they have informed
the literature on the ethical teacher and contributed to a deeper understanding of the role of the teacher as a moral agent.

*The Manner in Teaching Project* (Fenstermacher, 2001; Fenstermacher et al., 2009; Richardson & Fenstermacher, 2001) was conducted in two elementary schools in the United States over the course of three years. One school delivered a “pre-packaged” moral curriculum while the other school’s moral curriculum evolved out of the school’s “mission and philosophy.” The researchers found that even though the teachers in each school applied the moral curriculum in very different ways, all of the teachers were aware of their roles as moral agents and conveyed a “strong commitment to guiding the moral development of their students” The researchers deduced that if a school has an overt moral curriculum then it conveys a message to teachers that “moral matters” are significant and will be highly regarded by colleagues and those in authority (Fenstermacher et al., 2009, p.12).

*The Moral Life of Schools Project* (Jackson et al., 1993) was based on empirical observations of classrooms over three years. Data revealed two types of moral influence that convey moral lessons to students; *moral instruction* and *moral practice*. Aspects of school life that could be observed and showed deliberate efforts to inspire moral behaviour were called moral instruction. These elements included moral teachings, either identifiable and repeated in the curriculum or existing as a distinct curricular unit. Moral practice encompassed classroom procedures and the personal characteristics of teachers. The researchers discovered that direct moral instruction, as a formal aspect of the curriculum, was almost nonexistent in the classes they observed. They concluded that teachers need to be aware of their power as moral agents, as well as the moral influence of the classrooms and schools in which they work. Moral practice was evident in the atmosphere of the classroom, established through authoritarian systems such as class rules and classroom procedures. The researchers urged teachers to reflect on the moral impact of their actions and the atmosphere they create in the classroom. (Jackson et al., 1993). More discussion about *The Moral Life of Schools Project* will follow in The Ethical School section of this chapter.

*The Moral and Ethical Bases of Teachers’ Interactions with Students* (Campbell, 2003a, 2004; Campbell & Thiessen, 2000, 2001) was a multiple case study conducted in five urban schools in Ontario and involved twelve teacher participants. I was a participant in this study which
investigated four aspects of moral agency that included: the awareness teachers have of their role as moral agents; the awareness teachers have of what they want their students to learn in relation to what is right and wrong; how teachers enabled students to learn what is right and wrong; and the ethical elements and intricacies of life in the classroom. Results indicated that an array of moral values were conveyed by teachers in their practice (Rosenberg, 2013). A model of moral agency as a “double pronged state” emerged from this study, which entails both how the teacher treats the students and how they facilitate students’ understanding of what it means to live “a moral life” (Campbell, 2003a, p. 2). Campbell (2003a) argues, “These dual characteristics of moral agency are obviously and inevitably interrelated as teachers, through their actions, words, and attitudes, may be seen to be living by the same principles that they hope students will embrace” (Campbell, 2003a, p. 2).

In discussing the three seminal studies summarized above, Colnerud (2006) argues, “The research referred to here constitutes a fruitful and unconventional way of combining philosophical and empirical studies where ethical and other relevant theories are applied to the present school system” (Colnerud, 2006, p. 366). These three seminal studies are cited throughout this chapter.

Campbell (2003a) defines professional ethics in the context of ethical practice and conduct of teachers and contends that professional ethics does not happen by coincidence. She states, “There are times when professional teachers need to ‘apply’ principles of ethics to the conceptualization of their work consciously, visibly, and with commitment and determination” (Campbell, 2003a, p. 10). Campbell maintains that at the very minimum teachers need to be able to identify how these principles essentially ‘apply’ to their work. This twofold usage of the term ‘apply’ places the concept of applied professional ethics within the context of ethical knowledge. Campbell (2003a) suggests that principals can assist teachers in coming together to share ethical knowledge by facilitating ethics committees or seminars, where the focus is on ethical reflection. Sanger and Osguthorpe (2013) concur that teachers must obtain ethical knowledge about every aspect of the decisions they make regarding their instruction, the curriculum, and their evaluative processes. They also must attain ethical knowledge in their relationships with pupils, principals, colleagues and parents.
The literature on professional ethics in teaching is important to my study as it helped me anticipate what I might observe in spontaneous daily interactions between the principal and the teachers. I could foresee that teachers may seek guidance from the principal in navigating ethical situations, particularly when situations are complex or ambiguous. The literature sparked my curiosity about how the principal might envision her practice in relation to teachers, and how she might engage them in the moral components of their work. The methodology in my study was informed by the literature as I came to understand that insights about how the principal influences the moral work of the teacher might be obtained through in-depth interviews with teachers. These interviews could encourage teachers to reflect on how the moral elements of their work are connected to the principal’s practice, and what this means to the realization of their curricular and instructional goals.

Scholars contend that to discover the purpose of teaching, and to understand the ethical virtues and moral principles central to it, they need only look to the practice of teaching itself (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002; Campbell, 2003a; Fallona, 2000; Hansen, 1998, 2001a, 2001b, 2002; Hostetler, 1997; Jackson et al., 1993; Richardson & Fenstermacher, 2001; Schulman, 2007; Stengel & Casey, 2013). For example, in his seminal article entitled “Teaching as a Moral Activity,” Hansen (2001b) challenges the reader to examine the practice of teaching, in all its complexity, and concludes that, “the claim that teaching is a moral activity calls attention to a teacher’s conduct, character, perceptions, judgment, understanding, and more” (Hansen, 2001b, p. 828). Hansen has an unmistakable reverence for teachers and the profession of teaching, evidenced in his remark that it has “a time-honored importance in human life” (Hansen, 2001a, p. 1). He focuses on the person who assumes the role of the teacher, maintaining that this person is unique and distinctive from any other human being. This distinctiveness is also found in the person who assumes the role of the student, which is why, according to Hansen, teaching involves paying attention to the persons who are found in the students (Hansen, 2001a). Hansen believes that teachers are obligated to give sustained moral attention to students, and it is this attentiveness that provides teachers of various disciplines with extensive common ground. Moral attentiveness involves being alert to how each student is unique, having a distinguishing array of dispositions, capacities, outlooks and understandings (Hansen, 2001a).

Elbaz (1992), in a similar vein to Hansen (2001a), argues that attentiveness is morally important because it raises the teacher’s awareness of the child’s life in the present moment which
heightens an appreciation of the child as an individual being. Stengel and Casey (2013) likewise state, “the value of any action, even habitual response, is dependent on the perception and particularity of attention, on a full and accurate reading of persons in situation” (p. 123). Stengel and Casey (2013) offer a hypothetical example of a teacher standing at the classroom door, watching for students who show signs of uncertainty or hesitation. The teacher who is attentive to students will notice these signs, and will understand that they indicate that these students might need help or encouragement.

Hansen’s (2001a) emphasis on the person found inside the teacher is similar to Fenstermacher’s (2001) notion that the person who resides in the teacher is essential for cultivating the virtues in students. Fenstermacher (2001) proposes the Aristotelian idea that virtues are acquired from being in the presence of virtuous people. According to Fenstermacher, (2001) if teachers wish to foster virtues in their students, they must first be virtuous persons themselves. He states, “Viewing manner in this way, students will acquire virtuous dispositions from a teacher only if that teacher is himself or herself a virtuous person” (Fenstermacher, 2001, p. 641). Likewise, Campbell (2003a) reasons that, “The ethical teacher is, by necessity, an ethical person” (p. 23).

Literature focusing on teachers and their practice informed this study of the principal’s daily work. The principal came to her position following years of teaching where she had numerous interactions with students, colleagues, and parents in her own teaching practice. The methodology of my study involved asking teachers to reflect on the ethical aspects of their work and to consider the principal’s role in assisting them with the ethical concerns they encounter in their practice. Integral to my study were a series of interviews with teachers that invited them to reflect on their moral authority and ethical obligations as educators. They often reflected on their relationships with their students and considered how the principal influences and facilitates these relationships. The teachers’ accounts of the principal’s influence offered a better understanding of how the principal assists them in forging connections with their students. This in turn provided insight into how the principal envisions her practice, in an ethical sense, in relation to teachers.

Fenstermacher (1990) contends that, “the need for teachers who are enlightened moral agents and moral educators calls for close, caring, connected association between teachers and students” (pp. 146-147). Zubay and Soltis (2005) affirm, “there is an inherent moral and ethical relationship between those who teach and those who are taught” (p.3). Clark (1990) argues, “At its core, teaching is a matter of human relationships. Human relationships, whatever else they may be, are moral in character and consequence.” (p. 265). Starratt (2012) reminds us, “The heart and soul of the ethics of teaching is to be found in the cultivation of learning in pupils” (p.109). Greenfield (1995) affirms that while teachers are morally compelled to attend to the intellectual and social progress of children, principals are morally accountable for supporting teachers and students in making this progress a reality. This support includes helping teachers build positive working conditions in their classrooms and in the school and assisting them to obtain appropriate materials for teaching and for student learning. The principal, in this sense, becomes a “facilitator of teachers” rather than an authority figure or “head” person (Greenfield, 1995, p.64). Greenfield draws a connection between the teacher and the principal, and makes clear that there is an ethical obligation on the part of the principal to support the teacher who in turn supports the students. His argument provides a bridge between the literature on the ethical teacher and the ethical principal and demonstrates how they are intricately connected to each other.

Cranston et al. (2006) likewise maintain that school administration is concerned with relationships and that caring for and attending to the development of their students and their faculty are essential to the personal morals and professional ethics of principals. Their argument illuminates the interconnectedness of the teacher’s work and the principal’s work, and makes clear that there is an ethical obligation on the part of the principal to attend to the growth of teachers and their pupils. Other scholars contend that the principal has a role to play in facilitating the relationship between teacher and student (Greenfield, 1995; Goodlad, 1990; Hart & Bredeson, 1996; Sergiovanni, 2001b, 2005b; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002; Starratt, 1996, 2011).
The principal’s influence as a role model was a recurring theme in my study, and so was the teacher’s influence as a role model. The moral authority of the teacher often means that teachers are role models who shape both the moral and intellectual development of those in their care (Beckner, 2004; Boostrom, 1998, 2013; Campbell, 2003a, 2003b; Carr, 2000; Colnerud, 2006; Fallona, 2000, Fenstermacher, 1990, 2001; Jackson et al., 1993; Hansen, 1996, 2001b, 2002; Kelly, 2001; Richardson & Fenstermacher, 1990, 2001; Rebore, 2014; Sockett, 2012; Starratt, 2012; Zubay & Soltis, 2005). Fenstermacher (1990) remarks that if children do not have role models or any pressure, either direct or indirect, to embrace moral virtues, and no chance to imitate moral deeds, then the ethical virtues might be missed or never acquired at all. He states, “the particular and concrete meaning of such traits as honesty, fair play, consideration of others, tolerance and sharing are ‘picked up,’ as it were, by observing, imitating and discussing what teachers do in classrooms” (Fenstermacher, 1990, p. 133).

Fenstermacher believes that every action a teacher takes comprises the teacher’s manner. He reasons that teachers deliver subjects in a variety of ways but the way in which they choose to do so is reflected in their manner. Teachers who understand their moral influence on students realize that they must carefully consider how they act in the presence of students. Fenstermacher (1990) reasons that if teachers model for students how to engage in critical thinking, then they need to do the same for moral virtues. For example, if a teacher wants a student to be caring, the teacher must be caring and must also show the student how to care for others. Teachers must make it known when they are being caring, explain why they are showing care, and then invite the students to engage in caring acts. The teacher offers support to the students as they attempt to model what the teacher has demonstrated, and offers a sense of acceptance to those students who are not yet prepared to model the teacher. In the context of my study, the principal’s manner was a significant aspect of her influence as a role model, and in some cases influenced the way that teachers approached complex ethical situations.

Fallona (2000) investigated whether it was possible to observe a teacher’s manner, as an expression of moral virtue. Some of the virtues that were observable included friendliness, wit and courage. The virtues of magnanimity, temperance, justice and truthfulness were not as easily observable and required some explanation from the teacher participants to make them visible. Fallona (2000) concluded that it is possible to systematically observe and understand manner in teaching. She recommended that teacher educators encourage teacher candidates to pay attention
to their manner and to consider its potential influence on students. Fallona called on teacher educators to help candidates realize that teaching is more than just learning methods and to “draw attention to teaching as a moral endeavor grounded in the relationship between student and teacher” (Fallona, 2000, p. 692). For me, conducting research over five months at one school afforded opportunities to observe the manner of the principal in her daily work. It was possible to observe the manner of the principal in frequent and sustained observations. As mentioned earlier, manner is expressed through choice of words, tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, posture, and overall demeanor (Fallona, 2000; Fenstermacher, 1990; Richardson & Fenstermacher, 2001; Jackson et al., 1993; Stengel & Casey, 2013). By observing the principal, I was able to understand the importance of her manner and consider how it contributed to the tone and climate of the school.

Zubay and Soltis (2005) affirm that both teachers and principals are role models in the way that they interact with students, in terms of whether they treat them fairly or unfairly, with kindness or without kindness, or with understanding or without understanding. Kelly (2001) points out that teachers need to be aware of the consistency between their stated beliefs and their actions, because students are affected just as much, if not more, by what teachers actually do, than by what they say they will do. Essentially this is a call for integrity of behaviour in the teacher as a role model. Hildebrantd and Zan (2008) suggest that teachers play an active role in assisting children to understand why some behaviours are wrong and to see the consequences of those behaviours on others and on their relationships with others. Children as young as three years old can comprehend the mutuality involved in turn-taking and sharing, provided an adult fosters an environment that focuses on the rights and feelings of others. Hildebrantd and Zan (2008) explain that when circumstances are constructed where children are presented with conflicting beliefs and varying needs of other people, they are motivated to relate to others and to take their opinions into consideration. Goodman (2000) concurs that “children will ‘construct’ values through their own socialization; they come to the moral life by figuring out solutions to real-life problems in environments that are caring and cooperative” (p. 39). My study explored how the principal helped children work through difficulties in getting along with each other, and how she tried to guide staff in helping children to socialize in constructive ways. My study also examined the principal’s congruence between her words and her actions and considered how she is a role model to teachers who look to her to be consistent.
Rebore (2014) also discusses role modelling and astutely argues that the way that principals, teachers and staff members model reactions to suffering can show children and adolescents how to respond to sorrow in their own lives. He affirms that suffering has an impact on how the character of children and adolescents is shaped. The way that educators model reactions to suffering can also bring strength to a community when students see adults modelling appropriate responses to distressing events. Wynne and Ryan (1993) concur, “Helping and serving (in essence ‘caring for’) imply that community members are sensitive to one another’s sorrows and joys” (p. 176).

Being a role model entails knowing one’s subject matter. The principal who has spent many years as a teacher and has an understanding of the curriculum can help teachers confidently deliver and report on the subjects they are teaching. Scholars assert that teachers have an ethical obligation to understand their subject matter, and to respect the values internal to it (Bullough, 2011; Colnerud, 2006; Elbaz, 1992, Goodlad, 1990, Hansen, 2001a, 2002; Schulman, 2007; Sockett, 2012; Starratt, 1995; 2011; Stengel & Tom, 2006; Strike, 1990; Wynne & Ryan, 1993). Strike (1990) argues that it is incumbent on teachers to honour the central values of the subjects they teach, and that failure to demonstrate concern for these values results in unethical behaviour. For example, teaching students to use poetry solely as a way to assist in writing songs for commercial jingles without exploring poetry’s central values, such as beauty and humanity, would neglect to honour poetry as a literary art form (Strike, 1990). Wynne and Ryan (1993) maintain that the teacher’s ability to ensure that students learn suitable subject matter that is both academic and connected to building character is the “prime moral obligation of educators” (p. 187). Schulman (2007), in commenting on Philip Jackson’s work, suggests that his message was that teachers should not only know their students, but also know the subject they are teaching. A teacher has to be a learner and a specialist in his or her discipline while simultaneously being caring and devoted to students. Having an understanding of the subject matter without caring cannot be considered teaching but showing care without knowing the subject is also not teaching.

It takes time for a teacher to learn a subject and plan interesting lessons but investing this time shows that a teacher cares about a subject and about the students. The principal has a role to play in supporting teachers in this regard. As mentioned above, the principal can demonstrate care by encouraging teachers to learn the curriculum and scheduling time in the school day for them to plan lessons together and mentor one another. Mentoring may enable teachers to share ideas and
insights and can help build confidence in a teacher who is either new at teaching or has no prior experience with a subject. Campbell (2003a) suggests that principals support teachers by limiting the number of administrative requests and by reorganizing institutional concerns so that teachers are able to meet together to engage in meaningful reflection about ethical issues and to share ethical knowledge. The principal’s ability to support teachers in becoming skilled and confident with the curriculum has been supported elsewhere in the literature (Campbell, 2003a; Goodlad, 1990; Greenfield, 1995; Sergiovanni, 2001b; Starratt, 2004, 2005b, 2011; Starratt & Sergiovanni, 2002; Wynne and Ryan, 1993).

Sergiovanni and Starratt (2002) explain that even though administration is often described by standards external to the moral virtues of teaching and learning, it actually acquires its moral character from its close ties with these virtues. As teachers care for students and respect the importance of what they teach, administrators support these acts of caring and uphold their efforts to honour the curriculum. In this way, “the moral authority of the supervisor is joined with the moral authority of the teacher” (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002, xvi). Sergiovanni (2001b) states, “When expressing the educational force, the principal assumes the role of ‘principal teacher’ who brings expert professional knowledge and bearing to teaching, educational program development, and supervision” (p. 103). Starratt (2004) argues that principals must have a far-reaching idea of what authentic learning is, and that without this vision, they cannot lead others. Principals who lack vision cannot gather the “moral passion” required to involve the school community in the demanding but exciting work of bringing about authentic learning.

When teachers exercise choice about what to teach, or the amount of time to allocate to a topic, their choices comprise a moral judgment (Hansen, 2001a, 2002; Kelly, 2001; Stengel & Casey, 2013). Kelly (2001) suggests that whenever teachers make decisions about the curriculum in terms of what they are going to emphasize or the instructional techniques to use, they are making value-laden decisions in a value-laden context. Teachers also have a moral responsibility to ensure that their subject matter, and the manner in which it is taught, cultivates the moral objectivity of students (Bull, 1990; Noddings, 2003; Kelly, 2001; Sackett, 2012; Stengel & Tom, 2006; Stengel & Casey, 2013; Strike, 1990). Noddings (2003) reveals that at the conclusion of a lesson she hopes her students will leave the classroom feeling valued, and not judged, for having expressed their views. She wants her students to know that subjects can inspire different opinions. For example, some may find a subject interesting while others may find it monotonous.
Despite the opinion a student holds, what matters is that her students know that differences of opinion do not change the affection they hold for each other, and that she holds for them. Sockett (2012) likewise contends that when teachers encourage students to seek the truth in an open and accepting way with each other, they cultivate a trusting environment. Trusting classroom environments allow children to not only express disagreements with each other in a respectful way, but also to value differing viewpoints and arguments. Stengel and Casey (2013) similarly stress that moral sensitivity and moral perception are crucial if teachers want their students to experience progress. When teachers allow their students to grow in ways that are positive but perhaps unintended, and then celebrate that growth, they are responding to their students in a sensitive manner that respects who they are as autonomous individuals. In this sense teachers are delivering both “responsible” and “responsive” education and are fulfilling the moral obligations of their work (Stengel & Casey, 2013, p.116).

The moral responsibilities of teaching demand that teachers make ethical decisions in complex circumstances, often with competing interests. It is widely recognized in the literature that teachers are responsible for making countless decisions and carrying out duties that hold moral weight (Bullough, 2011; Boostrom, 2013; Campbell, 2003a; 2011; Colnerud, 1997; Hostetler, 1997; Nash, 2002; Stengel & Casey, 2013; Thomas, 1990; Zubay & Soltis, 2005). Bullough (2011) explains that a teacher’s work is filled with conflict between values and beliefs that is sometimes derived from opposing interests between teachers, pupils and parents. Stengel and Casey (2013) argue that when one considers the numerous situations that teachers encounter where they have to make decisions, it becomes easier to appreciate the complexity of their professional lives. They argue, “teachers are always responding to situations only partly of their own making and never under their complete control” (p. 125). Thomas (1990) suggests that schools ultimately rely on the teacher’s moral agency and that no matter how carefully monitored the teaching profession is, teachers must make continuous choices, and the most difficult choices are essentially moral.

The literature reveals that teachers are not always prepared to deal with ethical situations and conflicts that arise in the classroom and in the school (Carr, 2000; Campbell 2003a, 2013a; Goodlad et al., 1990; Hostetler, 1997; Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2013; Sockett & LePage, 2002; Zubay & Soltis, 2005). The faculties of education may be a good starting point for preparing teachers to recognize and deal with complex ethical issues. When thinking about the ethics of the
principalship it is instructive to remember that principals started their careers as teachers and that it is often in the faculties of education where the foundation for their professional work was laid. Faculties of education have an important role in preparing teachers to assume the ethical responsibilities of their teaching practice (Bullough, 2011; Carr, 2000; Campbell, 2003a, 2004, 2008b, 2013a; Mahoney, 2009; Nash, 2002; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2003, 2011; Stengel, 2013; Stengel & Casey, 2013). Despite the important role that faculties can play, the literature reveals that teacher education has often neglected to make teachers aware of the moral and ethical aspects of their work (Campbell, 2011; Joseph, 2003; Nash, 2002; Strike & Ternasky, 1993).

Campbell (2003a, 2013a) argues that while teacher candidates often have an intuitive sense of the moral aspects of life, engrained in their character, their upbringing, and their personal experiences, formal instruction in ethics that extends beyond a sole reliance on intuition is still required. Even the most honourable person may not be aware of exactly how the principles deeply rooted in his or her character translate to the situational experiences of the workplace, or to the context of professional expectations. Without instruction, it is difficult for teacher candidates to understand how to express ethical virtues in their teaching practice. Sanger and Osguthorpe (2013) concur with Campbell (2003a, 2013a) that while teacher candidates have intuitive moral beliefs, based on their life experiences and circumstances, they still require official instruction in ethics, in order to understand how the ethical virtues are made manifest in their practice.

Strike et al. (2005) stress the importance of being clear about the beliefs and principles that form the basis of our moral intuitions. This clarity, they argue, can guide a person to revisit an original point of view, about what is significant or accurate. Gaining an awareness of underlying principles can either bring clarity to an otherwise confusing situation or it can help someone to appreciate the ambiguity of a situation that originally seemed clear. Once practitioners are aware of the assumptions behind intuitive thoughts, they can make different choices.

Sockett (2012) argues that learning the moral and ethical objectives of teaching must be given higher priority than acquiring the techniques of teaching. There is some debate about the best learning tools for encouraging teachers and principals to carefully consider the ethical aspects of their work. Scholars have pointed to the benefit of using case studies to engage prospective and practicing teachers in thoughtful reflection about the moral complexities of their practice.
Bullough, 2011; Campbell, 1997b; Coombs, 1998; Hostetler, 1997; Strike & Soltis, 2009; Zubay & Soltis, 2005). Other scholars have pointed to the benefit of using case studies as a learning tool for prospective and practicing principals (Coombs, 1998; Strike et al., 2005; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2003, 2011). Strike (1990) advocates for using case studies to explore ethical decisions with teacher candidates, as they closely mirror real-life classroom situations. Teachers must be taught how to apply ethical principles to specific circumstances by first learning to recognize that a situation has an ethical issue and then reflecting on how principles are properly applied to the case.

Hostetler (1997) points out that case studies kindle one’s imagination and make situations tangible, but they have limitations. The difficulty is that concentrating too much on distinct situations can lead one to think that ethical judgment is only required in these types of circumstances. Rather he argues, ethical judgment is often required in the seemingly minute, routine aspects of daily classroom life, such as the placement of desks or the content of visual displays. It is in these apparently mundane features of school life that ethical judgment from the teacher is needed, and these features cannot always be captured in a distinct situation as portrayed in a case study. Hostetler’s (1997) insights lend support to the findings of Jackson et al. (1993) that the physical environment of the classroom contains subtle moral nuances that are not immediately discernable, and are harder to define as moral in substance, but permeate all elements of classroom life. By contrast Coombs (1998) suggests using case studies to foster dialogue. He believes case studies present accurate portrayals of situations that embody standards of sound moral reasoning. According to Coombs it is important for teachers and principals to develop their moral perception and moral sensitivity, because without improvement in these areas, one cannot begin to engage in moral reasoning. By heightening one’s moral sensitivity and perception, the ability to attend to aspects of a situation that require sound ethical judgment and action is strengthened (Coombs, 1998).

Opportunities for teachers and school leaders to dialogue together and articulate the moral principles that guide them may help them to better deal with ethical situations. Scholars argue that such dialogue between the principal and the teacher requires a moral language (Colnerud, 1997, 2006; Huebner, 1996; Joseph, 2003; Nash, 2002; Schwartz, 1998; Starratt, 2004; Strike, 1995; Sockett, 1993; Sockett & LePage, 2002; Thomas, 1990; Stengel & Casey, 2013). Strike (1995) clarifies what a moral language entails, defining it as, “a set of concepts and
argument strategies. Seeking a shared language instead of shared convictions reduces the temptation to think of professional ethics as the transmission of ethical rules instead of a shared way of thinking through ethical issues” (Strike, 1995, p.33). Nash (2002) suggests that a moral language refers to a particular type of moral discourse, containing a certain vocabulary that mirrors and shapes a specific professional organization. This moral language proposes and prohibits certain types of virtuous and hurtful behaviours, as well as particular types of conclusions and decisions. My study investigated how the principal uses moral language to set a climate or tone in the school. It also looked at ways in which the principal encourages staff members to be aware of the language they use in their interactions with others. Staff meetings as well as smaller group discussions were observed. The ways in which dialogue facilitates awareness of ethical issues, particularly when moral language is used to convey expectations, were considered.

Huebner (1996) argues that the ethical challenges that teachers confront must become a central focus of their dialogue, and that this is possible once the limitations of technical language, that tend to be prevalent in teaching, are removed. Without these limitations, teachers can begin to talk about feelings they experience in their teaching such as joy and pain. These feelings, according to Huebner, are sometimes a sign that ethical dilemmas exist and need to be brought into conscious awareness. Thomas (1990) agrees that teaching is, “an enterprise whose moral character is obscured by legal or technical vocabulary” (p. 267). Stengel and Casey (2013) astutely point out that while the pervasive contemporary dialogue about education is led by concerns regarding accountability and achievement, upon closer examination, many teachers are concerned with questions that are morally-laden such as who their students are and what they will become. Sockett and LePage (2002) conclude that teachers need a moral language, which is missing, both in the classroom, and in preservice courses. Teachers lack moral sophistication, they argue, not because they are immoral people, but because they are socialized into school cultures where moral decisions are not given relevance. Preservice training has ill prepared them to deal with the moral complexity of the classroom and the school. Teachers experience isolation when they are left alone to make moral judgments on a daily basis. Having little to no dialogue with colleagues, teachers make judgments that appear to go not much further than the intuitive level. Strike (1990) explains, “Even when people have strong feelings about ethical matters, they are often unable to articulate coherent reasons for their opinions” (p. 189). My study considered
how teachers dialogue with their colleagues and with the principal on matters of ethical significance. Moments when the principal reached out to teachers to engage them in dialogue on ethical issues were also explored.

By authority of their role, principals are often called on to assist teachers in navigating discipline situations with their students. A moral language might be helpful in guiding teachers as they try to articulate reasons for the discipline decisions that they make with their students. Colnerud (2006) addresses a challenge that many teachers confront when they struggle to find a language that differentiates between serious moral breaches among students and the more superficial infractions of system rules and conventions. One unfortunate result of a lack of a moral language is that teachers have difficulty justifying why they might make an exception to a rule, even when they have the needs of the student foremost in their minds. Colnerud (2006) suggests that research has a role to play in helping to develop and articulate what she regards as an “unrecognized and unexamined moral language of practice” (p. 377). Colnerud’s argument calls attention to the need for teachers to have a means of articulating why they make decisions and to articulate what the ethical issues are that helped them to arrive at those decisions. Without a moral language teachers find it difficult to sort through ethical situations with their students, and to make clear how their decisions ultimately serve their students’ needs.

Similarly, in relation to teacher education, Nash (2002) argues that it is important to help teacher candidates acquire a sophisticated moral language, and gain wisdom, balance, and transparency in their decision-making. What educational professionals need, he contends, both before and after they graduate, is training in moral discernment. Nash defines moral discernment as learning to differentiate between what is morally significant in a situation and what is not morally significant. Joseph (2003) stresses the importance of using moral imagination as a basis for bringing the moral dimensions of teaching into teacher education. The components of moral imagination, according to Joseph, include: perception, rationality, reflection, emotion and caring for the self. She uses these components as a basis for understanding her students’ progress in her graduate seminar for novice and experienced teachers. This seminar helps teachers to begin to appreciate their roles as moral agents and to use a moral language for explaining their practice.

The literature points to the notion that teachers and principals might need training, prior to assuming their roles, to acquire a moral language. This need for training has been defended
elsewhere in the literature (Bullough, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Schwartz, 1998; Sockett & LePage, 2002; Strike, 1995). While I agree that training may help teachers and principals to develop a moral language, I suspect that training may not be enough if words with distinct moral overtones are not used on a daily basis in a school. Principals can provide guidance for teachers, and in a sense, give permission to teachers to use moral language, if they use it themselves. Scholars have pointed to the trust that develops over time when principals and teachers dialogue about ethical situations, where motives and intentions become clearer. Sharing ethical concerns with other stakeholders, such as parents, can afford an opportunity to articulate the moral principles that guide decisions. Sustained dialogue can allow suspicion and doubt to dissipate, and bring about a shared responsibility for decisions that influence the school (Begley, 2006, Cranston et al., 2006; Greenfield, 1995; Hart & Bredeson, 1996; Haynes, 2002; Murphy, 1992; Sergiovanni, 2001b; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2003, 2011; Sockett & LePage, 2002; Zubay & Soltis).

One obstacle to shared dialogue is that teachers tend to work by themselves in contained classrooms, which can foster a sense of isolation. Isolation can lead teachers to become private, and not readily share ideas with each another. This situation can curtail professional development and good teaching practices (Sergiovanni, 2001b; Sackett & LePage, 2002). Greenfield (1995) points out that when the teachers are physically isolated in classrooms, it becomes particularly challenging for principals to guide them. Campbell (2001) concurs that collective dialogue and reflection on ethical principles are crucial in establishing a shared understanding of ethical norms and practices between administrators and teachers. Developing ethical norms that are pervasive in policy and in practice requires professional communities of educators who are willing to confront difficult questions and communicate openly with each other. She states, “there must be an expectation among everyone that all professionals in the school community not only uphold the principles themselves, but also that they assume the responsibility of helping each other to honour the ethical norms as well” (Campbell 2001, p.408). Cranston et al. (2006) agree that continuing dialogue in an organization is a vital step to building ethics in an institution. Zubay and Soltis (2005) explain that when educators discuss ethical situations and listen to one another’s positions, it can sometimes assist them in recognizing important aspects of the same situation that they had not previously considered. Discussing ethical situations contributes to a shared sense of commitment in finding thoughtful resolutions to ethical dilemmas. Sergiovanni
and Starratt (2002) suggest that principals bring teachers out of isolation and into reflective discussions, with the goal of helping each other improve. They advise having teachers visit one another’s classrooms to build “communities of practice.” Teachers then become more invested in a “single, shared practice of teaching” (p.5).

Teachers need to engage in meaningful dialogue, but they also require opportunities to reflect on the moral dimensions of their work, before and after they enter the profession (Bullough, 2011; Campbell, 2003a, Darling-Hammond, 2007, Fallona, 2000; Hansen, 1998; Haynes, 2002; Higgins, 2011; Mahoney, 2009; Nash, 2002; Sockett, 1990; Stengel & Casey, 2013). Sockett (1990) notes that the best people to model reflection for teacher candidates are teacher educators because their attitudes and actions can have a great impact on aspiring teachers. The teacher educator can teach through example how to be reflective and open-minded by contemplating their own teaching, and demonstrating to teacher candidates that they engage in constant reflection.

Tom (1984) contends that morally complex situations in teaching require the teacher to engage in a thorough analysis and reflection of desirable ends, that might not be necessary in personal situations. This level of analysis and reflection is needed because teaching is a shared act, concerning at least two people, and occurs in the public domain. I agree with Tom (1984) that teachers must carefully reflect on desired outcomes in their teaching practice. I only take issue with his suggestion that the same level of reflection might not be needed in personal situations. I would suggest that it is needed, as teachers try to live out the virtues in their personal as well as professional lives. The struggle to live virtuously is ongoing. Coombs (1998) suggests a different notion of the teacher as one who acts morally depending on the context. He states,

As is true of most persons, they [teachers] will likely be sensitive to the morally relevant features of some situations, actions, and policies and not others. They will be caring of persons in one context, or within one group, and not in others. Similarly, they may typically act honestly or fairly in one area of life, or in one sort of context, and fail to act fairly or honestly in another (Coombs, 1998, p. 568).

The guiding perspectives and concepts of my study reject the notion that a teacher’s behaviour is determined solely by the context. It supports the belief that the ethical teacher is first and foremost an ethical person. This notion of the teacher has been supported elsewhere in the
Insights from the literature regarding the importance of the relationship between the teacher and the principal inform the current research. There is growing appreciation that the practice of the teacher and the practice of the principal are inextricably connected. This connection in turn influences the moral and ethical dimensions of the school. The principal and the teacher work closely together to fulfill the moral obligations of their professions and to influence the moral tone or climate of the school. Hart & Bredeson (1996) draw a vivid connection between the role of the principal and that of the teacher and suggest,

Principal’s concepts of their own roles in schools may be tied so deeply to their interaction with other roles – the central roles of teachers and students particularly – that major changes in leadership role concepts may not be possible decoupled from other roles in schools (p. 75).

Day and Gu (2010) claim that in order for teachers to reach their fullest potential in the classroom, they have to practice in schools where a principal is fair, supportive, unambiguous and fervently dedicated to inspiring them to maintain high levels of commitment (p.194). Campbell (2003a) comments that it is regrettable that traditionally the research and literature pertaining to administration and school leadership and that pertaining to teaching and teacher education seldom come from a similar starting point or even cross-reference one another. She states, “the role of school administration is critical to the success of the teacher’s site-based efforts to reconceptualise their professional responsibilities in moral terms. Principals and other administrators can either support such efforts or thwart and subvert them” (Campbell, 2003a, p. 126).

An understanding of the ethical principal is supported by an understanding of the ethical teacher. Traditionally the literature on the ethical principal and the ethical teacher has been viewed as distinctive and different. This literature review has brought to light what is known about the ethical teacher and the ethical principal, in an effort to show how both bodies of literature interrelate and enlighten one another. The moral elements of the teacher’s practice are many and varied, and the role the principal plays in assisting and guiding teachers to understand and meet those demands is significant. The principal is a teacher before becoming an administrator. This reality further underlines the importance of understanding how the moral elements of a teacher’s
work affects how the principal envisions her practice. The next section of the literature review includes a discussion on how building and maintaining an ethical school involves committed partnerships between principals, teachers, staff, parents and community members.

2.3 The Ethical School

The final section of the literature review examines the concept of the ethical school, and the struggles involved in building and sustaining it. Schools are more than bricks and mortar and established routines. While this may seem obvious, the distinction bears mentioning, if only to remind the reader that ethical schools rely on people, within them and closely connected to them, to survive and thrive. Literature exploring the importance of collaboration among all stakeholders in working through ethical issues and sharing ethical concerns is discussed. The influence of relationships on the moral climate of the school is considered. The literature reveals how organizational structures can foster or impede how ethical situations are dealt with in schools. Often schools approach ethics through school-wide programming and assemblies. Character education and how it becomes embedded in aspects of school life will be briefly discussed, as it pertains to the moral dimensions of the principal’s practice and the teacher’s practice. An aspect of this review includes a discussion of the seminal research study, The Moral Life of Schools Project, that significantly contributed to the literature on the ethical school and informed my study conceptually and theoretically.


Compelling images of the ethical school can be found in the literature. Foster (1986) claims, “the school as a social institution has tremendous impact on an individual’s life. School is more than simply a class to attend or a degree to attain” (p. 10). Noddings (2002) remarks that it is “part of our everyday moral obligation to develop and maintain an environment in which moral life can
flourish” and suggests, “We want schools to be places where it is both possible and attractive to be good” (p. 9). Greenfield (1995) affirms, “schools differ from most other types of organizations in being uniquely moral enterprises” (p. 62). Hargreaves (2003) notes, “it is through professional and personal development that teachers build character, maturity and other virtues in themselves and others, making their schools into moral communities” (p. 48). Thomas (1990) claims, “If individuality, understood as autonomy, is to flourish, institutions must be morally disciplined. So, talk of institutions as moral communities, while it hints of the exhortative, is plainly factual” (p. 291). Zubay and Soltis (2005) describe schools as settings with moral connections and moral struggle.

Stengel and Tom (2006) suggest that schooling has two purposes: moral and academic. They claim that the moral has been obscured through the use of technical language found in bureaucratic practices, such as standardized testing. Once the moral elements of schooling, such as the atmosphere in a classroom or the structure of the school are uncovered, the moral reasons for engaging in actions are clear. Even when attempts are made to obscure the moral dimensions of schooling, or to cover them up in some way, moral elements can never be completely removed, because they are pervasive. Stengel and Tom (2006) explain that what is moral might include, “references to student’s character development, teachers’ professional action, curricular content, classroom environment, school structure, and public support for schools” (p. 145). They note that the moral can be found in actions and in interactions, and that moral questions revolve around what is worth doing. Determining what is worth doing, they argue, should always be in the context of one’s response to others and to the world.

There is growing recognition that for a school to have an ethical climate, attention must be paid to the organizational structures that promote or impede it (Beck, 2003; Campbell, 2003a; Cranston et al., 2006; Duignan, 2006; Greenfield, 2004; Haynes, 2002; Higgins, 2011; Huebner, 1996; Langlois & Lapointe, 2010; D. Mahoney, 2006; Sergiovanni, 2001b, 2005b; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002; Sockett, 2012; Starratt, 1991, 1996, 2012). Langlois and Lapointe (2010) observe that in organizations such as schools, ethics tend to be longstanding and entrenched by way of values embedded in the purpose and operation of the school. A code of conduct can reveal how ethics have become well-established in an institution. Ethical interventions, they argue, are now employed not only to change individuals, but also to change bureaucratic structures and firmly established beliefs. Such ethical interventions include paying attention to
ethical authority, to ethical businesses and to the ethical school. Starratt (1991) asserts that if principals assume that the atmosphere in the classroom, in the school or in the board of education is value neutral or even worse, already personifies appropriate ethical standards, then they are too trusting and might be even blameworthy. Starratt (1991) is arguing that principals have a responsibility for questioning the values that are embraced in schools and in their governing boards. He is asking principals to be vigilant in ensuring that standards are not upheld without scrutiny. Starratt (2012) further argues that existing practices in schools must be examined so that assumptions entrenched in those practices can be changed. These changes might result in practices that are more aligned with an ethical school.

Cranston et al. (2006) explored the ethical dilemmas educational leaders experience when faced with decisions that affect staff and students. The participants in the study were long-time serving school heads working in seven independent schools in Australia. Dilemmas predominately arose for school leaders when they encountered situations where staff members were poorly performing and where students were either exhibiting serious misbehaviour or were experiencing violence at home. Participants expressed a belief that the values and general philosophy espoused by the school assisted them in solving dilemmas. Interviews with the participants revealed a widely-held view that “an ethical institutional culture is vital for supporting and facilitating ethical decision making in schools” (Cranston et al., 2006, p. 116). Challenges arose for the school leaders when there was a conflict between their personal values and professional ethics and the established structures and organizational values of the school. For example, one participant recalled that when he suspended a group of students he received strong opposition from parents who joined forces to express their disagreement with his decision. Other participants experienced ethical dilemmas when staff members who were failing to perform well on the job had either been a member of the staff for a long time or were seen to be supportive of the school and the values it espoused. Important issues were at stake such as the effect on the students if the staff member remained in the school, and the effect on the other staff members who were witnessing the situation.

Cranston et al. (2006) discovered that educational leaders also experienced dilemmas when they had to work with district policies that had undergone substantial change. For example, policies that once prioritized the care and well-being of staff and students sometimes changed in their focus or priority. Such changes were a source of tension for school leaders, particularly when
they were trying to protect students from harm. One participant recalled receiving no support from outside agencies for a student who was being abused by a parent. When the student refused to go home, the participant had to decide whether or not to take responsibility for the girl’s safety, without the parent’s permission. Decisions about students who were experiencing violence at home caused considerable angst for school leaders, particularly when they had to make decisions that conflicted with deeply held values.

Cranston et al. (2006) conclude that there is a necessity to “embed ethics within institutions” which means that not only do individual leaders have to be ethical, but so do the rules and procedures that govern the institution. They suggest that school leaders discuss ethical dilemmas with their administrative team or with guidance staff, as they seemed to resolve dilemmas more easily when they worked with others. Cranston et al. (2006) point to the need for professional development that will encourage principals and those aspiring to be principals to talk about ethical dilemmas, and to be more prepared in making ethical decisions. They also place the onus on principals and state, “it is incumbent on principals themselves to be proactive by seeking opportunities to dialogue with and gain feedback from peers regarding ethical issues and decisions in the course of their every day work” (Cranston et al., 2006, p. 118).

Similarly, Mahoney (2006) suggests that a new principal who is trying to make constructive changes in a school is likely to encounter established procedures that are not contributing to an ethical climate. Even though the procedures are not constructive, he or she may receive pressure from more experienced colleagues not to challenge a system that is entrenched. The new principal, wanting to feel accepted by colleagues, may feel pressure to conform and not challenge the status quo. Such pressures can stop new administrators from trying to effect positive change. Although Mahoney (2006) does not offer specific examples of established procedures, one can imagine what such procedures might be. For example, a fundraising activity that has been practiced in a school for many years may be so entrenched that it may be difficult to end it. Students selling chocolates to neighbours, family members and friends may generate much needed income for the school but it may also place a lot of responsibility and stress on students. A new principal who believes that children should not be devoting time and energy to fundraising and tries to stop this procedure may meet with resistance from staff members and parents who benefit from the school supplies that are purchased with money generated from this fundraising activity.
Marshall (1992) likewise adds that new principals feel pressure to demonstrate allegiance and conform to the social norms and agreed upon assumptions of the profession, while experiencing uncertainty about the ethical dilemmas that confront them in their practice. She calls attention to the fact that school administrators are “not merely technical bureaucrats” and often deal with situations that involve competing values in their daily work (p. 368). While principals have the authority to influence their schools toward realizing a vision that reflects the values they hold, they are often uncertain how to use their values to guide their decisions. This uncertainty, Marshall (1992) argues, is further complicated by a lack of open discussion about ethical dilemmas among administrators and a lack of “articulation of guiding principles” that might help them (p. 369). They are then left to find or develop their own support networks. This is particularly problematic for new administrators who want to be loyal to their superiors, whose values can be different from their own, while feeling uncertain and conflicted by the ethical dilemmas they face on a daily basis. Marshall (1992) contends that principals need to be offered support in expressing values and in dealing with ethical dilemmas in “professional preparation” experiences before they assume the role and in “professional support systems” once they assume the role (p. 382).

Haynes (2002) likewise argues that situations that principals deal with are sometimes affected by changes in school structures. These changes in structures can impact the reasons for a principal’s decisions; reasons that may not be apparent to others. When a principal makes a decision among competing values, the moral behaviour of the principal can be seen in the intention, and not necessarily in the action. She argues that school structures are constantly being modified and that because of this, a leader can exhibit the same behaviour in different situations for very different reasons. She explains, “The values that govern a decision are frequently quite different from those that announce themselves in the act” (Haynes, 2002, p.10).

Haynes’ (2002) argument might be understood where principals find themselves making very different decisions regarding student disciplinary action in what appear to be very similar situations. Changing societal norms, expectations and values can all affect school structures which in turn impact the choices principals make when faced with student misconduct. For example, a student who is diagnosed as developmentally delayed may receive a very different consequence for swearing at a teacher than a student who has no such diagnosis. If the principal works with a discipline policy that specifies that a suspension is only warranted if the student can
fully appreciate the consequences of his or her actions, then a principal will invoke a different course of action, other than a suspension, for the developmentally delayed student. An alternative course of action may involve taking away a privilege such as a class trip or recess time with peers. Whereas the same principal in a similar situation years earlier may have considered suspension a viable option, changing societal norms and values which impact school discipline policies make such an option no longer feasible, and in some cases, no longer ethical.

The arguments put forth by Cranston et al. (2006), Mahoney (2006), Marshall (1992) and Haynes (2002) highlight the challenges that principals encounter when they strive to be ethical leaders in their schools. Structures that constantly change or conversely, resist change, can all have an impact on how principals deal with ethical dilemmas and make ethical decisions. The theoretical underpinnings of my study support the notion that the principal should strive to work with others to ensure that ethical goals and norms established in the school are reflected in practices and procedures, even though there may be obstacles to making this a reality.

Beck (2003) suggests that the pursuit of morality is an ambitious and multifaceted undertaking that demands constant attention to the moral aspects of policies, practices and structures. She challenges administrators to look seriously at and change long held assumptions and traditions whose consequences are unjust and inhumane. She explains that long held assumptions and traditions that have unjust consequences need to be transformed. In keeping with the perspective of my study, I believe unjust traditions should be changed but change takes time, and may require a certain amount of “buy-in” from the community. The principal needs time to determine which traditions are unjust and why, particularly when the morally questionable aspects are subtle, and then dialogue with staff and community members in an effort to build trusting relationships and create change.

Likewise, Greenfield (2004) affirms that because schools are found within a larger community and a larger society, the norms and values held by the community and by society intervene and influence what occurs between people in the school. He states, “much of what transpires occurs out of habit – responses learned, internalized, and enacted often without conscious consideration – people have been socialized to certain expectations and social conventions” (p.182). He further suggests that the role of the principal as a moral leader is to gather people in the community
together around common objectives in a way that strives to consider the needs of children and adults in the school.

Zubay and Soltis (2005) offer a way for various stakeholders to come together to raise awareness about the prevalence of ethical issues in a school and to reexamine long-held assumptions. They propose that if principals, teachers, staff and parents dialogue with each other and contemplate real-life ethical situations together, they might reconsider their own learned reactions and question existing rules that may no longer seem relevant. Thoughtful dialogue can encourage stakeholders to explore and apply ethical principles that they can agree on as members of the same community. Listening to each other’s insights can allow people to consider ethical elements in a situation that they may not have been aware of or may have overlooked. Zubay and Soltis (2005) explain that discussions encourage “a sense of communal commitment to the thoughtful solution of moral dilemmas in one’s school and to the building of an ethical educational community” (p.3). During my fieldwork, I attended several parent council meetings in the evenings. These meetings were forums for stakeholders to express ideas and share concerns, all in an effort to ensure that the school could provide the best possible programs and services for the students and staff members.

Creating and sustaining an ethical school requires collaboration between the principal, teachers, support staff and other stakeholders to work through ethical concerns and build relationships with each other. The literature on the ethical school highlights the importance of relationships and the influence these relationships have on the moral climate of the school (Begley, 2006; Begley & Johansson, 2003; Campbell, 2003a; Cranston et al., 2006; Duignan, 2006; Fullan, 2003; Goodman & Lesnick, 2009; Greenfield, 2004; Haynes, 2002; Rebore, 2014; Ryan and Bohlin, 1999; Sergiovanni, 2001a, 2001b, 2005b, 2007; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011; Starratt, 2004, 2012; Strike, 1999a, 2013; Strike et al., 2005; Wagner & Simpson, 2009; Zubay & Soltis, 2005).

Ryan and Bohlin (1999) affirm,

We are social beings and forge our lives in a social context. Classroom and school environments give rise to a variety of social relationships: among students, teammates, and cast and choir members; among teachers, administrators, and staff; between students and teachers; between students and bus drivers, cafeteria staff, and custodians. The connective
tissue that sustains these relationships – whether it is trust, encouragement, mutual respect, cooperation, collaboration, and selflessness, or mistrust, fear, power, manipulation, competition, and antagonism – has a powerful character-shaping influence. In sum, the ethos of a school has both an inevitable and a potentially permanent educational power (Ryan & Bohlin, 1999, pp. 56-57).

Sergiovanni (2005b) concurs that relationships are essential to building an ethical school, particularly relationships built on trust. He discusses “relational trust,” a term first coined by Bryk and Schneider (2002). Sergiovanni stresses the importance of relational trust in building a successful school. He maintains that no matter how profound and comprehensive exchanges are among people, without trusting relationships, these exchanges likely would only encourage self-preservation. Sergiovanni (2005b) explains that self-preservation occurs when trust is lacking in a school and people tend to withhold ideas. They are not as likely to be helpful and giving toward one another. This lack of trust feeds into greater mistrust, as the more people keep their ideas and opinions to themselves, the more a feeling of mistrust intensifies. Sergiovanni (2005b) maintains that a lack of trust can have serious ramifications for schools that only seem to worsen as time passes. The importance of relationships and more specifically trust in relationships was relevant to my study where many of the interactions between the principal, staff members and parents involved a mutual sharing of ideas and insights. An aspect of trust was needed to ensure that people spoke candidly and felt listened to and respected.

Duignan (2006) stresses the importance of principals working with staff members to address ethical situations. When principals invite staff members with varying perspectives and insights to solve problems, then everyone takes responsibility. The diversity of the group helps avoid a situation where the voices of only a few are heard. He explains, “Many educational leaders leave themselves isolated and alone, taking primary responsibility for the leadership of the school. This constitutes a very narrow view of leadership and ignores the leadership talents of teachers, students, and other community stakeholders” (Duignan, 2006, p. 105). Duignan, however, also cautions that shared decision making among teachers will not in and of itself bring about a change. In order to engage teachers in leadership, the entire school must be committed to bringing about change.
Haynes (2002) concurs with Duignan (2006) in suggesting that an ethical school be a place where everyone has a voice and where the school community remains open to inquiry. This requires an on-going and open discussion of ethical issues. Haynes (2002) astutely points out, “An efficient school is not necessarily an ethical or equitable one, nor is one in which some make the rules and others simply follow them” (p. 38). Rebore (2014) insists, “It is impossible to have a positive school culture if the parents, students, teachers, and staff members do not have a sense of ownership of the school” (p. 144). Starratt (1991) agrees that the administrator cannot work in isolation, and that even individual choices made in individual situations must be acknowledged as taking place within a larger ethical context.

Principals can encourage teachers and staff members to make ethical choices by fostering a school environment where this is the norm, not the exception. The principal, in turn, needs to have the ongoing support of the school community. Sergiovanni (2001a) suggests that when principals and teachers share a purpose and establish shared values, these become the “compass points” for setting future directions. A shared purpose and shared values provide the “glue that connects people together in meaningful ways” (Sergiovanni, 2001a, p. 25). Shared goals are the responsibility of teachers, principals and staff members, and should guide them as they make decisions.

However, Strike (1999a) stresses that a shared value does not in and of itself produce a community. Values must be constitutive in order for them to form communities. A constitutive value has two characteristics. The first characteristic is that people share an idea of what constitutes the ends of a good education. A school staff, for example, understands what they are trying to achieve, and they share a common appreciation for how education promotes human flourishing. The second characteristic is that these values create common endeavors. They are sought after by a group because they are challenging to pursue alone. They generate a feeling of belonging, support, and ownership. Strike (1999a) suggests that when principals, teachers and students work together in a community, they perceive themselves as part of a collective, as they strive to accomplish collective educational goods. These collective educational goods become the definition of what a good education means and they are the “source of moral coherence” for the group (Strike, 1999a, p.49). Strike maintains that while constitutive values can bring people together, they can also separate them into smaller groups or sub communities, who then share the same constitutive values.
Goodman and Lesnick (2009) claim that it is important for a school community to have shared values because this allows children to develop a moral identity and a sense of belonging. When a community lacks shared values, children make choices based on personal inclinations, and do not consider the moral elements of the decision. When children belong to a community they feel a sense of shared responsibility for caring about each other and about their school. Goodman and Lesnick (2009) state, “A caring moral community gives children that sense of belonging which is particularly central to the early moral life” (p. 275).

My research study was conducted in a Catholic school. The importance of shared values was apparent in the school. As will be reported in subsequent chapters, the principal and staff members made concerted efforts to ensure that students felt a sense of belonging. These efforts appeared to arise from a conceptual belief that every child was an important member of the school community. The visual displays in the principal’s office, in the corridors and in the classrooms seemed to reinforce the message that the school was an inclusive community, where each and every person was needed and belonged.

The literature review on the Ethical School has so far emphasized that principals, teachers, staff members, parents and various stakeholders all exert a moral influence on the school. Their conduct, manner, words and stated intentions shape and define the moral tone of the school. One of the most pivotal empirical and scholarly studies ever conducted on the Ethical School was *The Moral Life of Schools Project* by Philip Jackson, Robert Boostrom and David Hansen. Published in 1993, this study brought the moral complexities of the school into sharper focus. Jackson and his colleagues suggested that teachers need to be aware of their power as moral agents, as well as the moral influence of the classrooms and schools in which they work. The researchers observed classrooms over a three-year period. *The Moral Life of Schools Project* (1993) uncovered two kinds of moral influence that deliver moral lessons to students and these included *moral instruction* and *moral practice*. Elements of school life that were observable and involved conscious efforts to inspire moral behaviour were defined as moral instruction. Moral instruction included moral teachings, either distinguishable and recurring in the curriculum or offered as a separate curricular unit. Jackson and his colleagues found that direct moral instruction, as an official aspect of the curriculum, was almost absent in the classes they observed.
An exception was found in classes in a Catholic elementary school and a Catholic secondary school. The Catholic elementary school devoted twenty minutes daily to religion lessons in each grade while the Catholic high school required students to take a religion course every year (Jackson et al., 1993). The religious teachings in the Catholic schools were distinctly moral in content. Students were urged to reflect on their own life experiences and connect them to the moral meaning of the text, which was often found in a bible story. Jackson and his colleagues observed that teachers in the Catholic schools conducted discussions with their students about hypothetical situations that presented ethical choices. These choices were guided by Catholic principles such as the Ten Commandments (Jackson et al., 1993).

In the secular schools that Jackson and his colleagues visited, they observed regular curricular lessons that were being taught with moral overtones as opposed to being direct moral lessons. For example, the moral strength of a real person or a legendary character was explored, and the students were asked to empathize with that person or character, imagining how they might feel or respond in a similar situation. Students were encouraged to voice their opinions and, even though moral decisions were discussed, it was rarely apparent that the teacher was attempting to deliver a moral lesson as such. Although the people or characters under discussion were often either revered or condemned for their actions, “the moral” aspects of their behaviour were more often inferred rather than overtly recognized (Jackson et al., 1993).

All of the schools and classrooms that Jackson and his colleagues visited had customs and ceremonies that reflected moral instruction. These ceremonies ranged from monthly school assemblies to classroom birthday celebrations. Jackson and his research team considered these rituals fundamentally moral in nature due to the atmosphere and feelings that were created such as loyalty, reverence, sorrow and pride. Moral messages were explicit in the posters and signs in the classrooms and schools. Moral instruction was also found in spontaneous interjections by the classroom teacher. These interjections ranged from stopping a lesson to address the moral aspects of a serious disciplinary incident to short comments of praise during a lesson directed at students exhibiting admirable behaviour (Jackson et al., 1993).

A second element of moral influence that Jackson and his research team found was moral practice. Moral practice encompassed classroom procedures and the personal characteristics of teachers. These characteristics included beliefs and assumptions that exemplified a moral
outlook, sometimes inadvertently. It included the teacher’s body language as observed through facial expressions and gestures and the moral messages these communicated. Moral practice was also evident in the atmosphere of the classroom, established through authoritarian systems such as class rules and classroom procedures. Jackson and his colleagues called on teachers to think deeply about the moral impact of their actions and the atmosphere they created in the classroom. Their study uncovered the importance of how a teacher interacts with students and urged teachers to treat students with consideration and understanding (Jackson et al., 1993).

Jackson and his colleagues also looked at the effect of the physical environment of a classroom and its subtle moral nuances. The physical environment included the way that a classroom was furnished. The researchers noted whether there was a lot of furniture or very little furniture in a classroom. They wanted to know what the differences in the way the classrooms were furnished expressed to others and what was the moral significance of these differences. The researchers were also interested in finding out what the relationship was between how the classrooms looked and the teachers who taught in them. Jackson et al. (1993) state,

there is always some correspondence between the appearance of the room and the person responsible for its care, even though the relationship may not be apparent and may even turn out to be the opposite of what we might think (p.40).

Jackson and his colleagues were curious to know what the room’s appearance expressed about the room itself, irrespective of the teacher, as these expressions were “often tinged with moral significance” They wanted to uncover what “mood or feeling” was created for teachers and students who spent time in classrooms that were either “gloomy and depressing” or “bright and cheerful” (p. 40). While elements of moral practice, such as the appearance of the room, were not always immediately discernable, and were harder to define as moral in substance, the researchers found that they permeated all elements of classroom life, including efforts to deliver explicit moral instruction. Jackson and his colleagues concluded that moral practice was more important than moral instruction in terms of its presumed lasting moral effect on students (Jackson et al., 1993).

The motivation behind the study was to try to uncover the moral and ethical elements of schools and classrooms. In reflecting on his role as a researcher in this study, Hansen came to the conclusion that teachers demonstrated care toward their work, evidenced in the fact that they
repeatedly used every moment of classroom time for engaged instruction. Hansen’s work had a particular focus on the moral importance of what occurs in the beginning moments of a class session. He observed levels of moral significance in procedures of turn-taking in group work. Hansen witnessed how teachers and students shape a moral community by developing collective standards, expectations, principles and ways of behaving that over time built an environment in which teaching and learning could occur (Hansen, 2007).

A significant lesson to be taken from *The Moral Life of Schools Project* (1993), Darling-Hammond (2007) argues, is that teachers and principals may have a greater influence on students through actions that are unintended and not deliberate than through actions that are deliberate and planned. She suggests that this lesson can be passed on to teacher candidates under the guidance of teacher educators. The task for teacher educators is to structure experiences for candidates that enable them to learn about their students’ lives, to consider the effects of their actions on their students, and to truly understand the meaning of their actions, including those that are unintended.

The results of the seminal work by Jackson et al. (1993) lend support to my study. The interviews and observations that form the basis of my study sought to uncover how the principal, along with the teachers and support staff, exert a moral influence on the school through their conduct, manner, words, and stated intentions. My study also sought to discover how the physical space of the school is infused with moral messages, and how these messages shape the moral tone of the school.

Character education is relevant in a section on the Ethical School because of the school-wide nature of it. Within the context of my study, the principal’s role in supporting character education activities, such as Virtue of the Month celebrations, was considered in an effort to better understand her vision of an ethical school. Scholars have noted the influence of character education in shaping the moral life of the school (Carr, 2007, 2008; Goodman & Lesnick, 2004, 2009; Leming, 2001, 2008; Lickona, 2000; Noddings, 2002, 2010; Nucci, 2008; Russell, 2007; Ryan & Bohlin, 1999; Wynne & Ryan, 1993). Leming (2001) explains that the character education movement emerged from the belief that citizens are connected to a moral community and that citizenship involves a quest for the common good. In this sense, morality is considered a public rather than a private endeavour. The emphasis is on virtue and its expression. Russell
Lickona (2000) likewise maintains that character education is based on the notion that virtues such as honesty, truthfulness, strength and kindness are learned through the example of others and can be directly taught. The central goal of character education is to cultivate the traits of character in children and to teach traditional societal values that will lead to good character development. Content that emphasizes traditional norms and standards upheld by society is central to character education. The traditional character education movement, whose proponents included William Bennett, was originally conceived out of a response to Lawrence Kohlberg’s work. Bennett and other advocates of character education criticized Kohlberg for placing too much emphasis on children’s moral reasoning, decisions and judgment, without paying attention to the development of virtues through habit and discipline (Russell, 2007, p. 45).

Carr (2008) offers a perspective on why teaching the virtues has been so appealing to those who advocate for character education in schools. Other approaches to moral development have emphasized personal preference when one is presented with several moral choices. In contrast, character education, which is virtue-based, stresses the importance of training in specific moral dispositions. Character education is based on the idea that moral dispositions can be learned and that the source of authority is collective rather than individual. Character education is primarily delivered by parents, principals, teachers, and the community at large (Carr, 2008).

Lickona (2000) provides another perspective on why character education programs have taken root in schools. This reason is the perceived loss of morals in society. He explains that the character education movement has emerged out of a need to respond to the moral and spiritual challenges of modern day. He points to the prevalence of gun violence and the increasing rate of murders in the United States as one example. Lickona argues that the character education movement is not a novel idea in the sense that every school, whether secular or religious, has always had two goals which include the improvement of the intellect, and the improvement of character. He maintains that character is of greater importance because it is at the root of personal relationships and professional success and “is at the heart of our capacity to love and our capacity to work, two of the hallmarks of human maturity” (Lickona, 2000, p.59). Within the context of my study, the moral climate of the school is evident in embedded procedures and practices, and made visible at school-wide events. Elements of school life, from daily rituals to monthly events, to curriculum displays in the hallways, uncover what people in the school care about and view as important in their work.
Noddings (2002) expresses reservations about character education programs. These programs, she argues, do not tend to recognize that different situations demand different responses. Sometimes, for example, compassion has to be exercised instead of honesty, but character education does not always allow for this level of flexibility. According to Noddings, a lack of flexibility in assessing a situation makes character education programs generally more suitable for young children than for adolescents. She also points out that an entire community may not be able to agree on common definitions of the virtues. Noddings (2010) further argues that character education programs have a tendency to pay closer attention to the person expressing the virtues, and less attention to the person who will actually be affected by someone’s actions. Similarly, Starratt (2012) points out that there is a tendency for character education programs to compartmentalize character development from academic development, by separating moral lessons from academic lessons. The resulting message is that academic engagement is distinctly separate from moral engagement. Starratt (2012) states, “Advocates of character education tend to assign an explicit curriculum for developing and sustaining character, leaving the substance of the academic curriculum as a separate matter altogether, as though achievement in academics is different from achieving character” (p.95).

Just as academic and character development can be integrated, so can the conventional aspects of schooling be connected with the moral aspects. From the perspective of my study, the ethical life of the school is revealed in words and actions that occur in daily exchanges. For example, it can be found in a principal’s words of concern offered to a young child or seen when a student volunteers to carry books for a teacher. While speaking words of reassurance may seem like a conventional response or carrying books may appear simply polite, closer consideration reveals two people engaging in acts of kindness. Not all agree, however, that the conventional domain can move into the moral domain. Russell (2007) explains that some theorists, such as Elliott Turiel and his colleagues, drew a sharp distinction between the moral domain and the conventional domain. Taking issue with Kohlberg’s assertion that there is one single inclusive moral theory, they argued that there is a difference between children developing concepts of morality and children developing concepts of social convention. Nucci (2008) describes a study conducted by Elliot Turiel and his colleagues, where they found that children and adolescents answered very differently to questions about rules and actions, if the action brought harm to another person. A four-year-old child could differentiate between a conventional rule, such as
staying quiet, from a moral directive, such as not hitting, because hitting caused harm. The child could explain that if there was no rule to stay quiet, then it was acceptable to be noisy. However, even in the absence of a rule to not hit, it would still not be appropriate to hit, because hitting could cause harm (Nucci, 2008). Nucci affirms that the moral domain is comprised of issues that pertain to the general well-being and benefit of others. Moral concepts are universal and non-arbitrary, evidenced in studies like that conducted by Elliott Turiel and his colleagues. These studies reveal that children and adults, in a wide variation of cultural settings, uphold conceptual differences between moral issues and issues of social convention (Nucci, 2008). While I agree that moral concepts are universal and non-arbitrary, my study considers how moral matters and conventional matters can and do overlap.

Nucci (2008) further considers governing social norms in society, such as appropriate ways to greet someone or appropriate table manners. Established and agreed upon rules in schools such as being quiet in hallways and climbing the stairs on one side would comprise the conventional domain. According to Nucci, conventional issues and norms, as dictated by those in authority, provide a measure of control and regulation, but are separate from moral issues and concerns. From my own experience, I would argue that conventional norms can and do move into the moral domain, as they help establish the moral tone of the school. For example, if students refrain from running in corridors, and use words such as “please” and “thank you”, their behaviour shows consideration for others. The school becomes a safer place where the overall tone is one of care and respect.

Principals can play a significant role in establishing a moral tone or climate by reminding staff members and students of the importance of adhering to agreed upon moral norms of behaviour. They can take opportunities to revisit established norms with parents, to bring about a shared ownership for the moral climate of the school. Goodman and Lesnick (2009) insist, “The school administration must make known to teachers and children that its commitment to moral education is serious” (p.276). Zubay and Soltis (2005) draw attention to the importance of role modelling from adults in establishing an ethical school climate. They claim that a child’s ability to grow in their moral sensitivity and moral reasoning is contingent on how adults demonstrate their own growth in these areas. They explain that if children see the staff engage in positive interactions and make positive comments about each other, this has an effect on the way children view adult’s moral sensitivity. Conversely if staff members have negative interactions and are
negative in their comments about each other, this behaviour will also have an effect on children’s moral perceptions. Similarly, the comments a parent makes about the child’s school or about the child’s teacher will have a direct effect on the way the child views the school and the teacher, and on whether the child learns to be respectful and trusting at school (Zubay & Soltis, 2005, p.4). Consequently, the principal, teachers, staff members, and parents need to work together to build an ethical school.

Carr (2007) highlights the difficulty of teaching the virtues in a simple and straightforward manner. He explains that if a person is perceived to be truly compassionate, he or she would have demonstrated that virtue through acts of compassion. Similarly, if a person is perceived to be truly honest, he or she would be expected not to engage in deceitful acts. The difficulty, as Carr (2007) points out, lies in the muddled and complex situations in which we sometimes find ourselves. For example, there might be times when not telling the truth is the right thing to do, because in telling the truth harm might be inflicted on another. He states, “the virtuously honest are those who recognize the need for some economy with the truth when they rightly appreciate that the unrestricted dissemination of knowledge may do more harm than good” (Carr, 2007, p. 374).

Starratt (2012) explains that virtues are not something that people attain, and that learning to express them is an ongoing process. There is no single prescribed way to live out the virtues, and it is dependent on the circumstance. He states,

Virtue is not something we achieve and then continue to possess. Virtue is always out in front of us to be achieved; it involves a perpetual doing. The human person is always incomplete. . . .We can’t lay it out ahead of time. We can't say, now that I have developed and possess this virtue, I know how to act in this or that circumstance, in advance. The virtuous act must be continuously sought and improvised (Starratt, 2012, p.159).

Carr (2007) and Starratt (2012) draw attention to the notion that building an ethical school is a process that requires patience and persistence from principals, teachers, and the community. Learning to express the virtues in a variety of situations takes time, and children need to be guided to understand that the process comes with struggle and uncertainty.
The perspectives and concepts that guide my study support the notion that principals and teachers engage in a life-long process to express ethical virtues as they strive to live with moral purpose. The school, as an institution, can be a place that supports its members in a continuous journey to incorporate the virtues in their daily lives. An ethical school is not an entity to be achieved or an objective to be reached. It demands constant vigilance from all stakeholders who are committed to coming together to examine and evaluate where they have been and where they are going in their quest to sustain a moral institution. Starratt (2012) astutely notes, “Cultivating an ethical school is never a finished task, just as living an ethical life is never a final accomplishment” (p. 157).

This section of the literature review explored the challenges involved in cultivating an ethical school. When all stakeholders collaborate to work through ethical issues, the influence of relationships on the moral climate of the school becomes significant. Organizational structures can help or hinder how principals resolve ethical situations in schools. Their ethical decisions are sometimes challenged by the norms and values of the school and of the larger society. The ways that principals conceptualize the moral aspects of their work and engage in ethical practices are in part affected by the policies and procedures that can either inhibit or empower them as they strive to incorporate ethics in their work. Literature on character education was explored. Consideration was given to how it can permeate elements of school life. The seminal research study, The Moral Life of Schools Project, was highlighted. This study is noteworthy in its significant contribution to the literature on the ethical school, and in the ways in which it has informed my study, both theoretically and conceptually.

2.4 Conclusion

This literature review was comprised of three sections: the Ethical Principal, the Ethical Teacher and the Ethical School. Each section revealed the moral complexity of the work involved in teaching and leading in schools. Although these sections are inextricably connected, they also contain themes that are significant and specific. Specifically, the focus of this study is on the principal’s moral and ethical leadership and her beliefs and practices. Themes addressed as part of the Ethical Principal section included: the history of the principal as a moral leader and its influence on current practice; the principal’s awareness of and ability to articulate the moral significance of decisions; addressing ethical dilemmas in daily work; the principal’s role as a
moral agent; and professional training in understanding and dealing with the moral aspects of practice.

The literature on the ethical teacher was reviewed because the principal comes to the role after many years of teaching and continues to work with teachers on a daily basis. Themes discussed in the Ethical Teacher section included: the moral and ethical elements of the teaching profession and applied ethics; the teacher as a moral agent; the teacher’s ethical obligation to understand the curriculum and to exercise ethical judgment in teaching it; ethical decisions encompassing a range of issues and the challenges they present for teachers; professional development programs that help teachers comprehend and respond to the moral components of their work; and opportunities for dialogue about ethical issues with principals and various stakeholders and the challenges involved.

Finally, literature pertaining to the ethical school was reviewed. Themes explored in this section included: organizational structures that promote or impede an ethical school climate; the role of collaboration between the principal, the teacher and various stakeholders in addressing ethical issues; relationship building and its importance in sustaining an ethical school; and character education as it is infused in the moral life of the school.

The intention of my study is to contribute to the literature on moral and ethical school leadership while drawing on previous scholarly work. The next chapter summarizes the methodology used in my research to investigate one principal’s beliefs and practices. Data collection was inspired and guided by prior empirical work in the field.
Chapter 3

3 Methodology

A principal’s moral and ethical leadership and her beliefs and practices is a topic of conceptual and empirical research that lends itself well to qualitative methodology. A description of methodologies used in this qualitative case study and why they are beneficial for exploring the topic is provided. I offer reasons for choosing to conduct a case study as well as an account of what the case study entailed. An explanation of the process of accessing participants, the purpose of my pre-fieldwork visit and the methods used to obtain data is included. I review the process of data analysis and representation and outline any limitations in this study. Lastly, the ethical considerations that were employed in an effort to safeguard the integrity and well-being of participants are discussed.

Qualitative research can be defined as the analysis of lived experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Glesne, 2006; Hays & Singh, 2012; Lichtman, 2013; Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011). Qualitative research is a method of inquiry that captures complex, in-depth phenomena (Lichtman, 2013; Parsons & Servage, 2005) and rich, nuanced and multi-dimensional aspects of the social world (Mason, 2002). It is often used to investigate human beings in their regular or natural environments (Creswell, 2007; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Hays & Singh, 2012; Lichtman, 2013; Parsons & Servage, 2005) with the researcher devoting an intensive and extensive amount of time gathering and analyzing data (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Hays & Singh, 2012). Qualitative research is concerned with understanding how participants construe and conceptualize their world and their experiences, as well as the meaning they assign to those experiences (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). The participant’s voice is revealed in the researcher’s descriptions and interpretations of social and human problems (Creswell, 2007; Lichtman, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Parsons & Servage, 2005). Qualitative research also seeks to understand and interpret how humans interact and communicate with each other (Lichtman, 2013). Hays and Singh (2012) note, “The naturalistic setting affords practitioners and researchers with opportunities to examine how individuals interact with their environment through symbols, social roles and social structures, to name a few” (p. 6).
Qualitative methodology has been used in this study to capture the complex and multi-layered interactions between the principal and various stakeholders. Through observations and interviews, a more in-depth understanding of how these interactions shape the principal’s practice and the moral climate of the school emerged. Qualitative methodology illuminated the lived experiences of the principal and those with whom she interacts. In my study, qualitative methods were valuable for describing and interpreting the multidimensional and sometimes nuanced elements of a principal’s practice. Ongoing observations provided an opportunity to record detailed aspects of situations, giving a more complete and authentic account of words and actions (Parsons & Servage, 2005; Robson, 2002). The result is a detailed and realistic portrayal of the principal’s daily practice.

My study employed interviews and observations to allow time and opportunity for the principal and the other participants to express their views and insights and articulate the meanings they ascribe to particular events. Observations of interactions between the principal and the participants afforded a chance to witness how they construct and communicate meaning through their conduct, manner, stated intentions and words. Debriefing after observations allowed me to clarify what I observed, thereby offering a more accurate portrayal of the interactions. Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) explain, “A special interest of qualitative researchers lies in the perspectives of the subjects of a study. Qualitative researchers want to know what the participants in a study are thinking and why they think what they do” (p. 431).

My research was conducted as a case study within the methodological framework of qualitative inquiry. It is instructive to explore what a case study entails, why it was chosen for this study, and how it was utilized. A case study is defined as a plan of investigation where the researcher develops an in-depth study of a case, often a program, event or one or more individuals (Creswell, 2014; Robson, 2002; Yin, 2014). The single most distinctive characteristic of case study research can be found in defining the object of study, the case. The case could be, among other things, a single person such as a principal or a teacher, a group such as a school or a class, or an institution (Merriam, 1998, 2009; Parsons & Servage, 2005). Schram (2006) notes that a case study is, “defined by an analytic focus on an individual event, activity, episode, or other specific phenomenon” (p. 106). The case is bounded by time and activity and gathers detailed evidence using an array of data collection measures over a sustained period of time (Creswell, 2014; Flyvbjerg, 2011; Yin, 2014). My research utilized a case study design in that it explored
the moral and ethical elements of one principal’s practice over a duration of five consecutive months which included three days per week of data collection, and two days per week of ongoing data analysis. My study used multiple data collection tools including interviews, observations, and analysis of documents.

The main strength of a case study approach is that it can glean rich and abundant information on various aspects of a participant’s experiences, due to its intense concentration on a specific case (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Springer, 2010). The case study method enables the researcher to, “capture multiple realities that are not easily quantifiable” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011, p. 78). Yin (2014) states that a case study develops out of a researcher’s desire to better comprehend complex social experiences and involves the examination of a current phenomenon or “case” in detail within its “real-world” context (p. 16).

My particular interest in understanding how a principal conceptualizes and deals with ethical issues on a daily basis led me to choose a case study design. Understanding how a principal thinks through ethical situations and addresses them is difficult to quantify. In a case study, I rely on careful and sustained observations, ongoing dialogue and participant reflection to comprehend the nuanced and complex nature of a principal’s practice. Case study methodology was intended to generate a rich and detailed account of how a principal expresses moral virtues within the context of her daily work in the school.

Lincoln and Guba (2013) claim that the case study approach is perhaps the only design “that can adequately identify and reflect the voice or voices that influence the outcome; that can enlarge the understandings of respondents while at the same time serving the purposes of inquiry” (p.80). In my study, interviews with the principal gave her “a voice” and allowed her to articulate how she conceptualizes the moral elements of her practice. Interviews afforded her an opportunity to reflect on her beliefs, her decisions, her moral values, and ethical conflicts as these arise in her practice. The case study design allowed for a better understanding of one principal’s practice. The overall intention of the research was to create a descriptive portrait of who the principal is as the leader of the school, and how she understands the ethical components of her work as she strives to build an ethical school. The outcomes of this case study with a single principal cannot be used to make assertions about how all principals think about their practice in ethical terms, and this is not the intent of the study. This study functions as an example of what might be
possible. It is intended to provide a deeper understanding of school leadership and teaching practice.

Stake (2008) identifies three types of case studies: the intrinsic case study, the instrumental case study and the multiple or collective case study. He defines the intrinsic case study as one where the case is itself, of importance, and is not considered in relation to other cases, or to any other issues or problems. The multiple or collective case study involves the joint study of a number of cases and seeks to explore an occurrence, a population, or a general condition. The instrumental case study, according to Stake (2008) means that the case itself takes on a supportive role in the understanding of an issue. The case is still examined in-depth, its context studied and its regular activities specified, but all to better comprehend the issue. When Stake (2008) uses the word “issue”, he would seem to mean the main purpose or focus of the research. In the context of my study, the issue involves gaining a deeper understanding of the moral and ethical leadership of a principal. Other scholars concur that even though a particular case is explored, the researcher’s intent in an instrumental case study, is to bring about an understanding of the complexity of an issue through the case itself (Creswell, 2007; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Schram 2006; Springer, 2010).

My research employed an instrumental case study approach. By focusing on the practice of one principal, I sought to develop an increased understanding of the ethical complexities in the work of school leaders. An instrumental case study, involving five months of sustained fieldwork, lent itself well to capturing the rich and detailed components of a principal’s daily practice, however subtle or nuanced. The moral and ethical leadership of the principal, and her beliefs and practices, represented the unit of study or bounded system intended to provide greater insights and understandings of the work of school leaders (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 1998, 2009; Schram, 2006; Stake, 2008; Springer, 2010; Yin, 2014). The principal who was the main participant of the study was the “instrument” whose words, actions, and stated intentions enabled a greater understanding of how principals might conceptualize, deal with, and resolve the ethical issues they encounter in their role. This is a case study of one principal that serves as an illustrative exemplar of the kinds of moral and ethical elements that comprise the principalship. A detailed summary of the research methods used for this study will now follow.
### 3.1 Sampling and Access

A single principal is the focus of my study and is the main participant. My challenge was to find a principal who could meet certain criteria which included being willing and able to participate in a five-month case study. Despite this challenge, I was motivated to find a principal who would grant me access to the world of the school administrator; a world that is intriguing and sometimes elusive.

Purposive sampling (Creswell, 2007; 2014; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Matthews & Ross, 2010; Merriam, 2009; Springer, 2010) was used to select the main participant. Purposive sampling is, “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009, p. 77).

Matthews and Ross (2010) likewise contend, “participants are selected based on the characteristics or experiences that are directly related to the researcher’s area of interest and her research questions, and will allow the researcher to study the research topic in depth” (p. 225).

The criteria that were considered for selecting a main participant are as follows:

1. Minimum of two years of experience as a principal;
2. Seems to have a sensitivity to moral and ethical issues and uses language related to morals and ethics. Is able to converse about her work in ways that seems to show attentiveness to ethical values such as care and trust;
3. Readiness and inclination to collaborate on a research project for a sustained period of five months;
4. Clear communication skills that enable a comprehensive and detailed account of a principal’s practice.

A minimum of two years of experience was required based on my assumption that this time would enable the principal to be comfortable and experienced in an administrative role. The second criterion was important in that the primary research question assumed that the main participant has an inclination to be perceptive about ethical issues and a readiness to discuss them. Awareness and ethical knowledge are defined in the literature (Campbell 2003a, 2008b; Hansen, 2002; Starratt, 2013), and have been discussed in Chapter One. Criterion three was
essential for the principal to remain committed and motivated over a sustained period of time. The fourth and final criterion was important due to the in-depth communication required in the study.

The school chosen for this research could have been elementary, middle or secondary. It also could have been publicly or privately funded. The research questions are distinctly connected to the moral elements of a principal’s practice; therefore, the school setting was of less significance. Due to the fact that I am employed in an urban Ontario Catholic school board, in the elementary panel, I knew that the context of my study would most likely be an urban elementary Catholic school in Ontario. I am also more familiar with the principals in that district so it seemed feasible to access a main participant from an urban, elementary Catholic school.

I considered several principals with whom I am acquainted as possible candidates for this study. I spoke with my thesis supervisor and we reflected on possible candidates. I approached a principal whom I had known in my professional capacity as a teacher. I had seen elements of her practice that I believed resonated with the kinds of things I thought about when I conceptualized ethical leadership. I phoned the principal whom I will refer to by pseudonym as Christine Bray, and provided her with a brief explanation of the purpose of the project, and what it might ask of her in terms of access and time. She expressed an interest in participating, however, the study was only in its initial planning stages, and I knew that unforeseen circumstances could occur that would alter this plan. I thanked Christine for her interest and told her I would contact her again once the details of the project took shape.

I contacted Christine many months later by telephone once I had a clearer idea of how much time I would be in the school, and the data collection measures I would be using. Christine continued to express an interest in the research. As the research plan developed, I became aware that this would be a valuable but onerous study, requiring a great deal of access to the principal over an extended period of time. I called Christine again by telephone to clarify the scope of the study and the time commitment that would be involved. I remarked, “I just wanted to make sure that I was clear that this research project will have me in your school for approximately five consecutive months for at least three days per week.” Christine laughed and reassured me that all this was made clear to her in our previous conversation, and that she was looking forward to participating in the study. She seemed to embrace the project wholeheartedly. It was a humbling
experience and a reminder that it is only with this level of interest and enthusiasm that research can happen in schools; research that is intended to benefit practitioners and scholars alike.

Criteria one and three and four had been met. I knew that Christine had been a principal for at least two years and that she was prepared to collaborate on a research project for a sustained period of five months. Through my previous professional experiences with her, I knew that she had clear communication skills. I had to focus on criterion two. I relied on my understanding of the literature and on conversations that I had engaged in with Christine over a number of years of professional association. Christine seemed to be able to express an understanding and appreciation of the ethical elements of school leadership, teaching, and school life. She seemed aware of the moral influence of her words and actions on others and her responsibility to various stakeholders. Christine had expressed a keen interest in character education initiatives in the school, and was involved in outreach programs for families in need in the school community.

In order to gain a more complete portrait of Christine’s practice, the study would have to involve two other categories of participants: “Other Participants” and “Not Primary Participants.” “Other Participants” would include administrators, teachers, support staff, board staff, parents and community members who had enough sustained interactions with the principal on a regular basis to generate informed responses on their perceptions of the ethical elements of her work. Sustained interactions meant that they met with or conversed with the principal consistently and felt they could speak with confidence about her work in the school and in the community. They would agree that I could observe them in interactions with the principal and record field notes based on those observations. Finally, they would agree to participate in at least one formal interview. These agreements were outlined in a Consent Form. Thirty-Two “Other Participants” were interviewed for the study. The Information Letter and Consent Form for “Other Participants” is included in this report as Appendix A.

The second category was termed “Not Primary” Participants. This category was created because I realized that as a researcher, I would be shadowing Christine throughout the day, and she would be involved in spontaneous interactions with a large number of people. I wanted to observe these interactions as they pertained to her practice without exploring them in depth. The “Not Primary” Participants provided a way for people to give consent to these observations. They would agree that I could observe them interacting with Christine and record field notes based on these
observations. They might include teachers, support staff, board staff, parents and community members who had spontaneous interactions with Christine. They would not be interviewed. These agreements were outlined in a Consent Form. Seventy-Nine “Not Primary” Participants took part in the study. Out of these seventy-nine “Not Primary” Participants, thirty-two agreed to be interviewed as “Other” Participants. This meant that forty-seven people had agreed to be observed in their interactions with Christine, and were considered in the category of “Not Primary” participants. The Information Letter and Consent Form for “Not Primary” Participants is included in this report as Appendix B.

Now that the study was beginning to take the shape, I set about to understand what was involved in doing research in the school board. I discovered that my research application had to demonstrate that I had satisfied the ethical requirements and guidelines for conducting research in a school setting. I completed the application process for the school board and the ethics protocol for the Office of Research Ethics for the University of Toronto. The Ethics Approval Protocol Letter from the University of Toronto is included in this report, as Appendix C. Once my research was approved, I began fieldwork.

3.2 Pre-fieldwork Visit

As per school board protocol I was not allowed to commence fieldwork until October 15, 2014. I met with Christine soon after and gave her a number of documents including the following: an Information Letter and Consent Form for Christine as the main participant; a copy of the Information Letter and Consent Form for Other Participants; a copy of the Information Letter and Consent Form for Not Primary Participants; a Consent to Photocopy Non-Public Documents; a copy of the approval letter to conduct research from the board of education; a copy of the approval letter to conduct research from the University of Toronto; and a One Page Summary of my study as requested by the board of education.

I had planned to formally introduce myself to the staff and explain my study. Christine suggested that I do so in early November. We agreed that I would speak at a portion of a staff meeting to introduce myself and explain my study using a scripted speech approved through my research ethics protocol. I learned that there are approximately nine hundred and fifty students with ninety people on staff including sixty teachers, twenty-four support staff, three office staff, and three administrators, including Christine. Support staff includes educational assistants, early childhood
educators, custodians and lunchtime supervisors. Christine and I agreed that no school administrators, including herself, would be present at the portion of the staff meeting where I spoke to the staff. This would allow staff members to feel comfortable to ask questions. I would explain to the staff that there would two categories of participants: “Other Participants” and “Not Primary Participants”.

The Information Letter and Consent Form for “Staff Members who are Not Primary Participants” would be given to all staff members at the meeting. This consent form would grant me permission to observe the staff during spontaneous interactions with the principal. This consent form would have an option not to participate in the study. All staff members would be asked to return the consent form to my personal mailbox in the main office. Names would not appear on the front cover of the consent forms to maintain privacy.

I would also explain the second category of participants in the study. These “Other Participants” would be those who agreed to be observed and interviewed. I would clarify that both of the vice principals had confidentially given me a pool of names from which to select these “Other Participants” and that neither the vice principals nor Christine would be ultimately aware of the candidates that I selected from this pool. I would explain to the staff that I would approach potential “Other Participants” in private, in the days following the staff meeting, and would give them an additional Consent Form if they agreed to be involved in the study.

I would clarify that if staff had any questions about the study I would be available to answer them after the staff meeting or in the days that followed. The rationale behind giving every staff member a “Not Primary” Consent Form at the staff meeting was twofold: it would offer everyone a chance to be involved or to decline to be involved in the study. It would also make it more difficult to determine who had been approached to be an “Other Participant” as all staff members would have received at least one Consent form.

During my pre-field visit I presented Christine with her Information Letter and Consent Form which is included in this report as Appendix D. Christine and I had agreed that a letter to the parent community would be distributed following my introduction and information session at the staff meeting. We decided upon this timing so that if staff members received questions about my research study from parents, they would have some knowledge of the study, and could then direct inquiries to me or to Christine. As far as I am aware, no concerns were ever posed by
administrators, teachers, staff, parents, or community members. My research was welcomed by all stakeholders and I felt warmly received in the school. The Letter to Parent(s) and Guardian(s) is included in this report, altered with pseudonyms, and abbreviated to remove identifiers, as Appendix E.

Christine and I decided on a schedule for formal interviews. We planned to have the interviews on a regular basis, with the least amount of interruption to her duties and responsibilities as a principal. Formal interviews would be conducted once or twice per month, subject to change due to unforeseen circumstances. Principals can be confronted with unpredictable situations, so Christine and I knew we would have to schedule alternative dates and times for interviews, when the need arose. We agreed that I would be in the school to conduct fieldwork for three full days per week, with the possibility of four full days during weeks that had special events and activities. I explained to Christine that I wanted to observe her at planned events, such as special school activities and meetings, and in spontaneous interactions with various stakeholders.

Knowing that I needed to observe her in interactions, Christine suggested that I be located in a small room close to her office, so that we could remain in close communication. This proximity would make it easier to observe spontaneous interactions, and to be aware of meetings that were delayed or that began earlier than expected. It would allow us to make maximum use of our time as we would both be aware of schedule changes as they occurred. It would also enable me to be in the “hub” of activity, immersed in the daily life of the school. Staff would have the opportunity to become more accustomed to my presence, as many of them passed through the office on a daily basis.

Mason (2002) affirms, “You will need to consider how you will generate data, or how you will ensure that you are in the right place at the right time to collect data and make meaningful observations” (p. 90). Being in a room close to Christine’s office would also give me the chance to observe routines such as daily announcements, the recitation of daily prayers, and various procedures that facilitated the start-up and closing of each school day. Christine and I decided that I would require a more private space to conduct interviews with other participants. This space had to be quiet with minimal distractions, and be far from the main office so the identity of participants would remain confidential. We decided that this aspect of my study could be worked out in the ensuing days, as I became more familiar with the physical layout and location of
rooms. Christine and I agreed to adjust our interview and observation schedules on an on-going basis, and to communicate through conversation and email. When special school events or programs were added to the school timetable, Christine would tell me or email me, and I would adjust my schedule to ensure that I would be in the school on that particular day.

After my conversation with Christine, I met confidentially with the vice principals to introduce myself, explain the study, and answer any questions that they had. I then outlined both categories of participants, and particularly explained the criteria for “Other Participants.” I explained how I wanted to involve them in the recruitment process. I asked them to consider a pool of potential names that would include teachers, support staff, parents, and community members. The vice principals agreed to meet with each other privately to draw up a list of candidates. I asked them not to share the names with anyone, including Christine, and not to approach potential participants. I explained that out of the list they generated, I would choose some names, but would not disclose these names either to them or to Christine. The vice principals agreed to these stipulations, and expressed a genuine interest in and excitement about my study. I thanked them for their time and assistance.

Lastly, the pre-fieldwork visit offered an opportunity to become acquainted with the school. As an elementary educator, I am familiar with the structure of an elementary school and its rules and routines. Notwithstanding this knowledge, I also know that schools, even in the same board, and even in close geographical proximity can vary. As Glesne (2006) recommends, I had to strive to remain receptive to possibilities and to unanticipated situations, and to check my assumptions very carefully before drawing conclusions. Creswell (2014) states, “Good qualitative research contains comments by the researchers about how their interpretation of the findings is shaped by their background, such as their gender, culture, history, and socioeconomic origin” (Creswell, 2014, p. 202). Guided by the ideas of Angrosino and Rosenberg (2013), I would try to remain cognizant of how my identity and past experiences might influence my interactions in the field and shape my interpretation of findings.

3.3 Fieldwork Methods and Data Collection

The information staff meeting took place in early November as previously outlined. Staff members were very receptive and warmly welcomed me to the school. Approximately two weeks later all but one consent form had been returned, including consent forms from staff
members who had not been present at the meeting. Several follow-up attempts to obtain the single outstanding consent form were not successful. It was assumed that this staff member had declined to participate. Out of ninety staff members, eleven people indicated that they did not wish to participate, and one form was never returned, bringing it to a total of twelve. No reasons were given as to why people declined. During this time, the vice principals provided me with a list of thirty-nine names of potential “Other Participants”. I approached thirty-four of the candidates from this list by email or telephone. The five candidates that I did not approach either represented a redundancy of grade, division or specialty or were difficult to access. My contact with potential participants included a personal introduction, and information such as the purpose of the study, methods of data collection, and an invitation to be involved. The potential participant was invited to meet with me to discuss the study further, and if willing to participate, to sign a consent form. Of the thirty-four who were invited to participate, five declined. The people who declined to participate offered reasons such as not being able to invest the time due to personal responsibilities or feeling overburdened by job obligations. In conclusion twenty-nine participants from the pool of names given to me by the vice principals agreed to participate. In addition, the vice principals participated, bringing it to thirty-one. I decided to invite a board resource teacher to participate, based on her presence in the school, and interactions with the principal. This name had not been given to me by the vice principals. This brought the total participants to thirty-two.

Data collection commenced in late October 2014 and concluded in late April 2015. Methods utilized in this study included interviews with a biographical intent and interviews that explored current issues and situations. Other methods included observations and document analysis. This project is a case study that employed biographical methods drawing on the work of many theorists and scholars, particularly Ivor Goodson (Goodson, 2005; Goodson & Hargreaves, 2003). The biographical interviews were conducted only with the principal. The researcher was the primary data collection instrument (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Lichtman, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Robson, 2002). Data collection methods were employed concurrently, and enlightened each other in a synergistic manner. What follows is a description of the research methods employed in the study.
3.3.1 Observation

Detailed observations of the principal were conducted in her office and in various other places such as the main office, the vice-principals’ offices, hallways, seminar rooms, the gymnasium, and the local church. I observed the principal at meetings with various stakeholders, including teachers, support staff, parents, community members, and board staff such as the field superintendent. Observations of the principal were conducted at school-wide assemblies, school competitions, religious celebrations, curriculum events, and craft days among others. Observations were also conducted at staff celebrations and evening events for parents such as open houses, seasonal celebrations, and literacy events. Mason (2002) defines participant observation as, “methods of generating data which entail the researcher immersing himself or herself in a research ‘setting’ so that they can experience and observe at first hand a range of dimensions in and of that setting” (p. 84).

I tried to observe Christine in many different places and with as many different people as possible, to develop an in-depth portrait of her practice. I always took my field notebook with me when I accompanied Christine to situations and events in the school. I was warmly received in the school and over time people grew accustomed to seeing us together. Staff and parents would sometimes make good humoured comments that we were hardly ever apart.

With the exception of one meeting with a representative from an outside agency who expressed a desire for complete privacy, I was granted access to all interactions, meetings and activities. If Christine began an interaction with a staff member who had not granted me permission to observe, I discreetly removed myself from the situation. At times, Christine would offer me information about an interaction after it occurred, but I was careful to focus only on her words and actions in my field notes. Occasionally when Christine placed a phone call to a parent I would withdraw from observation, particularly where the parent would not be aware that I was observing. Withdrawing from observation maintained privacy for the parent and reduced the complication of introducing me as an observer, particularly in high anxiety situations.

For the first week or so of the study, I kept direct interaction with the principal to a minimum, allowing her a chance to adjust to my presence as an observer. In the early stages of my fieldwork I took the role of non-participant observer, causing as little interference to the research setting as possible, and giving people an opportunity to become accustomed to my presence.
Springer (2010) describes the non-participant observer role as one where, “The researcher looks and listens (and perhaps also tastes, smells, and touches) without conversing or sharing activities with the individuals who are being observed” (pp. 143-144). Maintaining an unobtrusive presence in the very initial stages of the research also offered me a chance to become acquainted with the climate and culture of the school.

I settled into the room very near to the principal’s office which is where I would be based for the duration of my fieldwork. The principal suggested I use some of the cupboards in this room to lock up my personal belongings. These cupboards, designated solely for my use, proved invaluable as I could lock up confidential information during the day. Due to the nature of my study, which involved observing and interviewing in different places in the school, this seemingly small detail gave me peace of mind, allowing me to concentrate on the task at hand. I set up my laptop computer on a table located in this room and placed various other general belongings beneath the table. My laptop computer was locked to the table when I was not using it and the screen was folded down. My computer was password protected after approximately one minute of non-use. The table where I sat was located near the door, so I could observe activities in the office and feel the pulse of the school, while still remaining relatively unobtrusive.

On the first day, I wrote detailed notes in a spiral-bound notebook about my physical surroundings, including the room where I sat and the general office area. I began gathering preliminary information on the school and community, largely through observations at this stage of the research. Patton (2002) stresses that descriptions should be factual, precise and detailed so that the reader can get an accurate sense of the setting without having been there. The researcher must avoid using interpretations at this stage, focusing on describing the place of research as vividly as possible. Robson (2002) concurs, “It is common practice to start with descriptive observation. The basic aim here is to describe the setting, the people and the events that have taken place” (p. 320). I tried to get a sense of the people in the building. I obtained a staff list and referred to it often in that first week. With a general sense of the rooms where people were located and their professional responsibilities, I could navigate the school more easily, begin to associate faces with names, thereby developing greater communication and rapport with staff. I
felt that making a concerted effort to get to know the people in the school was important in having them feel comfortable enough to share their insights and ideas with me.

Over the course of my fieldwork many of my observations were recorded by hand in field notebooks. Some observations were recorded on my laptop computer and on my iPad. I noticed that when I handwrote my observations I seemed to have a sharper focus on details and could recall what had occurred with greater clarity. Many times, when I reread my field notes soon after an interaction or later that evening, I could remember the details vividly if the fieldnote had been handwritten. Denzin and Lincoln (2013) offer, “words fixed on paper ensure accuracy of quotation in print; and they confer a certain intellectual authority on what could be construed as an ephemeral form” (p. 126).

I used my laptop computer to capture details in complex interactions or exchanges, particularly when dialogue was important to understanding what had occurred. I found my computer an asset in quickly capturing conversation when reflection was not crucial. Further on in my fieldwork I purchased a keyboard for my iPad. I began to prefer my iPad to my laptop computer for recording observations. The iPad seemed less intrusive than my laptop computer, primarily due to its smaller size. I created a computer file folder for field notes typed on my laptop and on my iPad. I printed hard copies of these field notes and placed them in my field note binders. They were dated and numbered and placed in chronological order. Occasionally I used the application iTalk on my iPhone to quietly record observations when I was in a private space. This was a particularly effective method for capturing observations when my thoughts were moving quickly or I did not have sufficient time to write or type notes. Soon afterwards I downloaded these files off my IPhone, transcribed them, printed hard copies of the transcripts, and placed them in my field note binders. They were dated and numbered and placed in chronological order.

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) recognize the sophistication of technology but caution that it does tend to show reality in a static way, working against the strength of naturalistic observation, which captures the unique and special qualities of life in all its complexities. I wanted to capture the flow of interactions in an unimpeded manner, so that they could be portrayed as authentically as possible. If writing notes seemed less intrusive than typing on a keyboard, particularly when the situation had an emotional charge to it, then I opted for this method. If the computer did not seem an intrusion or a possible barrier to authentic exchanges, then I took advantage of the speed
it offered me. I used my intuition, discretion and judgment, which grew easier as I became more accustomed to the setting and the people, and they became more accustomed to me. Mason (2002) states, “your chosen methods will have an influence on your setting and the interactions within it, just as your own presence does” (p. 97). I tried to keep the cautionary words of Denzin and Lincoln (2011) and Mason (2002) in mind in order to achieve a balance between the expediency that technology affords and the intimacy of moments that are at times best captured through handwritten field notes.

Technology was an aid in organizing information. I maintained a detailed chart to track my correspondence with potential participants. My chart included the following: the name of the potential participant; role and grade if applicable; the date of email of invitation to participate; the initial response from the potential participant in terms of a yes or a no and the date the potential participant responded; the date and time of the meeting with the potential participant; and then following that meeting, whether the consent form was signed and if so, whether it was a yes or a no. The chart was a private record and I did not show the information to anyone. It allowed me to stay organized and to never misplace important information or forget a meeting. I wanted to respect people’s time by responding promptly to them and by showing up on time for meetings and interviews. I also wanted to be able to locate them in the school for any necessary follow-ups, so it was important that I knew the room number where they could be found. I did not rely on office staff or Christine to help me locate anyone because it was very important to maintain the confidentiality of the participants. I found that maintaining my independence was significant in safeguarding their confidentiality. The chart is included in this report, as Appendix F, entitled Correspondence Chart of Potential Other Participants.

I regularly reviewed the Correspondence Chart of Potential Other Participants to ensure that I was recruiting a good representation from the staff population. I considered their professional roles as a factor. My goal was to recruit participants with a range of job descriptions including teachers, educational assistants, early childhood educators, office and custodial staff. A cross-representation would provide a view of the principal’s practice from different perspectives within the school community. I tried to recruit teachers from a range of grades and to include both classroom and specialist teachers. French, ESL, and Physical Education teachers are examples of specialist teachers.
When the vice principals provided me with a list of parents for potential participants they suggested I be available at the parent-teacher interview evening in mid-November. They felt this would be a good opportunity to discreetly approach parents and ask them to consider participating in my study. I went to the school that evening as they suggested and I approached parents individually and privately. All parents expressed an interest in my study and welcomed me to the school. We agreed to be in contact shortly thereafter to arrange a day and time to meet. If a parent wanted to meet with me once to sign the consent form, and then again at a later date for an interview, I agreed. If the parent preferred to meet with me only once to sign the consent form and conduct the interview on the same day, I agreed to that. I was sensitive to the needs of parents who have busy work schedules and family obligations. I tracked correspondence with the parents in a similar chart to that being used for staff members. The list of potential participants provided by the vice principals also contained names of community members, such as school bus drivers, and I approached them individually and privately and tracked their correspondence (See Appendix F).

On the first day of fieldwork I met with Christine to answer any questions she might have and give her a sense of the kind of interviews we would be doing and the topics we might explore. Christine shared with me that she had been recently speaking with her field superintendent who had indicated that the study would be a positive opportunity for her to reflect on her work and her practice. Christine seemed pleased as she relayed this conversation to me, and commented that she felt supported by her superintendent.

Christine informed me that her communication practice was to email newsletters to the staff on a weekly basis to keep them informed of events in the school. These newsletters indicated when she would be out of the school for various reasons, such as principal meetings. Christine offered to send me these staff newsletters through email to keep me informed. I agreed that this would be a great way to align our schedules and to alert me to special occasions and events in the school. This information proved important as we were careful not to book interviews with each other on those days.

Christine and I decided together that I would not observe her at principal meetings because some of her colleagues are acquainted with me. We agreed that it could place her in a vulnerable position if her colleagues discovered that she was the participant in my study. She offered to
bring me documents from the principal meetings that connected in some way to the ethical dimensions of her work and to then talk about them in interviews and informal discussions. I agreed that this would be a satisfactory compromise, and a valuable addition to the interview and document analysis components of my study.

By mid-November I was feeling more at ease in the school and Christine seemed more accustomed to having me with her on an on-going basis. I was slowly shifting from non-participant observer to participant-observer (Cohen et al., 2007; Glesne, 2006; Matthews & Ross, 2010). Matthews and Ross (2010) describes the participant-observer role as, “different from being a complete participant in that the researcher takes an overt stance and reveals both her presence and her research role to the group” (p. 258). On occasion, when there was a non-confidential message that had to be relayed to a staff member, I took the note to the classroom or verbally delivered the message. This gesture seemed appreciated by the staff who could not always leave their classrooms to retrieve messages. Christine laughed when she saw me extending these small gestures and said, “We are putting Kelly to work now.” I enjoyed this opportunity to become more acquainted with the staff. Over time I noticed they would say hello to me in hallways, wave to me from classrooms, or smile and nod as they dashed from one room to the next. My presence in the school was beginning to feel more natural, and people seemed more at ease with me.

I always tried to be present at the beginning of interactions between Christine and participants because the first few minutes seemed crucial in developing a sense of who was involved in a situation and what was occurring. These first few minutes were also important for establishing a sense of trust with participants and creating a sense of ease with my presence. It was particularly important to be present in the first few minutes of interactions with parents. They were in the school on a periodic basis and were not as familiar with me as were the staff. Sometimes when parents came to see Christine they were in an anxious or emotional state. This was often due to the stressful nature of the problem or concern that the parent was bringing to Christine. When I was present at the start of the interaction, the parent appeared more at ease and it avoided the awkwardness of interrupting an interaction once it had commenced. I was always granted access by parents and I thanked them for their trust.
I draw a parallel between my experiences in my fieldwork and Hansen’s experiences in his fieldwork in the Moral Life of Schools Project. In reflecting on his work as a researcher, Hansen (2007) noted that the beginning moments of a class session were crucial to observe. These moments revealed the care a teacher took in ensuring that students were promptly engaged in learning, on task, and following established routines that over time created a moral community. Although the focus of our work is different, as Hansen (2007) was studying the classroom, I likewise valued those first moments of Christine’s interactions with others. I found these moments were difficult to recapture if I was not present to witness them firsthand. I could observe Christine’s words and actions and how they helped set a tone. For example, when meeting with an emotional parent or staff member, Christine would begin the interaction by inviting the parent to sit with her at a small table, away from distractions. Making eye contact and leaning toward the parent, Christine would invite conversation and begin to write notes. In these moments at the beginning of an interaction, she listened carefully to the needs and concerns of others.

I asked Christine to explain why she gets up from her desk to go to her table when people come to her office with a concern. She responded,

As a principal, staff members and parents and kids come with things not work related. They come for other reasons too so I would rather take myself away from the principal seat and sit and have that conversation where I can look at them. I’m not distracted by anything [and] there’s nothing on my desk. If I’m meeting with a parent or a child and I need to take notes, that’s the only thing I take, is the book, the pen. I don’t take my phone over, nothing [emphasis in original] goes to the table, so for me, that’s a really important thing to do because I can just make that connection with them and they know I’m listening because there’s nothing else here to distract me. (interview 4)

To create rapport and an understanding of my role as a researcher in the school, I encouraged staff members, parents, and community members to refer to me by my first name. Likewise, the letter that was sent from Christine to the school community identified me by my first name. I felt that being on a first-named basis made me more approachable for parents and community members and differentiated me from the staff. When people addressed me by my last name it was usually their way of showing respect because students were nearby. This was a common
aspect of school culture, that when adults address each other in the presence of students, they refer to each other by their last names.

I frequently reflected on how my presence in the school might be affecting the people and the environment and recorded these reflections in my field notes (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Hays & Singh, 2012; Springer, 2010). This process of reflection helped me to acquire a greater awareness of my attitudes and actions and ensured that I maintained my researcher role. Glesne (2006) notes that even though the role of the observer can range from complete observation to complete participation, it is common for the observer to be at various points along this continuum, depending on the stage in the fieldwork. As time passed my level of participation fluctuated, but I tried to be cognizant of maintaining a balance between participation and observation (Cohen et al., 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Patton, 2002). Springer (2010) likewise adds, “Qualitative researchers may change the nature of their participation, or shift from participant to nonparticipant approaches (or vice versa) if doing so will help make participants more comfortable with being studied, or otherwise facilitate the collection of useful information” (p. 144).

What follows directly below is an insight Christine made on how my presence as an observer has made her more aware of her challenge to slow down, attend and listen to others, particularly during hectic times. She explains,

This whole process of this year working with you, holy moly, I’ve done a lot of thinking about the way I do things. You know, even now if I’m thinking, “I just gotta get this done. Come on, let’s move on.” Especially since it’s so busy I’m thinking, “Now would I do that if Kelly were here?” and I’m thinking, “Just listen” but it’s been so unbelievably busy that I just want to get it done and I just think, “Okay, yeah, yeah, I hear you, okay, I gotta go” and then I’m thinking, “No, don’t do it, don’t do it [laughs]. Keep listening.” (interview 8)

Christine offered an additional insight on how my presence as an observer affected the school environment. She described the school environment as “a little gentler” and continued,

You have a lot of adults in the building, but they are good to each other. The staff members are good to each other here you know, for the most part, but I think [they are now] paying attention a little more to things that people do. One of the staff members goes out of her way
to do a little extra for people and have treats and I think people are noticing and being good to each other. (interview 8)

Over time my level of participation changed again, and my role shifted this time from \textit{participant–observer} to \textit{observer-participant} (Cohen et al., 2007; Glesne, 2006; Matthews & Ross, 2010). Glesne (2006) defines the \textit{observer-participant} role as one where, “The researcher remains primarily an observer but has some interaction with study participants” (p. 50). I was careful, however, to not become too involved in school life, which might jeopardize my sense of objectivity. When staff came to speak to Christine, I observed quietly, maintained a professional demeanor, and did not offer advice or problem-solve.

Whenever I needed to step away from Christine’s office to contemplate something I had just seen or heard or to write a field note, I retreated to my room close by where I could reflect but still be in the midst of activity. At times, I remained in Christine’s office and sat alone at a table near her doorway, and wrote field notes. It was a good place to sit because I could write without interruption but was not isolated from the ongoing events of the school. If a situation or interaction occurred, I would be aware of it, and I did not have to be concerned that I was missing opportunities (Mason, 2002).

Over the duration of my fieldwork I took copious and detailed field notes. Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) offer the following definition of field notes,

\begin{quote}
In educational research, this usually means the detailed notes researchers take in the educational setting (classroom or school) as they observe what is going on or as they interview informants. They are the researcher’s written account of what they hear, see, experience, and think in the course of collecting and reflecting on their data. (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, p. 516)
\end{quote}

As Hays and Singh (2012) and Springer (2010) recommend, I recorded my field notes in thorough detail, with descriptions that were as rich as possible. If I could not always manage that level of detail at the time of the observation, I would sometimes make \textit{field jottings} (Cohen et al., 2007; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Yin, 2014) where I quickly recorded notes about the interaction, with just enough information that I could expand on later, in a quiet space. I made sure I attended to these field jottings as soon as possible, usually within a few hours, out of a concern that the
passage of time would affect my ability to remember details (Cohen et al., 2007; Glesne, 2006; Springer, 2010). Many interactions I observed were spontaneous, requiring flexibility in the methods I used to record the observations, to create an authentic portrayal of daily occurrences. Richards (2015) stresses the value of recording field notes about spontaneous discussions and events, as they offer unique perspectives and contextual information that can be otherwise hard to obtain. She suggests, “These may be precious records. Good field notes intrigue with vividness and contradictions, bother and distract with remembered themes and recurrent noises” (Richards, 2015, p. 45). My field notes helped me to capture, recall, and reflect on the nuances and dynamics of day-to-day interactions that otherwise would have been missed.

My field notes comprised two types of observation data: descriptive and reflective (Cohen et al., 2007; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). Descriptive data encompasses efforts to depict the setting, the people, and the actions they take. These include: portrayals of subjects such as physical appearance, mannerisms and gestures; reenactment of dialogue including words spoken to the researcher; an account of the physical setting, such as room set-up and placement of objects; descriptions of specific events including who was there, what happened and how the event occurred; and the researcher’s behaviour such as actions, reactions, and discussions with participants (Cohen et al., 2007; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

In the context of my study, descriptive data that focused on people included, as in the case of other studies examining the moral nature of educators’ practice, their mannerisms, gestures, body language, and dialogue between the principal and stakeholders (Campbell, 2003a; Fallona, 2000; Jackson et al., 1993; Richardson & Fenstermacher, 2001). Descriptive data that focused on the setting included descriptions of the principal’s office and gathering places such as the gymnasium and meeting rooms, similar to what Jackson et al. (1993) did in their study. As Cohen et al. (2007) and Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) recommend, when I described an interaction or a formal event, I was careful to note all of these factors including people who were present, how the event unfolded, and behaviour or dialogue of participants. In my descriptive field notes I included my actions, words and responses as I interacted with participants.

Field notes also contain reflective data which involve an emphasis on what the researcher is thinking about in the process of observation (Cohen et al., 2007; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). They can include: contemplations on analysis, including the researcher’s conjecture on
knowledge he or she is gaining, ideas that are forming and patterns noted; deliberations on the researcher’s frame of mind as the fieldwork develops, such as attitudes and viewpoints and how these might be impacting the research; and details of clarification, such as reminder notes about what needs to be followed up on and verified (Cohen et al., 2007; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

In the context of my study, examples of reflective data included new discoveries I made, elements of the fieldwork that surprised me, and honest self-appraisals of how my own personal bias might be affecting my interpretations of situations or events (Hartas, 2010; Springer, 2010). Reflective field notes allowed me a place to note gaps in my understanding and areas where I needed further clarification. They also provided me with a method of follow-up to confirm and explore concepts and ideas that were arising. I began to notice patterns and themes emerge and I wrote them down as I observed them. I would sometimes refer to my reflections in discussions and interviews with Christine to affirm and deepen my insights. Largely due to the confidential nature of the data, the field notes were not made available to Christine nor to any of the participants. I was therefore able to record data truthfully, without risk of causing psychological harm to Christine or to any of the participants.

I developed a tracking system for my field notes in order to keep them organized (Creswell, 2007). In the top right corner of each page of each field note, I indicated the month, day and page number. For example, “N18-10” meant the tenth page of the field notes for November 18. Keeping my field notes organized allowed me to make sense of what I was observing as my study unfolded. This tracking system also provided easier cross-reference between field notes and interview transcripts and vice versa. This was important, for example, if I wanted to refer to or follow-up on a field note in an interview. Robson (2002) notes that observations can “validate or corroborate the messages obtained in the interviews” (p. 312). This tracking system saved valuable time and allowed for different methods of data collection to complement each other.

Documents such as emails and staff newsletters that were sent to me on a particular day, or were given to me with Christine’s permission, were also similarly marked with the first letter of the month, date, and page number, and were included in my field notes. Usually these documents were included in chronological order, according to the day they were given to me, unless they connected closely with other documents that described the unfolding of an event or situation. For example, if separate emails gave context to a situation as it progressed, I stapled those emails
together rather than separating them. I felt this gave more meaning and coherence to the data. Stake (2008) asserts that researchers engaging in qualitative inquiry are inclined to identify events as, “multiply sequenced, multiply contextual, and coincidental more than casual. Many find the search for a cause as simplistic. They describe instead the sequence and coincidence of events, interrelated and contextually bound, purposive but questionably determinative” (Stake, 2008, pp. 127-128).

My field notebook was a place to chronicle Christine’s practice as I tried to capture the fluid and evolving nature of her work. Glesne (2006) explains that the “field notebook” is the main chronicling tool for a person doing qualitative research. She states, “It becomes filled with descriptions of people, places, events, activities, and conversations; and it becomes a place for ideas, reflections, hunches and notes about patterns that seem to be emerging’ (Glesne, 2006, p. 55). I recorded my field notes in a spiral-bound notebook which I carried with me on a daily basis. At the close of each week of fieldwork I removed the pages from the spiral-bound notebook and inserted them into a binder located in my home office. This practice meant that the field notes would never be left unattended or misplaced. The binder provided a system of organization and a secure place to keep my field notes off school premises. Over time I accumulated several binders of field notes. If I needed to refer to particular field notes, for example during an interview, I would remove them from the binder and use them for that day.

I wrote reflections in my field notebook in the margins, following an account of an incident or situation, or at the very end of the day’s notes. Although I built in moments during the day to reread my field notes and insert missing details or lingering questions, I still reread them each evening, soon after I got home. This allowed me a chance to reflect on the day, away from the school, and take stock of what I had observed. I was able to write down what I was wondering about, and any follow-up questions I had for Christine or the other participants. I located places in the field notes that were a little unclear and added details, even if they were seemingly small or mundane. As Cohen et al. (2007), Glesne (2006) and Springer (2010) caution when I returned to the field notes in the future I might not recall them as sharply as I did in that moment, so I made concerted efforts to ensure they were clear. Time spent in reflection was very valuable, but could also be intense, as thoughts would sometimes spill onto the pages, as I tried to capture the essence of what I was thinking and feeling. Lincoln and Guba (2013) state, “In many instances, engaging in qualitative and constructivist work involves the difficult task of attempting to ‘bring
forth’ the tacit by struggling to render such knowledge or understandings into words” (p. 46). As I reread my field notes I looked for categories and themes and began to develop preliminary codes based on what was emerging. I was often able to note resonances and dissonances between Christine’s view of her practice and views expressed by other participants, as they were recorded in my field notes. Stake (2008) notes the centrality of reflection in case study research. He states, “The case researcher digs into meanings, working to relate them to contexts and experience. In each instance, the work is reflective” (p. 128).

Although some researchers choose to have a separate field diary where they write their reflections separate from their field notes (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006), I decided to incorporate my reflections into my field notes. I preferred this method, and, as my field notes were placed in a binder off school premises at the end of each week, I felt an increased level of privacy about my reflections. I brought my field notebook with me essentially everywhere I went, including religious gatherings. I always found a discreet place to sit and quietly observe, and the notebook and pen seemed the least intrusive tools to use. I took great care to ensure my notes were sequential, comprehensive and legible so that I could return to them later and have an accurate account of events. Yin (2014) affirms, “The only essential characteristics of the notes are that they be organized, categorized, complete, and available for later access” (p. 125).

At times, I referred to observation data in my field notes to shape questions and guide an interview. Interviews provided an opportunity for Christine to clarify intentions that I could not always perceive through observations. Her clarifications provided further understanding of the events and situations recorded in my field notes. Conversely, sometimes observations revealed contradictions or incongruities in interviews, which I could then follow up on in subsequent interviews. I could respectfully challenge Christine by pointing out any contradictions between what she was saying and what I had observed. She always welcomed these challenges and never backed away from an opportunity to sort out the contradictions. Seidman (2006) notes, “Interviewing provides access to the context of people’s behaviour and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behaviour” (p. 10). Denzin and Lincoln (2013) maintain that effective interviews, “have a measured, thinking-out-loud quality, as perceptive questions work and rework a particular topic, encouraging the narrator to remember details, seeking to clarify what is muddled, making connections among seemingly disparate
recollections, challenging contradictions, evoking assessments” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p.121).

Observation protocols were created prior to the commencement of my fieldwork and operated as general guides, indicating details to look for and listen to during my observations. Observation protocols provided a focus so that what I was looking for and listening to connected back to my research questions (Mason, 2002). Yin (2014) defines a protocol as, “the procedural guide for collecting the data for a case study, including a set of field questions to be addressed by the researcher” (p. 240). The observation protocol for Christine is included in this report, as Appendix G, entitled Observation Guide.

3.3.2 Interviews

Interviews can be used for different purposes in an interpretive study. A number of these purposes pertain to qualitative methodologies (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Glesne, 2006; Hays & Singh, 2012; Josselson, 2013; Matthews and Ross, 2010; Mason, 2002; Robson, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Seidman, 2006, 2013). These purposes include the following:

- Producing knowledge (“everyday knowing” and “systematically tested knowledge”) (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p.4);
- Generating understanding from the participant’s point of view;
- Acquiring information on context and background;
- Offering detailed examples and stories that describe experiences and situations;
- Revealing what may not be evident in observations, such as insights, opinions, perspectives, and viewpoints that are contextualized in the participant’s experiences;
- “Reconstructing” situations that the researcher did not participate in to create a complex understanding of the participant’s experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 3; Josselson, 2013, pp. 2 & 3);
- Helping people make sense of their professional lives (Rubin & Rubin, 2005);
- Accessing the participant’s social world by directly experiencing the participant’s language through conversation that reveals how the participant speaks, particular words chosen and the way words are used to connect thoughts (Josselson, 2013);
- Cross-referencing data collected using other methods such as observations.
Other purposes were established from previous empirical studies on the moral and ethical dimensions of a teacher’s practice (Campbell, 2003a, 2004; Fallona, 2000; Fenstermacher, 2001; Richardson & Fenstermacher, 2001). They include:

- Generating an understanding of the participant’s moral orientation to practice and his or her awareness and ethical knowledge;
- Differentiating between moral and conventional reasons for actions and decisions.

To clarify the last point, without interviews as a method of data collection, there is a greater possibility that the researcher will assign a moral reason to an action that upon closer scrutiny is not moral. For example, in a hypothetical situation, a principal may decide to closely oversee the distribution of classroom supplies to teachers. The principal might collect lists from teachers every week indicating the supplies they need. On a designated day, each week, the principal personally delivers the supplies to classrooms. For the remainder of the week the supply room is locked, allowing access only when the principal is available. The principal may interpret his or her behaviour as ethical, considering it fair and equitable, as teachers have an equal chance of obtaining supplies. Then again, the principal might interpret his or her behaviour as conventional, being essentially prudent and thrifty, as tighter control of how supplies are distributed results in less waste. This latter stance may signify that the principal has overlooked a chance to express the moral and ethical virtues in his or her practice. It might also signal a lapse in the principal’s awareness and ethical knowledge. A moral stance and a conventional stance may not be easily discernable in an observation, and might require the principal’s explanation obtained through interviews. Glesne (2006) offers the following insightful remark, “The opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see is the special strength of interviewing in qualitative inquiry” (p.81).

My study employed semistructured interviews using interview protocols. Hays and Singh (2012) suggest that semistructured interviews allow for some flexibility in that the order and pace of questions can be altered. Additional questions can be added to devise a unique interview, thereby capturing the interviewee’s experience. One advantage is the increased participant voice, which provides a richer picture of the phenomenon being studied. One drawback is that it can be somewhat harder to guarantee consistency of data collection across participants (Hays & Singh, 2012). Using an interview guide helps to ensure that all topics are explored in a suggested order,
that there are probes that allow for clarification of answers, that most if not all details are considered, and that the participant can offer authentic and thorough answers (Matthews & Ross, 2010). The formal protocol for Christine is included in this report, as Appendix H, entitled Interview Guide Principal.

In view of the fact that this project is a case study that employed biographical methods, two formal types of interviews were conducted with the principal. The first type of interview explored contemporary, present-day issues in the principal’s practice, which I will hereafter refer to simply as ‘main interviews’. The second type of interview explored past experiences in the principal’s personal and professional life. These are referred to in this study as ‘biographical interviews’ or ‘interviews with a biographical focus’.

I decided to conduct the main interviews and biographical interviews alternately due to the time, emotion and reflection involved, as opposed to conducting each type consecutively. This meant that I conducted biographical interviews in between the main interviews. My rationale for this approach was that the biographical interviews involve significant reflection as they focus on the past, and can be lengthy and emotionally tiring for the participant. I scheduled the main interviews in a timely manner so that the principal and I could have an on-going discussion of recent situations in her practice. These two types of interviews tended to inform and propel each other and to work synergistically. Issues arising in the biographical interviews sometimes connected with issues arising in the principal’s current practice and vice versa. The biographical interviews enriched and in part contextualized the main interviews. All interviews took place over the course of the field work.

Interviews drew on observations, document analysis, and the literature in the field. Using data from observations and documents helped to keep the dialogue between myself and Christine focused and on topic. I could follow-up on curious, unforeseen and surprising ideas without the interview losing its guiding framework. At times these interviews contained questions that followed up on responses from preceding interviews in order to seek clarification or further elaboration. This method of questioning made sense because the interviews tended to connect in an unfolding narrative or story.

In total, nine formal interviews were conducted with Christine. Christine and I scheduled our interviews together month-by-month, and, as recommended by Robson (2002), at a time in the
school day suitable for both of us. Some of the interviews occurred in the morning while others occurred in the afternoon. All interviews were conducted in her office with the door closed. Each interview in total lasted between 35 minutes and 115 minutes. Interview five was conducted in one session, interviews one, four, six, and nine were conducted in two sessions, and interviews two, three, seven and eight were conducted in three sessions. All interviews were completed on the same day that they were started, regardless of whether they were in two sessions or three sessions. Christine and I intended to complete each interview in one session but due to the nature of Christine’s responsibilities, there were times when we had to pause the interview so she could attend to a pressing situation. We always resumed the interview as soon as she was available that same day. The first interview of my fieldwork was conducted on November 4, 2014, and the final interview of my fieldwork was conducted on April 17, 2015. An interview was originally scheduled for April 30, 2015, which was the last day of my field placement. It was postponed at Christine’s request. As a result, two interviews were conducted in June; the interview postponed from April 30, 2015 was conducted on June 17, 2015 and a final interview was conducted on June 30, 2015. It was always our intention to conduct our final interview in June because the topic involved reflecting on the entire school year and envisioning the future. This interview also provided an opportunity for Christine to reflect on the study and consider how it had impacted her practice and how it had informed her professional learning. Christine reflected on the school year, considered her vision and goals for the upcoming year, and contemplated the legacy she hoped to leave behind at the school.

In addition to interviewing Christine, I also conducted one interview with each of the other participants. The interviews were scheduled in collaboration with the participant and, as recommended in the literature, I always did my best to arrange the interview on the best day and time for the participant (Robson, 2002; Yin, 2014). Interviews generally occurred during the morning, afternoon, or after school at a convenient time for the participant. I sometimes met with parents in the evening to accommodate their work schedules. Out of courtesy to Christine, and knowing that she and the office staff would be gone by the time the parent arrived, I would tell her that I would be staying into the evening to conduct an interview, but would not reveal the name of the participant.

Most of the interviews with participants other than Christine were conducted in a small, private, and comfortable room just inside the library on the second floor of the school. This room was
located on a different floor away from Christine’s office and the main office to maintain confidentiality. As advised in the literature, being located just inside the library meant that the participant did not have to pass through people to get to the room, which made it more discreet (Josselson, 2013; Matthews & Ross, 2010). The room had a table large enough for two people, two chairs, and a heavy wooden door that was always closed during the interviews. Occasionally an interview was conducted in a teacher’s classroom with no one else present and the door closed. One of the parent interviews was conducted in a seminar room, after the school day had finished, and again with the door closed. Interviews with the administrators were conducted separately in their offices with the doors closed. Where possible, I scheduled interviews when Christine was out of the school in order to create an additional level of confidentiality for everyone, including Christine. Four interviews were conducted off-site and these included the interviews with the field superintendent, the priest, the administrator (colleague) and the board resource teacher.

Each interview had standard questions to establish consistency across participants, however, questions were altered slightly to be relevant (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 2013). For example, when I interviewed an educational assistant, I might ask about the nature of the principal’s involvement in deciding which students get chosen to receive individual educational assistance. Likewise, for a parent, I might ask about a situation where a safety concern was brought to the principal, and the parent’s views on how the principal dealt with it. Each interview began with general questions about the participant in order to get a sense of his or her role and duties in the school, followed by more specific questions about how the participant’s work or involvement in the school connected to the principal’s work. Rubin and Rubin (2005) note, “most qualitative interviews are between strangers, so part of the interviewing process requires establishing a connection that allows for an openness of exchange” (p. 13). My study employed semistructured interviews using interview protocols. The formal interview protocol entitled Interview Guide Other Participants is included in this report as Appendix I.

I interviewed thirty two “Other Participants” and they included the following: one field superintendent; two vice principals; one secretary; ten regular classroom teachers including at least one teacher from each grade; five specialty teachers including Special Education, English as a Second Language, French, Physical Education and Guidance; one Child & Youth Worker (CYW); one Early Childhood Educator (ECE); two Educational Assistants (ECE); one
custodian; one lunchtime supervisor; one local parish priest; one bus driver; three parents; one administrator (colleague); and one board resource teacher. The Chart of Selected Other Participants is included in this report as Appendix J. Most of the “Other Participants” work in the school on a daily basis with the exception of the following: the field superintendent, who is located at the school board head office; the guidance teacher who works in the school for one half day each week; the local parish priest who works in a nearby church; the administrator (colleague) who is located in a school in a nearby district; and the board resource teacher who is located in a district office.

I used a Zoom H2n Handy Recorder with an 8 gigabyte SD card, set to record WAV files, as my primary recording device for interviews. I selected the Zoom H2n because of its ability to produce clear recordings with minimal background noise. Josselson (2013) notes, “The aim is to get clear sound that you can transcribe easily” (p. 55). The Zoom H2n is relatively small, lightweight, unobtrusive and operates on 2AA alkaline batteries that run for twenty hours. As a precaution, I always had extra batteries with me. The Zoom H2n can also operate from a computer USB charge or from a wall outlet adapter if necessary. I had these accessories with me although I never had to use them. A red indicator light makes it easy to tell when it is recording. The Zoom H2n came with a cable that interfaced between the recorder and a computer USB port. I was able to transfer audio files from the Zoom H2n to my computer using a USB cable that came with the recorder.

When connected to the computer, the Zoom H2n would immediately prompt me to transfer files. I opened the Finder application on my iMac desktop and accessed the H2n Zoom device. I could easily see the folders which contained the WAV audio files and I dragged them from the H2n Zoom to my computer. I would then dismount the Zoom H2n and reformat the SD card, thereby erasing all recordings. On my computer, I would rename the WAV files according to the following convention: participant’s pseudonym – role – date – part of interview. For example, SMITH – TEACHER – DEC 2 – Part 1/2.WAV. I developed this system for easy reference and organization. Each file contained a part designation as each interview often contained more than one WAV file. If an interview was paused, it created a subsequent file. Thus, each interview could contain several files. It was common for me to test and pause the Zoom H2n recorder at the beginning of each interview, thus creating more than one WAV file.
In addition to the Zoom H2n, I used a password protected iPhone 5 with an iTalk recorder premium application as a backup recording device. The iTalk application was an inexpensive purchase from the Apple application store. The iTalk application produces audio interchange file format (.aiff). I selected this application because it was inexpensive and user friendly. It gave me three prompts: “Press to Record,” “Press to Stop,” and “Press to Resume.” The iTalk application also allowed me to choose three levels of recording quality: “good”, “better” and “best”. I always had it set to “best”. The iPhone 5 with the iTalk application produced clear recordings.

Audio files could be easily transferred from my iPhone to my computer using a lightning to USB cable. I opened up an interface to the iPhone through iTunes and accessed the iTalk application. I selected the relevant .aiff files and dragged them onto my computer. I then deleted the files from my iPhone and dismounted the phone from the computer. On my computer, I renamed the files from the iPhone in the same format with the participant’s pseudonym – role – date – part. For example, SMITH – TEACHER – DEC 2 – Part 1/1.aiff. Again, this procedure helped to facilitate organization. I maintained the same naming convention as the Zoom H2n for consistency.

I used both audio devices to record interviews with all participants, including Christine. The most significant reason for using two audio devices was that I did not want to risk losing data due to an unforeseen mechanical failure. Having two devices meant that if something happened to one device I would be able to continue the interview with the other device, as suggested by Josselson (2013). I explained this reason to each participant before beginning the interview. Having two devices also put me at ease because I was able to concentrate on what the participant was saying, without having to be concerned about whether the audio device was working properly. No participant expressed a concern about having two devices, although I was always prepared to use only one device if it made the participant more comfortable. As recommended, I always tested my voice and the participant’s voice on both recorders before beginning the interviews (Josselson, 2013; Seidman, 2013). I explained to each participant that I would be downloading the interview files from each audio device onto a desktop computer at home following the interview, and that I would erase the files on both audio devices. No participant expressed a concern with this procedure. Matthews and Ross (2010) emphasize that there is a responsibility on the part of the researcher to ensure that the participant does not experience undue stress or anxiety.
During interviews, I often wrote brief notes on the Interview Guide either in the margins or above or below the questions. I recorded key words and key points the participant used in his or her answer. These key words and points were an important way to track details to follow-up on and to note aspects of the participant’s answer that needed further clarification and elaboration (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). It was important to maintain eye contact with the participants so I wrote quickly and kept my notes brief (Creswell, 2007; Springer, 2010). I found that by committing pen to paper I could more easily follow the conversation, the connections between ideas, and realize when a question was only partly answered (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013). These brief notes were not shared with any participant and none of the participants asked to see them.

I transcribed the interviews shortly after conducting them to make my workload manageable and to learn from the interviews. In the earlier interviews of my study, I realized that I was interrupting the participant more than required, as Josselson (2013) and Springer (2010) warn can happen. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) argue that while an interviewer can verbally convey how a question is worded or articulated, developing competence with the non-verbal dimensions of an interview require practice. Over time I made concerted efforts to refrain from interrupting and listen more closely in subsequent interviews. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) remark, “the intonation of questions, the stretching of pauses, sensitive listening, and the establishment of good rapport in the interview situation rest largely on tacit knowledge acquired through practice” (p. 75).

In the transcription process I used several pieces of software. I loaded the WAV files into Express Scribe Transcription Software Pro in order to play back the interview audio recordings on my desktop computer at home. I purchased an AltoEdge USB Foot Pedal which is connected with a USB cable to the computer and works with the Express Scribe software. The pedal allowed me to control the audio playback with my foot so that I could stop, rewind, or fast forward the audio. Using the Express Scribe desktop interface on my computer, I could increase or slow the playback speed and volume to catch small details. Adjusting the speed helped to ensure that I had accurately transcribed the participant’s words. Using the foot pedal to control recording playback proved to be efficient and freed my hands to type.
Simultaneously, I used Dragon Dictate for Mac to transcribe the interviews. Once I trained Dragon Dictate to recognize my voice and I learned the commands, I found Dragon useful for transcribing. I could dictate the interview to Dragon. I used a headset/microphone provided with the Dragon software to listen to audio playback from Express Scribe. I then repeated what I was hearing into Dragon Dictate so it would appear in typed written form in Microsoft Word. The foot pedal allowed me to quickly stop, fast forward, or rewind playback and type necessary corrections. The headset provided privacy and sharp sound quality. The microphone arm of the headset allowed Dragon Dictate to pick up my voice with greater accuracy. At first this process was cumbersome due to a learning curve. As time passed, I became accustomed to it. I found that Dragon Dictate allowed me to concentrate on the details of the interview without having to be overly concerned with the mechanics of transcription.

When transcribing I made notations in the transcripts based on what I heard in the recording using brackets and italicized words (Seidman, 2013). For example, if participants emphasized particular words, I indicated that by typing the words in italics and then typing “emphasis in original” in brackets directly following the words. If there was more than one place in the quotation where participants emphasized words, I typed the words in italics each time the emphasis occurred and I typed “emphasis in original” only once in brackets at the very end of the quotation. When participants emphasized particular words by raising or lowering their voices, I typed those words in italics and indicated in brackets, preceding the words, that the participant had changed their voice. If a participant expressed something of non-verbal significance, such as banging a fist on a desk or table, I noted it in brackets. Other non-verbal aspects such as laughs, sighs, pauses or interruptions, including telephone rings or a knock at the door, were also noted in brackets. If participants omitted words that were necessary in understanding what they were saying, I inserted words in brackets to help the reader understand the quotation. Shopes (2011) comments that in interviews, “Meaning is conveyed though language, which in turn is shaped by memory, myth, and ideology and through nonverbal expression and gesture, which give both immediacy and emotional depth to the exchange and further command the listener’s attention” (Shopes, 2011, p. 458).

This excerpt from my study provides an example,
This is the institution [that] I’m teaching in [and] a lot of people have high regard for me teaching here [bangs fist on table] although out of the blue, [raises voice] one of your students brought in a weapon [emphasis in original] and it’s something to feel pretty bad about I would say, and if we fail to act now, I think we’ll be failing altogether [sighs], we as a school community will be failing. (interview, Gerard)

No participant, including Christine, ever requested to see transcripts. Nonetheless, I sometimes removed verbal ticks such as ‘right’ or ‘you know’ when it interfered with understanding the participant’s message or did nothing to clarify what the participant said. Seidman (2013) stresses the importance of maintaining the accuracy of the participant’s words. He remarks, “Although inevitably the researcher’s consciousness will play a major role in the interpretation of interview data, that consciousness must interact with the words of the participant recorded as fully and as accurately as possible” (Seidman, 2013, p. 117).

Along with semi-structured interviews that were pre-scheduled, I also conducted unstructured interviews. According to Hays and Singh (2012), unstructured interviews are like a “guided conversation” where the focus of the interview is on the immediate context where the interview takes place. Like an informal discussion strategy, unstructured interviews provided a method for following up on my field notes to clarify with the participant what I had observed, and to include his or her insights. I sought clarification of the data in my field notes by restating aloud to the participant what I had seen and heard in order to ensure my interpretation was accurate. Seeking clarification helped build trust and was important in capturing an authentic and accurate portrayal of the principal’s practice (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Seidman, 2013). As recommended by Rosenberg (2013) I found it was important to verify and contextualize what I was observing, not only to ensure accurate data, but to ease possible feelings of suspicion or resentfulness that could arise if I consistently took notes without engaging participants in dialogue. This was particularly important with Christine, given the fact that she was the main participant, and I spent a great deal of time with her.

Data from unstructured interviews were recorded as field notes and not disclosed to the participants. Sometimes these data were referred to in subsequent formal interviews to gain further detail or add context to the topic under discussion. Unstructured interviews required a sensitivity to timing; they needed to be relevant to the issue at hand and at the right moments.
where Christine could engage in sustained conversation. I found a similar challenge with classroom teachers who are on structured schedules, and could not always be free to engage in conversation because they had to return to their students. To meet this challenge, I often wrote down my questions and then approached the participants privately as soon as they were available. Having my questions prepared ahead of time meant that the discussion was focused, and I could be respectful of participants’ time (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Mason, 2002). Despite challenges, I found that unstructured interviews offered a more complete understanding of what I had observed, and helped to further establish a trusting relationship with participants, who appreciated the opportunity to clarify the details of a situation and express their views and insights. Patton (2002) suggests that trust and cooperation develop between the researcher and the participant in a “mutual exchange.” This “mutual exchange” occurs when the researcher obtains data from the participants, and the participants “find something that makes their cooperation worthwhile, whether that something is a feeling of importance from being observed, useful feedback, pleasure from interactions with the observer, or assistance in some task” (Patton, 2002, p. 312).

No formal protocol was created for these unstructured interviews because they were spontaneous and context bound. I used my instincts and good judgement to conduct these interviews, which grew easier over time as participants became accustomed to my presence and grew to trust me.

3.3.3 Document Analysis

In addition to interviews and observations, my study incorporated document analysis. Documents are written texts and records about people and things but can also include technology, such as audiotapes and videos (Matthews & Ross, 2010; Hartas, 2010). Documents can provide insight into how rooted ethical values are in the function and procedures of the school (Langlois & Lapointe, 2010; Mahoney, 2006). Documents can reveal how the structure and culture of an organization influence and shape ethical decisions and dilemmas that confront the principal (Beck 2003; Cranston et al., 2006; Greenfield, 2004; Haynes, 2002).

Christine shared an assortment of printed documents and published materials with me. These documents included professional books and magazines, materials from training sessions and principal meetings as well as correspondence from students, parents and colleagues. Documents also comprised letters of recommendation and performance reviews, the school handbook.
including the code of conduct, as well as memos, emails and newsletters. In addition, I gathered resource guides, curriculum documents, policies, and strategic plans. I visited the school’s website and the board of education’s website. I looked for keywords, codes and themes that emerged in printed and electronic materials. I noted places in the printed and electronic materials where keywords, codes and themes either aligned or were different from those found in my field notes and interview transcripts. When I searched through the materials, I thought about the messages that were conveyed about the moral climate of the school. I reflected on how those messages might influence and be influenced by the principal as an ethical leader.

I obtained written consent to photocopy non-public documents to use in my study. Written consent included the understanding that in the unlikely event that the document was copyrighted material, I would photocopy it for my exclusive use for the document analysis, but would not reproduce it in my written dissertation without securing appropriate permission from the publisher. Citations of documents are included in my dissertation wherever they are known. Descriptive and reflective data based on the documents I examined were incorporated with field notes and were not shared with Christine or any of the participants. Document analysis is regarded as an aspect of the observations and as such is directed by the Observation Guide (see Appendix G).

The amount of data collected from document analysis was relatively small, however it enhanced and influenced other methods, such as daily observations and interviews. Glesne (2006) outlines some advantages to using documents in a research study,

Documents corroborate your observations and interviews and thus make your findings more trustworthy. Beyond corroboration, they may raise questions about your hunches and thereby shape new directions for observations and interviews. They also provide you with historical, demographic, and sometimes personal information that is unavailable from other sources. (Glesne, 2006, p. 65)

When I analyzed documents in conjunction with observations and interviews, I found that I could obtain a better understanding of an ongoing situation or event. For example, if Christine sent an email about a situation that I did not completely understand, I would follow up on it in an interview to gain a better sense of what had happened. Sometimes when I observed Christine in an interaction with those involved in an ongoing situation, my observations provided additional
context for an email. Cohen et al. (2007) argue that beyond the information they convey, documents are also interpretations of events. They caution that documents must always be analyzed in context, so as to comprehend their relevance at the time that they are written. Their multilevel nature means that documents must be interpreted at many levels, and must therefore be contextualized. Matthews and Ross (2010) maintain that documents are communal and shared creations and therefore their context is essential.

Document analysis offered an indication of what the principal and stakeholders valued in their work and in the school. If the principal expressed a sentimentality about a document, that provided a sense of what she cherished in her life and in her profession. Hartas (2010) reminds us that personal notes or records are more likely to be misplaced, damaged or destroyed than are institutional documents. They are not as pervasive or reproducible and therefore the experiences of the participants could become overshadowed by the predominant views and discourse of the institution. I valued the non-public documents that Christine shared with me because they offered her a voice in the data and in the ongoing analysis. School policies that have endured gave me a sense of the ethical values upheld in the school, as well as what might be promoting or hindering an ethical climate. I sometimes referred to documents in interviews to obtain the participant’s views on the influence of the document on their practice and how it did or did not reflect the ethos of the school.

3.3.4 Participant Feedback

Participant feedback is the act of checking for understanding with participants in order to ensure that data is authentic and reliable. It involves paying close attention to what a participant is saying and then checking back with the participant to confirm that the words are accurate (Creswell, 2014; Seidman, 2013; Springer, 2010). Seidman (2013) claims that comprehending what people are saying is difficult even in everyday conversation because the context may not be evident or it may not be obvious what the person is referring to in the conversation. He maintains that people often “let such things slide” without ever really knowing what the person was saying but that in interviewing allowing things to “slide” undercuts the interviewing process (Seidman, 2013, p. 84).

I checked for understanding during interviews, after observations and when analyzing documents. In order to improve understanding, I asked the participant questions such as: “Can
you elaborate on what you just said?” or “This is what I heard you say… Did I understand you correctly?” For example, during one of my interviews with Christine I said to her, “I’m getting the sense that you really want the staff to see the human side of you, that they’re now seeing you as a person, not just an administrator in a professional role” (interview 1). Christine agreed with this interpretation and then offered more examples of how she tries to make a personal connection with staff, and how she tries to have them understand the ethical values that are important to her as a human being and as a leader.

During an interview with a participant named Harry, I noticed that he contradicted himself when he offered a personal definition of the word “morals.” When he subsequently offered an example, it did not align with his definition. I wanted to make sure that he did in fact contradict himself, and that it was not my interpretation that was inaccurate. I asked him, “Would it be fair to say that for you, morals actually might be [the] opposite of what you said originally? For you, morals might be more of your personal virtues?” Harry confirmed that my interpretation was correct, and we continued the interview without my having lingering doubts about what he really meant, and he did not have to wonder if I understood him correctly (interview, Harry).

Checking for understanding required awareness and vigilance to ensure that I did not “let such things slide” as Seidman (2013) cautioned. I listened carefully to a participant and made sure that I understood the answer before moving on to the next question. Creswell (2014) stresses that interviews and observations need to begin with the acknowledgement that there is an imbalance of power between the researcher and the participant. With that in mind, it is incumbent on the researcher to consider, among other things, whether participants will have a voice in how their words are understood. Lincoln and Guba (2013) explain that participant feedback helps establish credibility in the findings and interpretation of the research.

Data drawn from participant feedback were recorded in interview transcripts and as field notes. It worked in conjunction with other data collection methods and informed all subquestions.

3.4 Analysis and Representation

Data analysis was ongoing and did not occur in one stage but rather occurred during and after my field work. Hartas (2010) affirms that the qualitative researcher collects and analyzes data simultaneously, “as the interrogation of data leads researchers to ask new questions about their
research setting, to think about their existing concerns in new ways and, as a consequence, to collect new data in order to answer those questions” (Hartas, 2010, p. 56). One aspect of my data analysis involved transcribing interviews and applying preliminary codes to the transcripts. I also conducted preliminary coding in my observation field notes and with documents I received.

Preliminary coding involved looking for key words and phrases and marking them in the documents with different coloured highlighters. The choice of colour was arbitrary and did not have any deep significance, although I maintained the same colours throughout the process, in order to keep the analysis consistent. For example, when I found key words and phrases that revealed the moral essence of the principal’s practice I marked them in pink. Words like “fairness” and “compassion” were highlighted in pink. When I found key words and phrases that seemed to resonate with “system” language, I highlighted them in purple. For example, a phrase such as “build capacity for leadership” was highlighted in purple, because this phrase is prevalent in administrative documents and in the dialogue among administrators. When I found words and phrases that resonated in some way with Catholicity, such as the phrase “from a Catholic lens” I highlighted it in blue. If I thought a word or phrase represented more than one category, I highlighted half of it with one colour and half of it with the other colour. For example, the phrase “we are accountable” was highlighted in pink and purple because while it does have moral overtones, it can also be viewed as common “system language” among administrators. This preliminary coding drew my attention to what might be salient in the data without making hasty conclusions early in the analysis process. Using two colours reminded me to keep an open mind as the data were unfolding. It alerted me to areas where I needed more information and helped me reflect on questions I could ask as I was conducting the fieldwork. I was looking for emerging themes, and similarities between what I had observed and newer discoveries I was making. I was also alert for contradictions and inconsistencies. Patton (2002) encourages the researcher to pay attention to inconsistencies and states, “Finding such inconsistencies ought not to be viewed as weakening the credibility of results, but rather as offering opportunities for deeper insight into the relationship between inquiry approach and the phenomenon under study” (Patton, 2002, p. 248).

As Seidman (2006) explains, sometimes a word within the passage can imply a category into which the passage can fit. While marking the transcripts, I continued labelling interesting passages by applying a word or phrase that captured the subject of the passage. I often wrote
these words or phrases in the margins of the transcripts and field notes. I looked for patterns in the data and connections between the categories that might indicate themes (Seidman, 2006).

As data analysis progressed, I realized I was continually coding and acquiring copious field notes and transcripts in paper form. I looked for ways to code the transcripts in digital form to be more efficient. I had attended a professional development course with Professor Johnny Saldhaña at the American Educational Research Association conference in 2015 to increase my knowledge on methodology and he had mentioned NVivo software, which supports qualitative research. Saldhaña (2013) states, “In Vivo (sic) is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies, but particularly for beginning qualitative researchers learning how to code data, and studies that prioritize and honor the participant’s voice” (p. 91).

I decided to purchase a license for NVivo 10 software by QSR International along with several introductory webinars. I loaded my Microsoft Word transcript files into NVivo and began to code. NVivo allowed me to code from the transcripts into “nodes” which is simply a term NVivo uses to represent categories. Coding by hand on paper transcripts using multi coloured markers had given me a foundation in coding but NVivo complemented my process of analysis. It helped me discover similarities and discrepancies across multiple transcripts with greater ease. I could locate and compare instances of coding within and across transcripts quickly. The software revealed occurrences and frequencies of codes both within and across transcripts. I was able to determine the most prevalent codes in my preliminary analysis which allowed me to see coherence forming in the data (Creswell, 2007). For example, the codes “accountability” “care” and “diligence” emerged as the most prevalent codes in my preliminary analysis. NVivo helped me to analyze the data more efficiently while still remaining in control of decisions such as what to code and how to code it. Davidson and di Gregorio (2011) remark, “It is the researcher, not the technology, that decides the question that will guide the research and how it will be approached” (p. 638). A list entitled Most Prevalent Codes is included in this report as Appendix K.

I was alert to the importance of coding early and continually throughout the research process. I found that by coding the data in a timely manner, I experienced a vivid recall of details, as the context was salient. My recollection of the event or situation that was being described and its nuances were fresh in my memory, which made the analytic process more meaningful. If a detail
had been overlooked in a field note there was a greater chance that I would remember it. An apparently trivial detail could prove significant in the later stages of the data analysis. I could re-experience the situation in my mind, and this helped with the coding. Constant review of my field notes kept the data foremost in my thoughts, so that in an interview I could recall details with greater ease. I also reviewed the literature and thought about the concepts and insights that resonated with my study and those that were in some way distinctly different. I read Nel Nodding’s work and reflected on how caring relationships were formed between the principal and the people who interacted with her on a daily basis. Nodding’s work resonated with my study and helped me to consider how care was manifested in the relationships the principal developed in her prior life experiences that in turn influenced and informed her practice. Literature that was distinctly different from the focus of my study, but I nevertheless found intriguing, were discussions about mindfulness training and what role, if any, it plays in helping people to live an ethical life. The interviews I conducted with Christine motivated me to read this literature as she often talked about the importance of mindfulness training in her personal life and in her professional practice.

Transcribing interviews promptly and frequently reviewing field notes enabled me to more easily manage the large amounts of data that are typical of a case study. Cohen et al. (2007) suggest that analyzing data early in a research project lessens the possibility of “data overload” by helping the researcher identify the most significant aspects of the data to focus on in the future. They maintain that because qualitative studies lend themselves to gathering large amounts of data quickly, it is imperative on a practical level to analyze the data in a timely fashion (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 184).

Continuous data analysis helped me to be alert to the possibility of data saturation. Data saturation is defined as a point in the research where the researcher is no longer acquiring information that is contributing to a new understanding of the data (Hays & Singh, 2012; Matthews & Ross, 2010; Springer, 2010; Robson, 2002). In the later stages of the fieldwork I noticed some repetition in answers from other participants. I was also detecting some repetition in Christine’s remarks. It felt like I was approaching data saturation. I used it as an opportunity to hone my questions and probe more deeply in areas that I had not previously explored.
3.4.1 Identifying Moral and Ethical Significance

I consistently referred back to my research questions and to my guiding perspectives and concepts to make sense of the data and to make informed judgments about how the data revealed morally significant aspects of a principal’s practice. Referring back to my research questions and my guiding perspectives and concepts helped to keep my analysis in perspective, so that I did not oversubscribe or undersubscribe moral significance. I sometimes asked the participants if aspects of their work were morally relevant to them and to explain their answer. These types of questions helped ensure that the data reflected the experience of the participants. I would sometimes return to a question that I asked earlier in an interview if I felt that I did not allot enough time for the participant to fully explain an answer. I then asked follow-up questions to determine if the participant believed there was moral significance in what they were discussing and the reasons for their answer. Asking participants for further details meant that I did not make assumptions about what they were saying. It helped ensure I did not overlook what was morally significant to the participant and I did not ascribe moral significance to answers where the participant did not see any moral relevance. I reflected on the data by asking questions such as: Does the situation I observed connect in any way to notions of what is right and what is wrong? What facets of the situation make this distinction clear? Is there a struggle in making the right decision and if so, how is this struggle revealed? Is the situation fraught with ethical complexities, and if so, how is this evident to me? Referring back to the literature, I searched for language or words that could help me describe what the data was revealing about the moral and ethical dimensions of a principal’s practice.

3.4.2 Establishing the Principal’s Ethical Knowledge

The term ethical knowledge was defined in Chapter One as it pertains to a teacher’s “understanding and acceptance of the demands of moral agency as professional expectations implicit in all aspects of their day-to-day practice” (Campbell, 2003a, p.3). Although Campbell’s (2003a) work is focused on a teacher’s practice, her concept of ethical knowledge aligns with the guiding perspectives and concepts of my study, that support the notion that principals are moral agents who can have a profound influence on the moral tone of schools. As leaders who direct many initiatives and procedures, the ethical knowledge they hold, and their ability to apply it to a range of circumstances, reveals the awareness they have of their authority as moral agents.
Questions that guided me while I was reviewing my data included: Is the principal aware that her words and actions have moral significance? How do I know that? Did the principal use moral language such as ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, ‘ethical’ or ‘unethical’, ‘moral’ or ‘immoral’ when discussing situations in her practice? Was she aware that she was using moral language? Could the principal identify interactions where she expressed the ethical virtues? Did she have a sense of how she expresses ethical virtues and the importance they have in her practice? Could the principal identify moral intentions behind her words and actions? How did she make her intentions known to stakeholders?

3.5 Research Credibility and Limitations of the Study

Qualitative research must adhere to standards so that the methodology, analysis and results are accurate, credible, reliable and valid. Both quantitative and qualitative researchers have to address limitations in their research, although they go about it a different way (Mason, 2002). Quantitative research often relies on standardized tools that can repeatedly produce the same results over time and place, thereby demonstrating reliability. It can be more challenging for a researcher employing qualitative methods to demonstrate reliability, as neither the methods nor the data are generally standardized (Mason, 2002). The qualitative researcher must be ready to prove that the methods and analysis have addressed the research questions and that they have been “thorough, careful, honest and accurate (as distinct from true or correct)” (Mason, 2002, p.188). The researcher needs to be transparent in reporting the steps that were taken to obtain results so that the research demonstrates integrity and can stand up to scrutiny.

The following practices are aimed at addressing research credibility and the limitations that might be found in my study. They have been informed by various sources including: Cohen et al. (2007); Creswell (2007, 2014); Fraenkel & Wallen (2006); Josselson (2013); Lincoln & Guba (2013); Mason (2002) Matthews & Ross (2010); Merriam (2009); Rubin & Rubin (2005); Parsons & Servage (2005); Patton (2002); Schram (2006); Seidman (2006); and Yin (2014).

3.5.1 Interview Structure

Semistructured and unstructured interviews encourage participants to share their views and experiences in an open and honest fashion, thereby assisting in the credibility of the data. Matthews and Ross (2010) explain that semistructured interviews contain shared questions and a
shared focus for each participant, while unstructured interviews concentrate on wider areas for conversation. Both these methods of interviewing “enable the participant to talk about the research topic in their own way” (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 221). As Josselson (2013) and Matthews and Ross (2010) recommend, every effort was made to ensure that the place and time for the interviews contained a minimum of distractions so participants could speak candidly. All interviews took place in private spaces. One of the objectives of my research study was to uncover participants’ candid views on how the moral aspects of the principal’s work connect to their own work in the school. Semistructured and unstructured interviews were appropriate methods for eliciting authentic and meaningful responses from participants.

The semistructured interviews that I conducted with participants allowed questions to be asked in the moment to gain further information and clarification. As the interview progressed, I could change the order of questions, and delve for deeper answers in areas of the interview that seemed to resonate with interviewees. Mason (2002) and Matthews and Ross (2010) suggest that semistructured interviews encourage a flow of conversation. Rubin and Rubin (2005) state, “Qualitative interviews and ordinary conversations share much in common. . . . Researchers listen to each answer and determine the next question based on what was said” (p. 12). Semistructured interviews can appear deceptively easy to the casual observer but actually require a significant amount of preparation (Mason, 2002; Matthews & Ross, 2010). Mason (2002) argues that the researcher must strike a balance between establishing and maintaining a dialogue that flows while at the same time ensuring that the data that are generated apply to the research questions. Judgments must be made in the moment so that the interview is both enjoyable but also has substance.

I listened closely to the participant during interviews to be able to discern places where a participant left out a detail that might be important in understanding an answer. As Mason (2002) advises, I jotted down brief notes in the margins of my interview guide and returned to them as soon as there was a natural break or bridging of an idea in the interview. In keeping with the ideas of Josselson (2013), I tried not to interrupt a participant’s response but waited for natural breaks to clarify information. This allowed participants to express uninterrupted thoughts in their answers. Rubin and Rubin (2005) remark, “Overall, qualitative interviewing requires more intense listening than normal conversations, a respect for and curiosity about what people say, a
willingness to acknowledge what is not understood, and the ability to ask what is not yet known” (p. 14).

3.5.2 Member Checking

Member checking, otherwise known as participant feedback, involved obtaining clarification from participants in an attempt to make sure that their responses were recorded accurately (Creswell, 2014; Seidman, 2013). I clarified my understanding and interpretation of details I had seen and heard during observations and interviews to help ensure that my conclusions were accurate and as free from bias as possible. At times, I sought clarification by restating aloud to the participants what I had heard in order to confirm that it was accurate. Participant feedback, or member checking, helps to establish credibility in the findings and interpretation of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 2013).

3.5.3 Reflection and Disclosure

Reflection and disclosure involve efforts to recognize and make transparent my own preconceptions, assumptions, and viewpoints as they shape the choices I make throughout my study (Lichtman, 2013). I am aware that methods used in my study are of an interpretative nature and depend on my observations, as well as the significance I attribute to them. The section in Chapter One entitled What Brought Me Here is part of an effort to understand and declare events and experiences in my personal and professional life that might have informed my study. Parsons and Servage (2005) maintain that in qualitative research, research bias is a constant reality. In referring to the qualitative researcher, they explain, “The rationale here is simple: the more you know about the person, the more you can understand the research” (p. 19). I wrote reflections in my field notebook which helped me become aware of how my own biases might be influencing my perceptions. These reflections made me conscious of the need to remain open and receptive to the unfolding data, and resist making hasty conclusions. Schram (2006) offers the following advice to researchers, “you need to be relentless in your efforts to uncover the influence of unexamined assumptions in your aims, questions, and tendencies as a researcher” (p. 179). Reflection and disclosure help to ensure that the data is as credible and reliable as possible.
3.5.4 Prolonged Engagement

It is understood that when a researcher enters the field there will be some effects on participants (Cohen et al., 2007; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). This is true for all research but it can be particularly apparent in qualitative studies, where researchers tend to stay in the setting for a longer period of time. The effects of prolonged engagement can be positive in the sense that participants may feel more at ease with the researcher the longer that he or she is present, and may then speak more candidly as they begin to trust the researcher. As well, participants may be more authentic in what they say and do because over time they notice the researcher less and less and resume their normal patterns of behaviour (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). In view of the fact that my study took place over five consecutive months for three days a week, it is reasonable to assume that prolonged engagement was a factor in my study. Over time I found that Christine and staff members seemed more comfortable with my presence as a researcher. As the months passed I felt more a natural part of the setting and it became normal to be a part of school meetings and events.

There can also be negative effects to prolonged engagement which can involve participants operating at a much higher level of productivity than they normally do, sometimes known as a “halo effect” (Patton, 2002, p. 567). Conversely, participants can be so stressed by the presence of the researcher that they function at a much lower level of productivity than normal (Patton, 2002). Prolonged engagement helps to establish credibility in the findings and interpretation of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Being in the school for five consecutive months contributed to building a professional rapport with the staff, who demonstrated an ongoing interest and curiosity in my research. They continually made courteous inquiries and were patient and generous with their time in answering my questions. They did not appear to view the research as a disruption to their work.

3.5.5 Audit Trail

The purpose of the audit trail is to increase transparency in terms of how data were gathered and analyzed, thereby making my study more reliable and valid. This dissertation and the field notes contain detailed descriptions of the research procedures and methods used in my study, particularly changes that occurred and decisions that were made. This dissertation and the field
notes also contain a thorough record of my research experience, including the various stages of analysis and writing.

3.5.6 Thick Description

Lincoln & Guba (2013) claim that thick description is evident when “the researcher provides enough description of the context so that the reader can determine whether the findings apply to his or her context” (p.105). Patton (2002) claims that thick description “provides the foundation for qualitative analysis and reporting” (p. 437). He explains that thick description invites the reader into the setting using enough detail that readers almost imagine themselves in the setting. Readers begin to empathize with participants as the setting, the people, and their problems become tangible and real (Patton, 2002).

This case study, conducted over five consecutive months, used multiple sources of data collection in an attempt to gain thick description. Multiple sources of data collection included observations, interviews and document analysis (Creswell, 2014). The design of my case study, which involved observing the principal during numerous interactions, facilitated the collection of thick descriptive data. In-depth interviews and detailed field notes provided a means for generating thick description of the setting, the interactions, and the participants. For example, my field notes describing the principal’s office are detailed enough to enable readers to imagine themselves there. The data chapters that follow will demonstrate that thick descriptive data were obtained in this study.

3.5.7 Generalizability

The results obtained in this case study with a single principal cannot be used to make claims about how all principals conceptualize their practice in ethical terms, and this is not the intent of the study. Rather the intent is to create a rich account of who the principal is as an administrator and how she makes sense of the ethical dimensions of her practice as she attempts to build and maintain an ethical school. This study functions as an example of what might be attainable. It is intended to contribute to the knowledge base of school leadership and teaching practice. It is an invitation to practitioners, scholars and stakeholders to continue the discourse on how school leaders conceive of their practice in ethical terms. As Merriam (2009) states, “It is the reader, not the researcher, who determines what can apply to his or her context” (p.51). Yin (2014) suggests
that one should view a case study as a chance to cast an “empirical light” on theoretical notions, ideas, and beliefs, and that case studies are “likely to strive for generalizable findings or lessons learned – that is, analytic generalizations - that go beyond the setting for the specific case” (Yin, 2014, p. 40). He explains that analytic generalizations could possibly be applied to various circumstances that go much further than “any strict definition of the hypothetical population of ‘like cases’ represented by the original case” (Yin, 2014, p.41).

One of the limitations of this study involves the amount of awareness Christine had about the purpose of the study before it even began (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). The Informed Consent that she had to sign before she participated offered her some prior knowledge of the study. She might have begun the study with a heightened sense of her ethical knowledge, and this awareness might have in turn affected the data. Nevertheless, as outlined earlier in this chapter, Christine was chosen through the process of purposive sampling because she had already demonstrated a level of ethical awareness (Merriam, 2009). Based on my understanding and knowledge gleaned through the literature, teachers (and I would argue principals) do not instantly become ethical based on suggestion and opportunity. Rather they apply moral principles and express ethical virtues in their professional practice because they are first and foremost ethical people (Campbell, 2003a, 2003b, 2011; Begley, 2006; Fenstermacher, 1990; Hansen, 1995; Higgins, 2011; Hostetler, 1997; Huebner, 1996; Sockett, 2012; Schwartz, 1998).

Another limitation of my study is the fact that I was the sole researcher. While there is no necessity to collaborate with fellow researchers to ensure that results are consistent, being the only researcher increases the chance that my biases and prejudices will affect the results. There are details that I could have missed that co-researchers might have obtained. I remained aware of this limitation throughout my study and relied on strategies previously discussed, such as member checking, to try to minimize these effects (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Seidman, 2013).

A third limitation relates to purposive sampling and the possibility that Christine may not have been a suitable participant for the study. This did not turn out to be the case, however, it was a very real possibility. Additionally, I was conscious that the duration of the study could present a challenge in keeping Christine involved and engaged amidst her demanding work obligations. Christine and I maintained an ongoing dialogue about the study through semistructured and
unstructured interviews. An excerpt from an interview in the later stages of the fieldwork is revealing. I ask her how her involvement in my research study has informed her professional learning. I also ask her if there were any particular insights she gained. She replies,

I am really happy that it gave me the opportunity to look at how [emphasis in original] I am as a leader and as an educator and as a person and [pause] I think that we are often so busy that we don’t very often get an opportunity to really think about what we do every day so it’s a gift really to be able to do that. (interview 9)

In the same interview Christine confides,

Honestly at the beginning when I said [laughs], a long time ago when I said, ‘Yes, I’ll do it’ and then when you came to me and said, “This is what it means,” I was like “Oh my goodness, this is impossible. I can’t have Kelly following me every day. This is not going to end well.” But I had no idea, I had no clue, to be very honest what a fulfilling experience it could have been. (interview 9)

A final limitation of this study is the small sample size, which means that results cannot be generalizable. Hays and Singh (2012) advise that researchers consider their goals when deciding on the size of the sample. The intent of this study is to offer rich descriptive examples of a principal’s work that may illuminate, inform and identify with broader practices of administrators’ work more generally (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). My goal was to acquire an in-depth understanding of a principal’s practice that could inform the knowledge base of the ethical principal.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Throughout every stage of the research, consideration was given to protecting the people involved. As the researcher, it was incumbent on me to ensure that the participants’ physical and psychological well-being and dignity remained intact. A number of ethical considerations pertain to this study. Some of these have been briefly discussed in various parts of this chapter, and others are evident in the protocols included in the appendices. Sources that have informed this discussion include: Christians (2011); Cohen et al. (2007); Creswell (2014, 2007); Fraenkel &
Wallen (2006); Groundwater-Smith (2011); Mason (2002); Matthews & Ross (2010); Merriam (2009); Patton (2002); Seidman (2006); and the University of Toronto (2010).

This study adhered to the ethics protocol, established by the University of Toronto, outlined in the Guide for Informed Consent (2010). I commenced research when I received permission from the University of Toronto’s Office of Research Ethics (see Appendix C). All participants in this study were fully informed of the study’s purpose, its limitations and how consent and confidentiality would be established. The risks and benefits of the research were also outlined as well as any compensation that would be granted. The nature of participation as well as the responsibilities of the participants were also made clear. Participants were informed that participation is voluntary, and that they could decline to participate, could withdraw at any time, and could decline to answer any question or participate in any part of the study, all without negative consequences. All of this information was documented in the Information Letter and Consent Forms and provided to each participant (See Appendices A, B, and D).

All participants who were interviewed had to grant written consent to be audio recorded, and this was part of the Informed Consent document. “Not Primary” Participants had to grant written consent to be observed during spontaneous interactions with Christine, and to allow field notes to be taken based on those observations. The Informed Consent document made clear that if there was a specific situation they did not want me to observe or to take field notes on, this request could be made verbally at the moment of the interaction and I would honour that request.

Confidentiality was maintained for information that I purposely gathered, and that I inadvertently obtained by being in the school and in the principal’s office. All names of people and the research site in this dissertation have been changed to pseudonyms. Other identifying characteristics have been changed, unless doing so would compromise the truthfulness and reliability of the results. Raw data from the study that contains identifiable characteristics such as transcripts, field notes, digital files, emails, and photocopies have been kept in a safe and secure location and will be destroyed after a maximum of five years following the completion of my doctoral degree, with the exception of documents that I have permission to reproduce in reports and publications. Audio files will be destroyed at the completion of my study.

Data and results were not shared either verbally or otherwise with administrators, teachers, staff members, parents or community members. The possibility that colleagues, such as teachers or
administrators, reading this dissertation or other published reports could identify Christine in the context of the research was discussed with her (Matthews & Ross, 2010). I made clear to Christine that the intent of this study is to create a portrait of a practitioner to whom others can relate and draw lessons. This is possible when the participant is portrayed as a human being, who experiences successes and setbacks, as she strives to work with others to build an ethical school. Any such examples of Christine’s “shortcomings” would be presented with the utmost respect, esteem, and worthy intentions on the part of the researcher.

As a requirement of the board of education’s ethics approval process, I spoke to the field superintendent prior to commencing my study. In that conversation, I outlined the purpose of my study and explained that every possible precaution would be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all participants and the school. At the request of the field superintendent, I provided an email that summarized our conversation. The field superintendent was supportive throughout the duration of the fieldwork.

All participants were treated with respect and dignity. I tried to ensure that participants were not caused any undue stress. I was professional in the manner in which I approached all interactions and situations, and thanked participants throughout the study for their gracious extension of time and energy. The data that I gathered that related to the research questions were considered admissible, and recorded through observational field notes and interview transcripts. Any other information not pertaining to the research questions was regarded as inadmissible, and largely not documented in field notes or transcripts. Semistructured interviews were conducted in private locations, free of distractions, as discussed earlier in this chapter (Josselson, 2013; Matthews & Ross, 2010). Unstructured interviews took place with as much privacy and discretion as possible. No unexpected psychological harm or adverse professional risks were anticipated for administrators, teachers, staff members, parents, and community members.

Some of the professional benefits that would be available to all participants, and especially Christine as a result of her participation in the study, included the following: a chance to discuss all aspects of her practice that hold moral and ethical significance; a chance to reflect on her words, actions and decisions in the ethical situations she faced daily; increased knowledge and awareness of her role in building and sustaining an ethical school; exposure to literature on the
ethical school leader; greater self-awareness and an opportunity to participate in research that contributes to professional discourse.

I expressed my appreciation to Christine and the staff by bringing treats to several staff gatherings. I also brought treats to celebrate special occasions, such as Christmas, and to mark the closure of my fieldwork. I routinely provided refreshments for Christine and the office staff and gave small tokens of appreciation to them at holidays. I brought packages of photocopy paper to compensate for any photocopying that I did in the school. These gestures seemed to be appreciated by everyone, especially Christine, as it brought staff members together and offered something tangible. Near the end of the fieldwork, I gave small tokens of appreciation individually and privately to all participants who were interviewed in my study. Finally, I provided a small monetary donation to the school which Christine directed toward a fund for needy families.

3.7 Conclusion

Understanding how a principal conceptualizes her work in moral terms and engages in ethical practices is a topic of conceptual and empirical research that lends itself well to qualitative methodology. This qualitative case study comprised in-depth interviews, sustained observations, document analysis, and participant feedback. These methods allowed me to obtain a rich and descriptive portrait of the principal and her work. Various measures, such as member checking, thick description and reflection and disclosure were put in place to ensure that this study was credible and reliable. Ethical considerations protected the confidentiality of participants and helped to ensure that they felt safe in disclosing information and in sharing their insights.

I will now turn to Chapter Four, which includes the contextual influences in the life of Christine. This chapter offers a unique portrait of Christine as a professional and as a human being. Data reported in Chapter Four was generated from a series of interviews that I conducted with Christine over the course of the fieldwork. A portrait of the school is also presented in Chapter Four and this portrait is regarded as descriptive data, in so far as it sheds light on the principal as a moral agent (Fullan, 2003; Heslep, 1997; Sergiovanni, 2001a, 2001b, 2013; Tuana, 2014) and reveals her awareness and ethical knowledge (Campbell 2003a, 2008b; Hansen, 2002; Starratt, 2013) within the context of her work in the school.
Chapter 4

4 Introducing Christine Bray and St. Abby

This chapter offers a rich descriptive account of the research site, St. Abby School. An introduction to the school provides the reader with an understanding of how the principal, Christine Bray, has contributed to the ethical climate in the school, and how it in turn provides a context for her actions. This chapter also highlights how Christine inspires a sense of community in the school and how the community in turn is a reference point for what she does when confronted with ethical situations. This chapter also examines efforts to provide enriching educational programs for students and support for families who are facing financial hardship.

I also introduce Christine, the main participant in this study, using excerpts from biographical interviews that are intended to give the reader a sense of who she is, as a person, and as a professional. Uncovering how Christine’s conduct, manner, words, and stated intentions have been influenced by the people, places and events in her life, provides a deeper understanding of Christine’s ethical leadership and her beliefs and practices.

4.1 St. Abby School

St. Abby School is a publicly-funded Catholic elementary school located in a city in Ontario, Canada. It consists of one main building with additional portable classrooms located in the school yard. The main building was originally constructed in the 1950’s and was torn down and rebuilt on the same site in the 1990’s. Over nine hundred and fifty students from junior kindergarten to grade eight attend the school for the full day, including junior and senior kindergarten students. Children in grades one, two and three comprise the primary division, children in grades four, five and six comprise the junior division and children in grades seven and eight are considered to be in the intermediate division. The portables are classrooms for students in grades four and six and some grade five students. There are more than two hundred students located in the portable classrooms. Students in portable classrooms enter the main building to eat their lunch in designated rooms, to use the gymnasium and the library, and for indoor recesses during inclement weather. The remainder of the student population is located in the main building.
The main school building has a front lobby that is spacious and circular with offices to one side and a large music room to the other side. There is a table located just inside the front door with flowers and several religious symbols. On the table a bible is located beside a cross, alongside a symbol for the board of education, and a wooden carving of the word “CHARITY”. A white candle is placed directly behind the word “CHARITY.” A small religious picture is placed on a window ledge above the table. The main school building has three floors with wide hallways. The walls throughout the school are predominately ivory but some are in soft shades of blue and brown. The floors are ivory but occasionally coloured tiles form abstract animal shapes, creating interest as you walk through the school. Bulletin boards featuring displays of student artwork are found throughout the hallways. Classrooms are located on all floors, and most are small but pleasant with many windows. Primary grades are situated on the lower floors while junior and intermediate grades are found on the upper floor. There is an elevator used only by adults but available for students with accessibility needs. Ramps are located both inside and outside the school to enhance accessibility. Overall the building gives a bright and cheery impression. The main gathering places are the staff room, the library and the gymnasium.

The staff room is large and pleasant with several rows of tables and chairs and a fully equipped kitchen. Staff gather here every day for lunch and monthly staff meetings. It is also used for special staff celebrations. “Treat Days” are held in the staff room once a week and staff members take turns providing food and refreshments for everyone. The staffroom is buzzing with people over the lunch hour and during recesses, but outside of those times it provides a quiet space to grade papers, plan lessons, and dialogue in small groups. Professional resources are located on bulletin boards and shelves. There is also a computer and a telephone for staff use. Students are generally not permitted in the staffroom unless accompanied by a staff member.

The school library is spacious with many tables and chairs and is located near the staff room. It has numerous fiction, non-fiction and story books that are appropriate for all grade levels. Classes visit the library once a week to borrow books, conduct research on computers, and listen to stories with the librarian. The library is sometimes used for meetings and for staff celebrations. It has one large enclosed room where the librarian works and a smaller enclosed room with a table and two chairs. The smaller enclosed room is where I conducted many of my interviews. The hallway outside the library is unusually wide and is occasionally used as a gathering place for classes.
The gymnasium is large and brightly painted with several basketball hoops and colourful lines on the floor to mark boundaries for sports and games. It can be divided into two smaller spaces using a mechanical divider. The gymnasium has interior and exterior windows providing natural light. Pennants awarded to the school’s sports teams flank the length of two walls and are placed near the ceiling. There is a stage that is used for performances, concerts, and plays. The gymnasium is primarily accessed from inside the building but can also be accessed from an outside playground. It is used for a variety of activities including physical education classes, sports’ tournaments, school-wide assemblies, fundraising activities, theatrical plays and concerts.

The main building and the portable classrooms are filled to capacity by a large student and staff population. There are approximately sixty teachers, twenty-five support staff, two vice principals and one principal to service the more than nine hundred and fifty students. The approximate numbers are intentional, and serve to maintain the anonymity of the school. Each grade has homeroom teachers who deliver core subjects such as language arts, math, religion, social studies, science, visual arts, drama and dance. Specialist teachers provide instruction in French, music, physical education, English as a Second Language (ESL), Special Education and Reading Intervention. Additionally, there is an Extended French program for students beginning in grade five and continuing until grade eight. The students in this program receive instruction in all subjects in English for half the day and French for half the day. Students are nominated for the program in grade four by their French teachers in consultation with their homeroom teachers and parents. In order to be nominated the student must have good grades, particularly in French, and overall good study habits. Students are only allowed to enter the program in grade five, although they can leave the program at any time with the permission of a parent.

The school year begins in September, the day after the Labour Day holiday, continuing until a two-week Christmas break in December. School resumes after New Year’s Day and pauses in mid-March for a one week break. The year concludes near the end of June. The school day begins at 8:30 am and ends at 3:00 pm, with two recess breaks of fifteen minutes each and a one-hour lunch break. Each day begins with the national anthem, prayers, and announcements. On the majority of days Christine is the first person to arrive at the school, and often begins her day at 6:00 am. The school is generally bustling around 7:30 am until about 5:30 pm, Monday through Friday, although some staff remain beyond 5:30 to mark papers and plan lessons. There is a daycare located in the school that operates before and after school hours and services the
families in the community. Large school busses provide transportation to and from the school for approximately half of the student population. The bus loading zone provides space for all the busses to park and is supervised by staff before and after school.

Students arriving in the morning gather in the school yard to play before the bell rings. They also play in the yard for the fifteen-minute recess periods and for forty minutes of the lunch hour. Students eat their lunch during the first twenty minutes of the lunch hour and are supervised in their classrooms. Lunch supervision is shared between staff members and parents who are hired for the lunch hour. After twenty minutes the bell rings and students exit the building into the school yard. The yard appears large when it is empty, but once it is filled with children, it is barely large enough for students to play. The portables occupy precious play space, and a closer look at the ground between the portables reveals a large multi lane track, that appears to have been once used for running, and whose colours have since faded over time (field notes November 11, 2014). There are designated areas in the yard for grade levels, and kindergarten students play in fully enclosed spaces. The yard areas are concrete although classes do visit a nearby park for special games and celebrations. All students are supervised by staff in the yard. During inclement weather students remain in their classrooms during recess and lunch periods to engage in quiet activities such as reading and board games.

Many students and their families have recently immigrated to Canada from various countries in the world. Some families have experienced upheaval and trauma and are offered the services of a Settlement Worker who connects parents with resources in the community. The Settlement Worker is not located in the school, but can be reached by telephone or email. Many families live on modest incomes while some parents struggle to find employment. Some families are single-parented, and many have two working parents. It is not unusual for a parent to hold more than one job. There are families living in shelters for various reasons such as seeking safe haven from domestic violence situations. A social worker is at the school one day a week, and provides services to students who have been referred by Christine in consultation with the classroom teacher.

A guidance teacher, named Candice, visits the school for a half a day each week and works closely with Christine. Christine advises Candice on which students require assistance. Candice helps students who are dealing with a range of challenges such as conflict with peers or authority
figures, difficulty maintaining good grades, and stressful circumstances at home. Candice services all grades but provides ongoing support to the grade eight students, as they select their high schools and grapple with the fears and uncertainties in making this transition. A Child and Youth Worker (CYW) named Oakley is on-site every day. She works with Christine to help students who are demonstrating aggressive or defiant behaviour receive the supports they require to succeed at school. Aggressive or defiant behaviour can include tantrums, refusal to follow school rules, and hostile responses to stressful situations. Oakley, Candice and the social worker work closely with staff and parents alongside Christine, providing a team approach to delivering support for students.

Classes for students with special needs include English as a Second Language (ESL) and Special Education. There are four ESL teachers and four Special Education teachers. Students attending ESL and Special Education are withdrawn from their regular classrooms for part of the school day. There are also two Reading Intervention programs that are each taught by a different teacher. These programs are targeted toward improving students’ literacy skills. One program services students in grades one and two while the other program targets students in grades four, five and six. Students are withdrawn in small groups from their regular classrooms for one hour every day for a portion of the school year.

There are many financial needs among the families in the school. The community responds to these needs and Christine reinforces and encourages this response. There is a food bank located in the school whose contents are donated by the staff, the parents and community members. It is overseen by Mark, an ESL teacher. Christine communicates with Mark on a consistent basis to ensure that families in need are accessing the food bank. All students and parents are invited to use the food bank year-round, and there is no formal application process. Students accompany their teachers privately and individually to access items from the food bank, and parents can use it before and after school hours. Items include non-perishable food, children’s clothing, toiletries such as soap and toothpaste, and craft items such as colouring books and crayons. With assistance, children place items in strong grocery bags or back packs so that they can be safely and discreetly carried home. Concerted efforts are made by the teachers to ensure that students access the food bank in a manner that is sensitive to their feelings and protects their dignity (interview, Mark).
Donations from the community are sought year-round with special food, clothing, and toiletry drives at Christmas and Easter. Christine believes that initiatives such as the food bank allow students to experience in a tangible way what it means to be a part of a Catholic community. She explains,

our kids [are] trying to be good leaders and collecting food, collecting toiletries, helping each other in the community, to me [emphasis in original] that is Catholicity, when you are helping each other because they need something, whatever it is that they need . . . for me it all comes into being grateful, generous [and] forgiving. (interview 9)

Grocery gift cards are donated by the staff and by the community. Mark, the ESL teacher, and Candice, the guidance teacher, work closely with Christine to ensure that the neediest families are given priority for gift cards. Christine is familiar with many of the families and their financial situations. She examines lists compiled by teachers based on who they think might need assistance in their classrooms. Christine identifies families who are missing from the lists or who might refuse assistance due to personal pride. She advises Mark and Candice on how to best approach the families, and in situations that are particularly sensitive, she will contact the families herself (interview, Mark & interview, Candice).

I asked Christine where she developed an awareness of the moral influence that she can have as a principal in helping to improve the lives of families in the school. Referring to her teaching experience in a practicum in England she remarks,

I’m not even sure if up until that point I realized what I had to offer kids. I’ve talked to many teachers about it since that time that coming to work every day and teaching them [the students] how to read is important but it’s not the be-all and end-all. I think that when I was in that placement I realized that every single day we’re looking at the big picture. The kids, where are they coming from? What do they really need? Do they need someone to listen? Do they need lunch? Do they need socks? Where’s mom? Where’s dad? Just looking at the big picture, all the time, and sometimes you have to go above and beyond what we would call teacher [emphasis in original] and sometimes it is a difficult thing because not everybody is in agreement with what your role might be. (interview 2)
As part of an on-going effort to respond to the financial difficulties of the children in the school, a “Christmas Store” is held for one or two days every December. The community donates gently used toys, books and a variety of small items such as scarves, jewellery and decorative figurines. The “Christmas Store” is organized by intermediate students and is overseen by Geraldine, an intermediate teacher. The gymnasium is transformed into a store where students can purchase items for as little as twenty-five cents to as much as five dollars. Gifts are wrapped by the intermediate students and the gift wrap is donated by staff members. Parent volunteers help to supervise the store and all classes visit it on a rotating schedule. The store is strictly for students, and adults are not allowed to purchase items, except for raffle tickets. All proceeds are donated to a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) that supports children in developing countries. The “Christmas Store” is a significant initiative that alleviates stress for children who cannot afford gifts for their families, and also teaches the spirit of generosity because students donate items and raise money for a charity (interview Mark & interview Geraldine).

As part of a continuous program to address hunger, a snack program is provided for students at a minimal cost. Parent volunteers oversee this program, processing orders and delivering snacks to classrooms three mornings a week. Christine consults with parents on an ongoing basis to ensure that the program is running smoothly and that students are receiving a variety of healthy snacks (interview, Mrs. Rock). The food bank, Christmas store and snack program are projects that reflect a general awareness that the school has the capacity to demonstrate care, compassion and generosity. Christine’s support of these initiatives indicates her belief that educators have a vital role to play in fostering moral virtues. In one interview, I ask Christine if she recalls discussing the ethical aspects of the teaching role when she was training to be a teacher. She refers to her teacher training in England and states,

There I was in a very poor school, very needy neighbourhood, just outside of London. Oddly enough the very first day I was there this little guy rushed up to me and he was speaking English, but it was tricky for me to know, because he was talking so fast. He was asking me where his brother was, I caught [understood] after a couple of tries, and I didn’t know who he was. I didn’t know where his brother was but as soon as I looked at the child I thought, “Okay, who’s this child?” [laughs]. I’m going to need to know him because he had no socks, his pants were too short, he was all disheveled, his hair was all standing up straight. Sure enough there were many boys in the school, in that one family, and one of them was in the
class that I taught, so I got to know this family really well and [I] think of them still. So, you can’t really take a course in education, unless it’s maybe about art, I don’t know, maybe even then, but I think the discussion always comes back to ethics, and how we show compassion for the children that we teach, it’s always there, every day, that we have to keep it in the back of our minds. (interview 2)

While families have different financial needs in the school community, one of the factors that creates a sense of equality is the student dress code. The student dress code is mandated by the school board and outlines specific colours for shirts, pants, dresses, skirts and dress shorts. Sweaters, vests and hoodies can be worn but must be the appropriate colours. Clothing can be purchased from any store such as Walmart and Old Navy. Tops with the school logo can be purchased from a uniform company, however wearing the school logo is optional. Representatives from a uniform company periodically come to the school during evening events, such as Curriculum Night, to sell clothing to parents. Students are not permitted to wear clothing that explicitly advertises popular company brands. The dress code is outlined in the school’s code of conduct which is located in the student handbook. Parents and staff members periodically consult with Christine to make revisions to the dress code that address the needs of the community.

All staff members are responsible for enforcing the dress code. Extra uniform clothing is made available by the school for students who need to change because their uniform is inappropriate in some way. Extra uniforms are also needed when food spills occur or when clothes are torn or soiled from minor playground injuries. Students sometimes require extra layers of clothing to stay warm during the winter, particularly students in portables who need to cross the school yard to enter the main building. Christine promotes clothing companies that she believes have ethical labour practices. She explains,

When they [parents] say, “Do we have to buy [from] the uniform company?” [I reply] “No, of course you don’t. We encourage your children to have a logo on their shirt, we really like that, it looks really good, and in case you didn’t know [emphasis in original] all of our uniform suppliers have a non-sweatshop policy, whereas if you go to Old Navy, that shirt is made in a sweatshop. I have that conversation with them [parents] all the time but then I follow that with, ‘I understand because you know in August Old Navy has a four-dollar t-
shirt sale.” I would probably do that too [go to Old Navy] because I’m privileged enough in this world that I can make the decision to go down to my local store where I know things are made in Amsterdam in a place where they’re probably very well paid, but it doesn’t mean I can’t let people know. (interview 6)

For Christine, promoting stores that have non-sweatshop policies is an ethical stance, one that she takes seriously. She uses her authority as a principal to influence others on an issue that she believes is right. While her stated intention is to raise awareness, her stance might be seen as one that is more political than ethical in a wider context. Christine is understanding and compassionate toward families, and her words may offer support for those who would like to shop at certain stores but cannot do so because of financial hardship. It is possible, however, that some families who choose to shop at Old Navy and Walmart do so out of considerations that are not financial. They may not share the same values as Christine does, and may not see a problem with shopping in these stores. Despite the best of intentions, Christine may be imposing her viewpoint on parents, albeit gently. This situation brings to light the complexity of dealing with ethical issues as a principal.

When students need a change in uniform they go to the main office. Before they reach the main office, they pass by a comfortable couch in the lobby of the school. This couch is frequently used by parents and staff who gather to talk, along with Christine who often joins them. She states,

If people are sitting on the couch, I often will just sit down and have a chat with them after school or during the day, just to touch base and say, “Hi,” and just sort of get a handle on the feel of the school. (interview 7)

Behind the couch are interior windows that give a view of a large and bright school office. Upon entering the office there are several work spaces for office staff and a small waiting area for parents and visitors. Directly past the staff desks there is a short hallway leading to various rooms including a meeting room, the vice principals’ offices and Christine’s office. The room where I was situated is also located in this hallway.

Christine’s office is spacious and striking, largely due to the floor, which is tiled in a dark shade of black interspersed with light grey. The walls are rectangular ivory cinder blocks and contrast with the deep colours of the floor and the furniture, also black and grey. Situated just inside the
office there is a freestanding round table with comfortable chairs. Further into the office is Christine’s desk, which is a rectangular shape that expands into a circle on one end. The rectangular portion is against an inner wall and this is where Christine’s computer and telephone are located. Three pictures hang on the wall over her computer and telephone. Two of the pictures are nature scenes painted by the Canadian artist Tom Thompson. The third picture is a striking black and white photograph of Christine and her family. The photograph is on an ivory mat and is “free floating” in a black wooden frame. Many people comment on the beauty of this photograph. There are windows on the back wall that are covered with a vertical blind. Smaller windows without blinds are found near her computer. There are three plants on the window ledge, including a pink orchid which is thriving.

Between the windows is a small wall space covered by a long rectangular wall hanging. This wall hanging is directly behind Christine’s desk and is highly visible. It is ivory with inspirational phrases printed in different colours, and some of the phrases are fully capitalized. Four of these phrases are explicitly moral: “BE BOLD” “Take Chances” and “Be Fearless” which implies having courage, faith and trust while “HAVE AN OPEN MIND” implies that there is value in being accepting, tolerant and appreciating knowledge. One phrase is in lower-case letters and is value-laden and implicitly moral: “seize every moment” which implies that there is value in being diligent and living to one’s utmost potential. The prominent place of this wall hanging could indicate an intentional desire on Christine’s part for people to see these messages and glean inspiration from them.

Christine has a sound system on her desk to make school announcements. The circular portion of her desk juts out from the rectangle, and faces the door to her office. Christine keeps her weekly agenda on the circular portion of her desk so that staff can record upcoming events, such as class trips, to keep her informed. Two chairs are located on one side of the circle so people can sit opposite Christine in conversation. When parents, staff or students enter Christine’s office she often leaves her desk and invites them to sit at the freestanding round table, away from distractions such as her computer and phone. There is a large bookcase in her office comprised of five shelves of books. Photographs of family, friends, and colleagues sit on one shelf alongside a collection of small angel figurines, given to her as gifts over the years. While some books are professional resources, the majority are children’s story books. At the very top of the book case Christine displays three children’s books, however the majority of the books are on the
lower shelves, easily accessible by children in her office. I was curious to know why Christine has such a large collection of storybooks. She explains,

I want to share with kids that even if they’re in trouble, we can have a talk [and] then they’re going to spend time in here. I want them to realize that they can sit with a book, and it’s calming. Yes, you’re in here because you’re in trouble but you’re not in trouble forever, so now you get to sit and just think for a bit, and look at a book. (interview 1)

When students are sent to Christine’s office after having committed a minor infraction, she views it as an opportunity to share a moral lesson. She wants children to realize that they must be accountable for their actions but that they can move beyond a difficult situation. She expresses hope through a sense of optimism by having children understand that they are “not in trouble forever.” Storybooks provide students with a means for reflection but they also afford a non-threatening way for Christine to develop relationships with children as they “spend time” in her office.

Christine provides a further insight about why she wants children who are sent to her office to have the option to read. She explains,

That probably comes from my own desire to read and look at books. I think that there’s nothing better in the world, so no matter what the problem is, if you sit and you look at books [laughs] it’s going to make you feel better. I want children to feel this [office] is a safe place for them. . . . I want the teachers to see that too. I want them to know that literacy is important and that what they [the children] get when they’re in the office is, I guess, multilayered. (interview 1)

Christine’s remarks reveal a desire to build a caring and compassionate school. She sees herself as a role model for children and teachers, showing them that alternative methods can be used to address behavioural problems. Christine is striving to create a climate in the office where students can be calm and gain perspective on their problems. Storybooks provide a tool for easing the anxieties of children who are in trouble. Christine reflects on her own childhood and states,
When I was a child [emphasis in original] I was so shy, and anxious at school, and I’m sure if they [school staff] had let me sit and read all day, which I probably tried to do, it would’ve been the thing that [would have] made me happy. (interview 1)

Sitting in Christine’s office, the observer’s eye is drawn to three large photographs of lighthouses on the wall, adding drama and atmosphere. Whimsical photographs of Christine’s face superimposed on famous people such as the Mona Lisa and Joan of Arc are displayed throughout her office, adding a lighthearted effect. There is a large wall unit with shelves where Christine keeps many of her professional resources and binders. Below the shelves is a counter with sentimental items such as a candle, a religious picture and a photo album. Deep drawer filing cabinets are found underneath the counter. At the very top of this unit are two vintage Crayola crayon containers, a Harry Potter DVD game and a children’s storybook.

There is one bulletin board on the inner wall covered with bright yellow paper. It is filled with literacy posters and material from the board of education. The bulletin board also has student work, inspiring slogans and necklaces made by Christine on various school trips. There is a list of emergency phone numbers, a yard duty schedule, a monthly calendar and school bus information. At the top right corner of the bulletin board there is a plaque with a cartoon picture of a girl, given to Christine many years ago by a student.

Leaving Christine’s office, it is hard not to notice her door, which is made of heavy wood. It has a small plaque that reads “Principal” and below the plaque is a beautiful large cross made out of metal and glass. The cross was given to Christine from the parent council. Christine also displays children’s artwork and photographs of students on her door. Student work and photographs signal an esteem for children and a belief that they are central to her work. Above the plaque that reads “Principal” is a small banner from the school board that reads “We All Belong.”

Christine speaks about the importance of making children feel that they belong. In one interview, she recounts observing a team of educators in a Multiple Exceptionality class during her practicum as a teacher candidate. The class was comprised of children with special needs such as Cerebral Palsy. I ask Christine what this team of educators taught her and she remarks,

Well, I think a couple of things, one is that we always have to be paying attention, paying attention to the kids, because they’re always telling us something, no matter if it’s through
words, or actions, or just through their demeanour, and we don’t always look for those things, because we’re kind of busy all the time. And the other thing is that they all belong in the school, they’re all part of a community, and those educators, because it wasn’t just teachers in a classroom, it was a whole team of people working with the kids, and they loved the kids, and they really worked hard to make sure they had a good community. (interview 2)

The “We Belong” sign on Christine’s door and her remarks in the interview reflect Christine’s belief that children need to feel included in a supportive and caring community. Her awareness that children communicate through their words, actions and demeanour reveal a sensitive person who recognizes the dignity of each child. Christine’s observation that it was “a whole team of people working with the kids” shows an understanding that staff must work together to build an ethical school that responds to the needs of children.

Christine often used the expression “my door is always open” during our conversations. In one such conversation, I ask her to articulate what she means, and she explains,

Literally the door is rarely ever closed [laughs], I have very rarely [emphasis in original] closed the door just to sit in here and do work. Honestly it really very rarely ever happens, if it all. It is [closed] on occasion to make a call. It's not ever just to sit in here and get through emails. I don't do it. I would rather come in here on Sunday. I would never want staff or parents or students to feel that I'm not available to them.

I ask Christine to explain why she would never want them to feel that way. She states,

That's what everybody needs, to know that the person who is at the head of the institution is available and we've heard it so many times, and we've seen it that the person who is supposed to be in charge is in the office with the door closed [pause] answering emails or I don’t know what they're doing in there, we don't know what they're doing in there. For me it's just not an option, so I just want people to feel that they can come to me with any kind of situation, and not just discipline. I think you've seen in your time here, if a staff member has a personal problem and they need something they come, and I think that they feel that I have their back. If they need something on a personal level, whether it's time off, they need support, they want to talk, that I'm here, that I'm going to listen, that I’m going to pay attention to them. I’m going to not always offer them advice, because I don’t have advice for them, but I'll
definitely listen and parents too, they do the same thing and the kids, [emphasis in original] they just show up at the door. (interview 7)

By implementing an “open door” policy Christine establishes trusting relationships, as people come to realize that they can depend on her to listen and to offer support. She is respectful and caring which is evident in her commitment to give people her undivided attention. She strives to be accessible, which is made clear in her remark that students “just show up at the door.” By keeping her door “open” she is sending a message to staff members and students that she recognizes that people need support beyond matters of discipline, and that her office is a place that can provide such support.

Stepping out of Christine’s office presents two possibilities for departure. One possibility is to turn right and exit through a door which leads to staff mailboxes, a photocopier, and public announcement system. According to Christine, this door was locked for many years, so that if the staff wanted to access the principal’s office, they would have to do so by walking through the main office door, which is at the other end of the principal’s office. When she arrived at the school she decided to leave this door unlocked so that anyone could access her office through the mailbox room, often a faster route, especially for staff members. Christine explained that her decision was motivated by a desire to have staff members feel comfortable in the main office and not feel restricted about where they can go. I observed that the door was used on a consistent basis, usually as a way to quickly update Christine on an ongoing situation, return a borrowed item to her, or just to extend greetings. Christine also decided to allow staff to eat in the meeting room in the main office area, which had not been allowed with previous administration. In her view, this change in policy sends a message to staff that they are welcomed in the main office. I observed that the meeting room was consistently filled with staff during the lunch hour, when they would meet together to eat and engage in conversation.

An alternative to leaving the main office through the mailbox room is to walk down a hallway past the vice principals’ offices. Passing these offices, it is interesting to note items placed on their doors. One vice principal has student artwork on display while the other vice principal has posters from the board of education. One of these posters outlines the Catholic School Graduate Expectations. These expectations include being honest, respectful, responsible, reflective, caring and forgiving. Another poster outlines the Catholic Social Teachings which include the
importance of living and working with dignity, treating people and the planet with care and respect and creating communities that are fair and inclusive. A third poster shows a picture of hands reaching together to form a circle. The hands reveal people of different nationalities. The poster reads “NURTURING OUR CATHOLIC COMMUNITY through . . . FAITH HOPE & CHARITY.” Below the word charity it reads “A community of FAITH anchored in HOPE with heart & CHARITY.”

Continuing down the hallway and exiting the main office brings one to the lobby and the main floor corridors, where similar posters can be seen. One of these posters was created by the board of education and assigns a virtue to each month of the school year. Each virtue is illustrated with a drawing in a heart, with the name of the virtue, the month and a biblical citation around the heart. The virtues are hospitality, peace-making, gratitude, charity, courage, love, forgiveness, justice, faithfulness and compassion. There is a biblical citation at the bottom of the poster noting that love connects all of the virtues together, which explains why every virtue is illustrated in a heart.

The board of education focuses on a different virtue each month, and the school formally celebrates the virtues on a monthly basis. In anticipation of the celebration, each homeroom teacher nominates two students every month for an award. One student is nominated for an academic award, and one student is nominated for a virtue award. Academic awards are given to students who are achieving at a high level in a subject area, and every month a different subject is celebrated. Virtue awards are given to a student who consistently expresses a virtue at school. For example, an award is given to students who demonstrate compassion. Acts of compassion might include helping a classmate who has fallen in the school yard, and volunteering to take homework to a friend who is sick. The awards are distributed at the conclusion of a monthly mass celebration at the local church. Christine comments on the monthly focus on virtues,

What the board provides us, the Catholic Graduate Expectations, the Virtues, it’s amazing that we can teach these to the children, that they have an understanding that this month our virtue is forgiveness, why [emphasis in original] well, let me tell you why, and this is why it’s so important. So, it gives us opportunities to teach these virtues to the children that are important when you are growing and learning and you’re interacting with other people. . . . I have [myself] never been a teacher that has said, [changes voice to higher pitch] “This is
what the bible says and this is what you’re going to do and you’re all going to go to hell if you’re bad” . . . because that is not who I am, but we can take examples of what is, of looking at ethical behaviour and teach children around that. (interview 9)

As the award winners are announced, students approach the front of the church to receive their certificates that have been signed by the classroom teacher and Christine. The students stand together at the front of the church, and when all names have been read, a round of applause is given. Along with certificates, students noted for an academic achievement receive a small pennant with the school crest, and students recognized for expressing a virtue receive a wristband with the words inscribed “What Would Jesus Do?” Prior to distributing the virtue award, a staff member reads an excerpt from the bible that demonstrates the meaning of the virtue, and a hypothetical example of how a student might have expressed that virtue at school. The virtue that will be celebrated at the next religious celebration is also announced. Christine reflects,

I think when the kids get the bracelets [inscribed with the words] “What Would Jesus Do?”, to me, if we look at the teachings of Jesus as an example, treat others with respect, that’s it, that’s the bottom line, that’s what we want to do. We’re not judging people. We have no place to judge. We’re just going to be respectful and our goal is through that teaching that we help these children become upstanding citizens who make good choices. (interview 9)

Fedler (2006) explains that posing the question “What Would Jesus Do?” is a typical method of using the Bible for teaching ethics by using characters as examples to emulate in life. He reasons that our morals are probably influenced more by our efforts to imitate our parents and teachers than they are by our intellectual moral reasoning. We hold people in high esteem and wish to emulate them.

Christine believes that the daily focus on the virtues has a direct impact on students, particularly by the time they reach grades seven and eight. She explains,

I think that at some point they [grade seven and eight students] cross the line where they think, “I have to be responsible and respectful and understand what is expected of me.” I also think that there are small things that happen but the teachers kind of deal with it and take it on as a teaching opportunity because we certainly talk a lot about responsibility and
respectful interactions, the virtues of the month, all these things, the faith, hope and charity, all these things are part of our everyday conversation and I think that by the time they get to that age [pause] they’re starting to really understand all those things and if something minor happens, even, maybe even [emphasis in original] more than minor, the teachers take the opportunities to say, “Really, is this the person you want to be? I think that I see you every day, and you seem to be more mature than that, and you seem to have better respect for others than that, so I think you’ve just made a mistake.” (interview 5)

Christine seems to believe that children become virtuous in their behaviour over time, as they engage in dialogue with others in the school, and as they grow and mature. She points to the significance of the teacher in facilitating conversations that help children to reflect on their behaviour and to consider how it impacts others. Christine clarifies that virtues are “part of our everyday conversation” thereby suggesting that they are integral to the daily life in the school.

Lastly, the local church provides a place for the school community to gather to partake in religious services and to celebrate the ongoing accomplishments of students and staff. The priest plays a role in maintaining a connection between the church and the school. He explains,

The majority of the students are my parishioners, not all, but the majority are my parishioners, the great majority, and so the parents, the families, expect [emphasis in original] to see me at the school. I do collaborate with the school, with the staff, with the principal, with the administration, to make sure that school masses [and] sacramental preparation events are properly conducted. So, I find myself engaged on an ongoing basis in the school life. (interview, Father Peter)

Efforts are made on an on-going basis to financially subsidize programs and pay for basic supplies for students. Programs include drama productions and classroom visits by local artists and organizations such as Scientists in the School. Supplies range from materials for arts and crafts to funding for the purchase of technology such as IPads. The Catholic School Advisory Council (CSAC), sometimes called “the parent council,” meets monthly in the evening with Christine to plan various fundraising initiatives in the school to help mitigate the costs of programs and supplies. The CSAC is comprised of volunteer parents and staff representatives who make decisions about how to best allocate money to meet the needs of the children.
The largest fundraising initiative organized by the CSAC is an annual one-day dance-a-thon. This dance-a-thon raises money to subsidize programs, trips, school supplies and the cost of school buses throughout the year. Students raise money by obtaining pledges from family and friends. Although prizes are awarded to students who receive the most pledges, the money that is raised is placed in a general pool, and is shared by all students in the school. Fundraising initiatives such as pizza lunches take place throughout the year and are organized by parents. Students purchase pizza and a drink for a minimal cost one day per month and it is delivered to their classrooms. Proceeds from the pizza lunches are funneled towards subsidizing school trips, programs and supplies for classrooms. For example, proceeds from pizza lunches are sometimes used to purchase books for classrooms (field notes, January 12, 2015).

Teachers attend CSAC meetings to appeal for subsidies. Obtaining subsidies is critical as many parents cannot afford to pay the full cost of a school trip or classroom program. For example, when teachers are planning to book local artists to visit their classrooms, they appeal to the parent council to cover a portion of the cost for every student in the room. A subsidy of two or three dollars per student can make a program more affordable for a parent and can help ensure that no child is excluded. Based on my observations at CSAC meetings, no staff member requesting money is turned away. A spirit of generosity is evident in the open discussions and expressed willingness to help in any way possible. For example, when the annual school-wide Carnivale Day was in its planning stages, two of the French teachers attended a CSAC meeting to appeal for money to purchase needed supplies such as food, drinks and tableware. After approving the funding request from the French teachers, some of the parents volunteered to serve food at the event (field notes, January 12, 2015).

On many occasions I observe Christine directly encouraging staff members to approach her if they require financial support for their students. Some participants shared with me that they have asked Christine for help when their students are experiencing financial hardship. Sheena, a kindergarten teacher, explains that she has approached Christine for help for students who need financial assistance to attend field trips. She relates that in one particular situation, after speaking to a parent whom she suspected was struggling to find enough money to send her child on a trip, she informed Christine who agreed without hesitation to cover the costs of the trip from school funds (interview, Sheena). Christine works closely with the parents and the staff in an effort to ensure that no child misses an educational opportunity due to his or her financial situation.
Efforts are intended to create a fair and inclusive school climate where all students can take part in interesting and enriching educational experiences. The principal along with staff members and parent volunteers devise creative solutions to mitigate the challenges that arise from a lack of public funding and from the economic disparities that confront many of the families in the community.

The first section of this chapter offered a descriptive account of the physical setting of the school and some of the activities that form the basis of school life. The journey through the school building highlighted a number of initiatives such as the food bank, the Christmas Store and the snack program. Events that shape the moral climate of the school such as the monthly virtue and academic celebrations were explored. I now invite the reader to become more acquainted with the main participant, Christine, and to understand who she is, as revealed through a series of biographical interviews.

### 4.2 Christine Bray

The biographical interviews that I conducted with Christine provide a foundation for understanding who she is and the events in her life that have shaped her in her practice as a principal. As Goodson (2005) notes, “Life experiences and background are obviously key ingredients of the person that we are, of our sense of self. To the degree that we invest our ‘self’ in our teaching, experience and background therefore shape our practice” (p. 236). Although Goodson is writing about teachers, his insight is applicable to the principal who comes to her position following years of teaching practice.

While the biographical interviews contribute to an understanding of Christine and her work, they are not intended to be an exhaustive account of her life. The details that Christine recounts in the interviews are somewhat determined by the interview questions and by the events that she recalls. Miller (2000) provides further explanation and states,

An interviewee, asked to tell the story of their whole life, cannot relate everything – to do so would literally take longer than the living of it. The interviewee must choose what areas to concentrate upon and how to frame the presentation of these areas to the interviewer. . . .

Memory itself is notoriously selective. Much salient material simply may not be recalled due to the course of questioning that the interview takes or simply just forgotten. Memory recall
is malleable; the past is constantly being rewritten by the subject as some events fade and others grow in significance. (Miller, 2000, p. 133)

The memories that Christine does recall offer insight into how she approaches her practice and what she values in her personal and professional life. Her memories reveal the people and events that have been significant in her life, thereby having a possible influence on her decisions and actions in her role as a principal. Over a series of five biographical interviews that were conducted in between the main interviews, I developed a portrait of Christine and the influences that have shaped her as a person and as a professional. The first three interviews focused on Christine’s childhood, her years in teacher training, early employment and experiences as a teacher. The final two interviews explored Christine’s professional learning experiences as well as her years as a vice principal and her early years as a principal. What follows is an overview of the data in the biographical interviews, including direct quotations to provide further context and insight.

Christine was born in a small town in Newfoundland. Although she is not certain about how many people lived in the town during her childhood, an internet search by the researcher indicated that the current population is approximately 3,000. Christine grew up with her father, mother and younger brother. She frequently spent time with many relatives who lived nearby. Christine describes her home town in the following account,

One of the most amazing things about the physical town, physical layout of the town, was that [pause] to the north of it was a hill, so you drove outside of the town. You would never go [pass] through the town because you would take the highway right by it, so no one could see it, which is very unusual for Newfoundland, because the towns are so scattered along the highway and down the peninsulas. On the other side of the town, there was one main street that went right along and on the other side there was a most beautiful river that you could ever see in your life. It was a huge river, and the town is really fascinating on some level because it’s where the Beothuk lived and had all their communities. (interview 3)

Christine had strong feelings about her home town from the time she was a very young girl. She explains,
The town was never very satisfying for me. I was never happy really there and even as probably a four-year-old I dreamt of leaving. I don’t know why because I don’t think that’s really normal for four year olds to think about leaving a town, but it never felt like it was where I was meant to be, I don’t know why. (interview 3)

In a later interview, Christine elaborates on her feelings about her home town and the Beothuk, who were the Aboriginal people of the island of Newfoundland. She remembers,

I mean everybody talks about the Beothuk there. I mean the river that I lived on [pause] was where they were killed. . . The white man came and it was a terrible [emphasis in original] history and I remember being little going, “Oh man, a lot of stuff went down around here,” and hearing adults talk about it [thinking], “That's not good.” I'm sure that I'm not the only one that would ever say the spirits are there in that area, they have to be, they really do. . . . I always felt, and I still do in that town, that there's something [pause] melancholy about it. (interview 6)

Christine’s father was an only child, born in the same town as Christine. He worked for the Canadian National Railway, the main industry in the town, and also drove a bus across Newfoundland. When Christine’s father graduated from high school he began studying for a pipe fitting diploma but could not finish it because he got a job with the railway. He eventually returned to school and completed his diploma, which required great sacrifice. School was a long distance from home so Christine’s father lived near the school during the week, returning home on weekends. Christine recalled her father’s accomplishments with pride, noting that despite the challenges “he did it” and was then able to move his family out to St. John’s, Newfoundland, where he worked on ships.

Christine’s mother was the oldest of eight children and was born in a very small fishing community in Newfoundland. To offer the reader a sense of the size of this community, an internet search by the researcher indicated that the current population is approximately 200 people. Christine’s mother was a Catholic nun for five years when she was a young woman. During Christine’s youth, her mother worked at a nearby store. She taught Christine and her brother the importance of living a life in accordance with Catholic teachings. Christine recalls her mother often saying, “If you don’t be good, Holy God won’t love you” (interview 3). Christine contextualizes her mother’s warning in the following remark,
In that kind of society, it was all just *assumed* [emphasis in original] that you would do the right thing . . . I don’t really remember them ever saying too much about making decisions but it was all based around religion for the most part. I mean you just did the right thing because that’s what God wants. (interview 3)

Christine frequently saw her grandparents while she was growing up with the exception of her paternal grandfather who died when she was four years old. He had worked for a Coca Cola plant and for the Canadian National Railway. Her maternal grandfather worked as a custodian at a high school and also did volunteer work for the Knights of Columbus. Christine’s grandmothers had a significant influence on her. She credits her paternal grandmother for instilling in her a love of reading. Her grandmother talked about the books that she herself was reading and often took Christine to the library. In describing her grandmother, Christine says,

[she is] probably the most brilliant woman I have ever known in my life. She read every day and she loved history. I mean she could quote anything that she read about, any time in the world, you could ask her, and she could tell you. She knew everything about her family. There was nothing you could [not] ask her. She had the answer about whatever, didn’t matter who, and that was her side of the family and my grandfather’s side of the family. (interview 3)

Christine’s grandmother dreamt of being a teacher. Being the oldest in a family that Christine described as “very poor” her grandmother worked at a local grocery store and was never able to advance through school to realize her dream. Christine recalls,

All she ever wanted to be in her whole life was a teacher, that was all she ever wanted. She never wanted really a family, she never wanted to get married, she wanted to be a teacher, it was her one true love in life until probably her son and grandchildren were born, but she didn’t know that at the time. Because she was the oldest she had to support her family so the fact that my brother and I are teachers, well that was [pause] crazy. (interview 3)

Christine becomes sorrowful at this stage of the interview, as she realizes the success that she and her brother have attained. They were both able to realize a dream that her grandmother could not achieve. Christine continues,
My grandmother had nothing. They didn't even have a bathroom in their house, they never did until she was older. She had a toilet [but] she never had a bathtub in her home, her whole life, I mean that’s amazing, and she never complained. . . . I can’t think about things that they [my grandparents] specifically said, only their actions, and how they just went through every day getting things done, no matter the hardships that they faced, there was never any[thing] stopping them. (interview 3)

Christine’s maternal grandmother also made an impression on Christine. She remembers her keen sense of humour, evident in the mischievous jokes she played at the Catholic bishop’s home, where she worked as the housekeeper. Her grandmother’s best friend was employed as the bishop’s cook and together they played a prank, by dressing up in the bishop’s robes one night when he was out of town. When Christine was very young she spent every weekend with her grandmother and recalls that even though her grandparents did not appear to be particularly happy together, there was laughter in their home, primarily due to her grandmother’s sense of humour.

When Christine was nine years old, her father’s cousin, who lived next door, had his first child named Gail. Christine spent a great deal of her time caring for Gail from the time she was a baby until she was six years old. She remembers,

When she [Gail] was born, I had such a desire to spend every waking moment of my life with her, and I’m sure looking back now I never saw it that way. I think as a nine or ten-year-old I just thought, “Ooh, a toy.” Looking back, I know, and she [Gail] says it still, to this day, and she’s nearly forty [years old] that I was her protector. I was there every day. Every day I would come home from school and I would run from the bus to her house and I would ask her father, because her mother worked and her father didn’t, and I would say, “Can I come in and see the baby?” and he would say, “Yeah, sure.” And I wouldn’t be there five minutes and he would say, “I’m just gonna run down the road to the Knights now” and he would leave me there with her and I would stay there until her mother came home from work and through her entire early years [emphasis in original] I babysat her and I babysat her all summer and then when her sister came three years later and her brother came three years later after that, I looked after all of them. (interview 3)
In a later interview, Christine refers to her years spent with Gail and remarks, “When you're dealing with small children there are always moral and ethical decisions and certainly lessons that you're teaching them. [It’s] the same thing we do as teachers [in that] when you see a situation you're always trying to guide them [the students] into approaching people with respect” (interview 5). Even when Christine eventually left her home town, she still returned for visits to care for Gail and her siblings, and has maintained close contact with Gail.

A pivotal event occurred in Christine’s family when she was fifteen years old. Her great aunt died suddenly leaving behind a family of nine children. Christine believes the way her family responded to this event still affects her life. She explains,

She was fifty when she died [and] it was very sudden, heart attack in the night, so that affected our entire family. People didn’t know what to do and everyone swooped in to try and protect this family, and they had small children. . . . One thing they [my family] decided to do was have a family reunion . . . People came from all around, cousins and aunts and uncles, came from everywhere because this woman had died and they realized that you don’t get to change things in life like this . . . That was something that probably impacted my life and I think if you look at moral and ethical decision making, it really ties in, because the older people in the family just thought, “We need each other right now and how are we going to do it? How do we support this family, our cousins, our uncle?” This is what they decided to do to support them and bring everybody together, so it was a huge thing and for sure everybody [emphasis in original] remembers that, and it was a long time ago. (interview 3)

I ask Christine to clarify the connections she sees between her family’s response to her great aunt’s death and the decisions she makes as a principal. She responds,

Well, just the importance of being there for one another, and when you see somebody in need that you figure out a way to help, and it doesn’t always look the same. You have to delve deep into what that need is. (interview 3)

Christine believes it is important that others can rely on her for support. She makes a connection between her family’s response to her great aunt’s death and her response to people in the school community. In subsequent discussions, Christine recounts her school experiences in her home town, where she attended school from kindergarten until grade eleven. Three school staff
members made particularly strong impressions on Christine. They were her grade one teacher, her grade seven teacher and the principal. Recalling her grade one teacher, Christine states,

I was very, very quiet when I was little. I was very introverted. I was very nervous. I did not like to talk to people . . . I was so afraid of everybody and the only time in my early years that I don’t remember being completely terrified at all times was in grade one and I just loved my teacher and I don’t really know why I loved her. I really can’t remember. I still see her, whenever I go to Newfoundland I see her, and she cries still whenever she sees me. She just made me feel at ease and I’m sure it was nothing that she was teaching. I’m sure it was just the way she treated me . . . I’m sure that other than my grandmother the reason I became a teacher was because of her and I can’t tell you anything that she said. I think I learned to read probably fully when I was in her class, but she just, I don’t know, I think she just let me be. I think she didn’t think that I should be different than I was, and really the only thing I remember is her shoes. I do remember her shoes, and her clothes, and her house caught on fire, and I could see her house from my house and I was so hysterical. I don’t even know if it was when she was teaching me. My mother or father, or somebody, someone had to practically hold me back, and I only weighed about 25 pounds [laughs], I was going over [to her house]. I was so worried about her and her fur coat [laughs], but I don’t know, I don’t know, I wish I could remember what it was really. Maybe when I was younger I remembered but now, and I never really felt like that about any other teacher [but] there were other teachers that I liked, as I got older. (interview 3)

The sense of belonging that Christine felt in this teacher’s classroom is evident in the freedom she experienced in being her authentic self without having to feel afraid. This teacher provided a safe haven for Christine where she could learn to read, and begin to dream about being a teacher herself one day. Christine draws attention to her teacher’s manner by stating that she thinks she “loved” her teacher because of “the way she treated me.” The childhood innocence of remembering the teacher’s shoes and clothes remind the reader of the significant and lasting impressions teachers make on our lives. Goodson (2005) remarks,

A common feature in many teachers’ accounts of their background is the appearance of a favourite teacher who substantially influenced the person as a young school pupil. They often report that ‘it was this person who first sold me on teaching’; ‘it was sitting in her classroom
when I first decided I wanted to be a teacher.’ In short such people provide a ‘role model’
and in addition they most probably influence the subsequent vision of desirable pedagogy as well as possibly the choice of subject specialism. (Goodson, 2005, pp. 236-237)

Christine remembers her grade seven teacher as “an amazing person” who made her feel at ease as a young adolescent. She was a Catholic nun who Christine describes as, “young, hip, very open and would let us talk about anything” (interview 3). Despite warnings from classmates who did not want to offend their teacher, Christine bravely questioned her in class about certain rules in the Catholic religion. Christine recalls that her teacher always responded to her with reassuring words such as, “It’s fine. We can talk about whatever you want to talk about” (interview 3). Her teacher established sewing, knitting and crocheting clubs during the lunch hour for students who wanted an alternative to playing outside for recess. Christine attended these clubs to learn skills, but also to gain reprieve from the stresses of school. Although she had friends and was beginning to manage her anxiety, she embraced opportunities to escape from school pressures. Recalling her battle with anxiety, particularly as a young child, she explains,

I was still not very happy in the classroom and I never wanted to be called on, never wanted to answer a question . . . if they asked me I’d burst out crying . . . As my mother would say, I was shy. Now I know [that] I’m just an introverted person. I never liked it when she said I was shy. For some reason, that word made me feel bad, and now it still, when people put it on report cards and they say, “So and so is a shy and pleasant person,” I’m like, “Take that out” and I say, “It’s my own thing. I don’t want it in there.” Nobody means that as a compliment it’s true, that’s what I think [laughs]. (interview 3)

Curious to know why Christine does not like the word “shy,” I ask her to elaborate. She responds,

I was so anxious, so anxious that if someone came into my house I went under the bed. I mean I did not like it [the word “shy”], and I think because looking back, I didn’t want my mother just to use it as an excuse “she’s shy”. . . It was true childhood anxiety that went unidentified, undiagnosed and nobody ever did anything and I suppose what would my mother know about it? She didn’t know [and] she had her own things to deal with anyway so whatever, if I was under the bed, I was under the bed. Nobody knew, so I think that when I found people that sort of didn’t put pressure on me, like my grandmothers, I could be
whatever I wanted to be and they just let me alone. They didn’t expect me to talk . . . they’d just leave me be, they all just left me be, whereas I think at school there were expectations and sometimes our expectations don’t really reflect the needs of the child. (interview 3)

Christine’s reflections on how anxiety affected her as a child and how she was misunderstood reveal a courageous person who is trying to use painful experiences to make life better for the children in her school. Her own childhood experiences have made her more sensitive to children who may themselves feel a sense of loneliness or isolation.

I ask Christine if there were any other teachers in her school who had an impact on her, and she recalls two interactions with her principal. In the first interaction, she remembers being treated with dignity and explains, “I was a little rebellious when I was in high school and I was upset with the teacher one day and he called me down to the office and he didn’t yell at me. He didn’t make me feel bad. He just talked to me” (interview 3). The second interaction happens unexpectedly for Christine, and may have changed her life in a way that she could not have anticipated. She recounts,

The other thing that he [the principal] did, which still stands out, was I really did not want to work too hard in high school. I really was doing the absolute minimal amount that I could possibly do. I wanted to do basic math and he called me down to his office and he said, “Bray,” [laughs] because he only called people by their last names. He said, “What are you doing? And I said, “Well, what are you talking about?” He goes, “Basic math? Really? Look at your marks. What are you doing?” I said, “I’m doing the best I can.” He said, “That’s a lie. That is a lie. You are not doing the best you can.” He said, “You can do whatever you want. You can be your rebellious self and you cannot like the teachers and you can do whatever, but I know that is not true.” He said something along the lines of, “You know we do IQ tests on you people. I know what you’re capable of.” He said, “There aren’t too many people above you,” and I was shocked. I couldn’t believe it, truly, I never saw myself as someone who was capable of doing more, I never did. No one ever told me. My parents never said, “Get good grades and go to university.” Those words were never spoken to me. My grandmother said daily, “You should be a teacher,” but I think that was her own need. I remember specifically that conversation and I remember being so surprised and thinking,
many years later after that, “Wow, was it true?” . . . “What if he never told me?” I mean I think about it [emphasis in original]. (interview 3)

Christine becomes emotional as she remembers her principal. She confides that she has not thought about this interaction for a long time. This principal challenged her to see herself as a capable person who could succeed beyond anything that she had ever imagined. He presents her with a different view of who she is and what she is capable of achieving in her life.

Haynes (2002) argues,

Humans are told stories about who they are and what they ought to do. Their belief in these narratives provides them with both an identity and a moral practice. In reacting to narratives as well as to situations they can continue to construct themselves, into personae, the personae of teachers, clever people, parents, citizens . . . The ability to stand outside one’s persona and reflect, perhaps modify it through self-awareness and self-reflection, is the mark of a form of morality that is the defining characteristic of a rational person [emphasis in original]. (Haynes, 2002, p.118)

In a sense, Christine’s principal tells her a different story about who she is, and who she can be, from the story that she has been hearing from others throughout her life. Although it is clear that her grandmother encouraged her, she perceives the principal as more objective, and not having the same vested interest. In this sense, she trusts her principal’s words which make a great impression on her, as she “remember(s) specifically that conversation” and still wonders, “What if he never told me?”

Christine remembers that her principal was not encouraging with all students. She recalls that this same principal, “was a very gruff man, almost like Jekyll and Hyde, because you would see him when the boys did something wrong, he was all over them, it was nothing for him to slam the boys right into the lockers.” (interview 3). Christine reflects on what she perceives as her principal’s missed opportunities,

A lot of the times they [the boys] were up to no good but I also remember that they would have definitely been the kids who were in Special Ed, so things could have been different. I hope that most of us now as administrators have a good handle on that, that a lot of the times
that the kids that we have to talk to that are getting into some trouble, that are struggling outside, are kids that don’t fully understand because of their learning needs or because something is happening in their private lives that we may or may not know about but they’re definitely struggling with. (interview 3)

Christine draws on the lessons she learned from observing her principal and is determined to conduct her own practice differently. She maintains,

I’ve had that conversation with teachers here, last year specifically. I said to a teacher and I think I mentioned this to you before, [I said] “I know that you want me to be more aggressive. I know that you want me to come down with an iron fist. I’m not going to. It’s not who I am. And although there will be consequences there’s not going to be yelling and there’s not going to be [pause] humiliation.” Unless I totally lose it, which I hope doesn’t happen, but really, even when I think that something is serious, I want to make sure that the person I’m dealing with, speaking to, student, parent, whatever, is treated with respect. (interview 3)

Christine is committed to leading the school in a manner that respects the dignity of others. She does not want to be remembered as a principal with “an iron fist.” She chooses to stay calm and not lose her temper, as she believes yelling humiliates people. Christine is determined to be respectful with her words despite the gravity of a situation. In an earlier interview, Christine relays a situation with a teacher where she was challenged to defend her discipline practices. She explains,

Last year there was a teacher who said, “I’m not sending the kids to the office because it’s just playtime up there.” So, I approached the teacher because she was saying it to many people on staff. I think she [was] a bit taken aback that I approached her about it and I said, “I know you’ve been saying this so if you have an issue, if there’s something you want to discuss with me, my door is always open to you. If you would like to discuss how I’m handling discipline in the school, then please come and have that conversation. If there’s something more you want from me that I can help you with then I’ll do so, however [emphasis in original] I am not going to be a ruler that causes fear in the office. It’s never going to happen, so no matter what you want, that’s not going to be who I am, because I don’t think that’s what these children need. (interview 1)
Christine displays courage and resolve as she makes clear that she will not discipline children in a harsh or threatening manner. Christine is concerned that children be treated with respect and dignity by adults and that they carry good memories of these experiences. She wants to be approachable and accessible to students, and believes this cannot happen if she becomes “a ruler that causes fear in the office.” Christine challenges this teacher to be honest and have the courage to confront her on matters of concern, instead of spreading gossip in the school.

When Christine was sixteen years old she left her home town and moved with her family to St. John’s, Newfoundland. She attended grade twelve in St. John’s but did not make lasting friendships with her classmates due to the short time that she was in the school (interview 3). Christine has maintained close ties with her elementary school friends, many of whom she has known since kindergarten. One friend remains in Newfoundland and is a teacher. Christine contacts her every day and they spend time together each year when she visits Newfoundland.

Following high school, Christine attended Memorial University of Newfoundland. Christine’s admission to university signified that she belonged to a new generation with opportunities not afforded to her grandmothers. Christine’s comments reveal an understanding that societal expectations and values have changed, and that her choices about her education are in part influenced by those changes. Her awareness of this shift in societal expectations is noted in her observation of how “crazy” it is that she and her brother became teachers while her grandmother could not fulfill this dream (interview 3). Sharing her biography and the contextual influences that shape her decisions bring to the surface a recognition for Christine that her life is in some ways vastly different from her grandmothers’ lives. Miller (2000) provides the following insight,

> To tell about one’s biography means telling about the constraints and opportunities that were available in the past and how one dealt with these – circumventing (or being thwarted by) obstacles, taking advantage of (or missing) opportunities. The biographical perspective is about the interplay between actor and social structure – how the individual has negotiated their path through a changing societal structure. (Miller, 2000, p. 75)

Christine enrolled in the Bachelor of Education program at Memorial University, earning a five-year degree, with a minor in psychology. She took fifty courses over five years in a variety of subjects including art and music. I was curious to know why she took such a wide range of courses. She comments, “I think that because we were going to be primary educators the belief is
that we teach everything and we should have at least some basic knowledge in everything. There was science, law, every type of art” (interview 2). Teacher candidates in the preservice program at Memorial University undertook practicums each year, beginning with the first year they were enrolled. Christine believes that her experiences in the classroom as a student teacher helped to prepare her to deal with the moral elements of her practice. I ask her to reflect on what, if anything, she thinks was missing in the pre-service program that would have better prepared her to understand and deal with the ethical complexities of teaching. She responds,

I felt quite fortunate when I first moved here [to Ontario] that I had so much classroom experience, and I still feel that people don’t get it here. Maybe now with the two-year program, even without having specific lessons or discussions in class, that I recall anyway, once you’re in the classroom you’re going to deal with those things. So, I think that [pause] in comparison to a lot of new teachers, in my program I was lucky because we had so much hands-on activity, all the time.

I ask Christine to clarify what the “hands-on” activity does. She explains,

Well, because you’re in the real world, so even when we’re not putting a name to it, we’re always making ethical decisions, soon as we’re with those children, soon as we work with the staff, soon as we’re dealing with parents and the community, the church, the police, the neighbour, the store. I believe [that] as soon as we’re working with all these people, then we’re making moral and ethical decisions every day, because we can't really interact with others without doing it, whether you choose to make good choices or not so good, it’s still an ethical decision on many levels. (interview 2)

Christine believes that when people interact with one another in a school on a daily basis it is inevitable that they will make ethical decisions. Reflecting on her time in the classroom when she was a student teacher, she realizes that it prepared her to deal with the ethical complexities of teaching. While Christine was training to be a teacher she lived on her own, and was responsible for paying for her own expenses, such as rent and tuition. She held various jobs during the school year and in the summer, which included being a nanny, and being a receptionist at an electronics repair shop and life insurance company. She was also a sales clerk in a clothing store in St. John’s, Newfoundland. I ask Christine if there were any moral or ethical situations that she encountered in these jobs and if so, to explain her role. I also ask her to recall what she observed
about other people in these situations, with respect to their words and actions. Christine responds,

I remember this very clearly, a man came in [to the store] and he was browsing around, and the store had stuff for men and women, shoes and accessories, whatever. He was browsing in the skirts so I said, “Can I help you with a size or anything?” and he said, “Well I need maybe a size seven.” I said, “Okay,” so I showed him a couple of styles and I said, “If it's not suitable you can always exchange it or whatever.” He said, “Can I try it on?” and I remember very clearly looking at him right in the face and saying, “Of course you can,” and leading him over to the change room and letting him in. There were a couple of other girls working, and one at least was much younger than I was because I was always the older person, and they were just in shock, totally in shock. I remember very clearly like, you know how the doors were high so you could see, and he took off his jeans, he was wearing tights, underneath, and it took a lot to go over and say over the door, “How are you doing? Can I get you another size? Is everything okay?” but honestly the whole time I was thinking how much courage it must have taken him to walk into a store in that little city and say, “Can I try this on?” . . . he didn't buy anything, but I remember thanking him for coming in and wishing him a pleasant day and one of my employees had to like banish herself because she couldn't cope, and not that she thought it was wrong or anything, but she was so nervous about it all that she had to hide [laughs] but I remember that very clearly and that was definitely a moral thing, I think, because some people probably would've said, “What do you [want]? No, go away,” or something like that. It was a long time ago too [emphasis in original]. (interview 5)

Christine is aware that she displays courage when she looks at this man “right in the face” and assists him without any help from her coworkers. She is also aware of his courage, not only as she reflects on the situation, but during the very moments that she is interacting with him. By acknowledging how hard it must have been for him to “walk into a store in that little city,” she reveals a sense of compassion. Her compassion arises from imagining how difficult it might be to live in a small city, in the late 1980’s, where the predominant moral values of the time were likely not inclusive. Christine’s awareness of the factors that made this a difficult situation for this man reveals her sensitive and caring nature. The fact that she treated this man with dignity is evident in her conduct, manner, and words.
Christine connects the incident in the store with her principal practice, as revealed when I ask her what made her speak and act the way that she did. I also ask her, “What would you say that is about you?” She replies,

Well I just certainly didn't want him to feel judged. I mean we don't have the right to be judging anybody else. I mean I do my best every day not to judge people. It’s hard sometimes, especially in our jobs because sometimes we think, “Why, why is the child being treated this way?” or whatever, but we have to move beyond that [and] we have to recognize, “Okay I’m judging right now and I have to stop.” I have to stop because I have to try and just see the big picture and see how we can help a situation [and] not judge why someone's doing something. (interview 5)

Christine wants to remain open-minded but is aware this is a challenge when she is upset about a child. She knows her judgements get in the way of seeing different sides of a situation. Her honesty about the challenges she faces shows that she is self-aware and genuine.

I ask Christine if there were any other moral or ethical situations she encountered in her jobs. She responds,

The common thread throughout all of them is just trying to be respectful because in any job that you’re in like that, whether you're babysitting or you're working as a receptionist or you're in the store, you're talking to people all the time [emphasis in original] and you sort of have to take into consideration everybody's feelings . . . it was important to me that people felt like you cared about them and that you were nice to them, even if they were being mean [laughs]. I don't remember too many people being mean but sometimes people get frustrated, you know. (interview 5)

Christine began her teaching career in Ontario as a Long Term Occasional teacher (LTO) holding temporary teaching assignments in various schools. She taught every grade from junior kindergarten to grade six, as well as Special Education and English as a Second Language (ESL). After several years of teaching as an LTO, Christine secured a permanent teaching position and taught for ten years before becoming a vice principal. Some of her most memorable experiences in her teaching years involved being a Special Education teacher. Christine believes that the children in her special education classes taught her to be patient and kind and to appreciate that
over time they would learn the curriculum, but at a different pace than other students (interview 5). As a principal, she has made important insights from working with the parents of these students, that she now shares with her staff. She reflects,

I say this to teachers all the time [that] when a parent has to come to the conclusion that their child may not be quite capable of what we consider the social standard, the social norm, it can be very heartbreak for parents. Sometimes parents show that heartbreak in different ways and they’re angry, they’re sad, [and] they’re frustrated. I think sometimes it’s hard for teachers to accept that a parent is feeling all those things because again, they think it’s directed at them, when really, it’s directed at the situation, and it’s just hard for people. I think it’s working with parents and trying to help them understand that their children are very capable but that they may learn, be learning in different ways [emphasis in original].

(interview 5)

Christine demonstrates compassion toward parents who are in distress. She understands that they experience complex emotions when they realize that their children are in some way different from “the social norm.” She expresses hope and keeps an open mind as she works with parents to help them understand that their children are still able to learn. Christine tries to help teachers view the situation from a parent’s perspective, and to see their role in helping the child succeed. Christine is also empathetic with teachers, evident in her remark that “it’s hard for teachers.”

Over the years, Christine has had several mentors, including superintendents, who have lent her a listening ear, and have guided her when confronted with challenging situations. They did not necessarily give her solutions, but encouraged her to consider different aspects of a situation before reaching a decision (interview 8). During her teaching years Christine had several mentors including one particular colleague, Richard, who had a significant influence on her. Although they worked together many years ago, she continues to draw on his advice and counsel in her work as a principal. Referring to Richard as “my number one role model and mentor” she says he taught her the significance of understanding a child’s emotional and academic needs (interview 5). He impressed upon her the importance of accepting children as they are and helping them to improve, rather than focusing on their shortcomings. Richard stressed the necessity of reaching out to families in the school community to offer them assistance and to approach every situation with an open mind. She recalls that he taught her, “not to pretend or fool yourself into thinking
you know all the details because you don’t, [emphasis in original] you don’t know anything, you’re just seeing something, seeing a situation and there's always more to know and to learn” (interview 5).

Another mentor who Christine described as “a major influence” was William, a principal whom she worked with during her years as a vice principal. His ability to remain calm and to “reflect on everything he did before he did it” made a significant impression on Christine. She recalls that he taught her to observe and to listen, so that she could always remain aware of what was happening around her. He imparted the importance of never making assumptions and always remaining calm. Christine passes on what she has learned from William to her own vice principals, particularly when they are new to the role. She advises them not to make hasty decisions but rather to observe first, talk to people, and obtain details before responding to a situation (interview 5). Christine remembers that William encouraged her to make her own decisions but keep an open mind. She explains,

[He would] ask me questions, sort of like you do in the interviews [laughs], so guide me, because he's watching and waiting [and asking], “Is she thinking about this? Have you considered this? What about if this happens?” but in a way that he wasn't giving me any answers, but he was pushing me to consider everything. (interview 8)

Christine sought out William’s advice on issues involving discipline or dealing with a difficult situation with a teacher. She phoned him every day during her first year as a principal as the enormity of the responsibility weighed heavily on her. Her biggest concerns that year are evident in the following comment, “When it comes to the kids, and I still have it [a fear], that I’m going to make a wrong decision and crush some child in one way or another” (interview 8). Christine is very concerned about what might happen to children at home after their parents learn of a mishap at school. She explains,

How are the parents going to react to the kids? We hear it all the time [from parents], “Well I just want you to feel free to beat him up or smack him or beat him,” and I just think those [emphasis in original] are my big, big worries about what was the fallout for this child if I do this. (interview 8)
In one interview, Christine speaks about a situation where she decided to suspend a student from school for five consecutive days. She confides that she found it very hard to suspend a child for such a lengthy period of time, even though his infraction was serious. She explains,

What if it makes him depressed? These kids are so much into self-harm and suicidal thoughts, like it's almost a way of life for a lot of these kids, and if they're on the brink, and if they're capable of doing serious things, and not getting it [then] what’s going on in their mind? I question it all the time. You know what if we suspend this kid and we don't know something about what this kid is doing? What if they're cutting or doing self-harm, and they just cross the line? What if they can't take it? I think about all that stuff every time. . . . you just don't know where a lot of these kids are because I think that [pause] they see the world in the way that we don't always know. We’re not privy to what is going on in their minds and they'll go out of their way [emphasis in original] to hide the fact that they're cutting, obviously and I just, you know, I worry, I worry about them. (interview 7)

I ask Christine how she deals with the uncertainties when making decisions. She responds,

I think that the important thing is balance, that yes, what you [the student] have done is pretty severe, this is serious, but I say it to teachers all the time and to parents, “We all make mistakes” . . . I don't think anybody needs to be punished forever, children or adults. I try to balance that with, “Let's be realistic. Yes, you [the student] have really screwed up, this is your consequence, you're going to have to accept it.” As long as it [the punishment] is done within reason, I think we’re okay, and just making sure that they [the students] don't feel deflated [emphasis in original]. (interview 8)

Christine feels accountable for the safety of the students, and her compassion towards them is evident. She is able to empathize with students who may be suicidal, and tries to imagine the world from their perspective. Christine cares about the students’ well-being, and she wants teachers and parents to understand that children make mistakes and should be forgiven. Christine holds students accountable for their behaviour, but in a way that maintains their dignity.

Christine maintains awareness of her words and tone of voice when she is disciplining students and she advises staff to do the same. She remarks,
Even if we’re having a long tiring day or we’ve had it with this child that just repeats these things over and over again [we must ask ourselves] “What’s the end goal?” And if we check, honestly, I have always said this, “Check ourselves.” Am I speaking to this child the way I would want to be spoken to? The way I would want my child spoken to? The way I would speak to this child if his mother [emphasis in original] was standing next to him? If I have to say, “Aah no” then I better stop. (interview 7)

Christine demonstrates patience and empathy when she speaks to children, and she wants teachers to do the same. By asking teachers to consider how they would want their own children treated, she is appealing to their ability to empathize. Christine is challenging teachers to demonstrate integrity by asking them to interact with students as if their mothers were there, and not change their behaviour when they believe no one is watching. The use of the word “mother” instead of “father” might suggest that she is appealing to the nurturing side of the teacher.

I ask Christine to clarify what she means by “check ourselves.” She elaborates,

I think I'm checking my own emotions and making sure that I'm not overreacting and not raising my voice. I’m not saying things that aren’t [pause] I guess key in moving the child forward in decision-making. I think that's what it is, that I'm not just blowing steam. . . . I think that it probably all comes back to mindfulness, where we’re just aware and present in the situation and not sort of just, reactive to what’s happening, but we’re mindful of the situation, mindful of the severity [emphasis in original] of the situation, the audience, and their own actions and behaviours. I think that’s what it is really. (interview 7)

Throughout her teaching years Christine took many courses to advance her professional learning. She obtained a Master of Education degree at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. She reflected that these courses were significant. Her courses focused on topics such as mindfulness and emotional intelligence. She was teaching yoga to her students at the time, so taking courses in “holistic education” made sense to her, from a personal and professional perspective. Inspired by these courses, Christine started teaching meditation to her own students, and saw that it made a significant impact on their well-being.

Christine has adopted a meditation practice in her own life and uses it to help her cope when the pressures of the principalship weigh on her. In an interview, she confides that she keeps herself
calm while conducting staff meetings by repeating reassuring thoughts to herself in the form of a meditation. Curious to know what she means, I ask her to elaborate. She explains,

I have to say to myself and I do it every meeting, “You're okay. You're okay Christine. Don't panic. You're the boss here, okay. You're doing what's best for everybody [pause] the best you can.” I do it at every single meeting, I have to, because if I don't, and people are getting all anxious and people are starting to fight, it's hard, I find it very difficult. It’s probably the hardest part of my job. . . . I hate conflict. I hate it and I don't like for people to be upset and even if I look at someone's face and that person seems angry, and I know that's a person who’s always angry, I don't like it. I don't like for that person to be angry. I don’t want that person to be angry [emphasis in original]. (interview 6)

I was surprised by Christine’s description of her anxiety. I attended several staff meetings and observed some anxiety in Christine’s behaviour, but not to the level that she is describing in the above interview excerpt (field notes, March 4, 2015). I usually situated myself in a corner of the staff room where I could obtain a clear view of Christine’s interactions with staff members and still be discreet in recording field notes. Christine generally presents as a calm, focused person, who is familiar with her staff and professional at the same time. She allows the staff time to converse before the meeting begins, and shares in good humoured jokes with them. Christine gives the staff opportunities to voice their concerns during the meetings, and the atmosphere in the room is respectful. The staff listen closely to her and she is patient in ensuring that information is clearly communicated (field notes, March 4, 2015 & April 8, 2015).

It is interesting to note that during one of my informal conversations with Mark, the ESL teacher, he comments on Christine’s approach at staff meetings. He explains that before she moves on the next item on the agenda she takes the time to ensure that everyone is heard, posing questions such as: “Are we clear? Do you understand what I just said? Are there any questions?” (field notes, October 31, 2014). I did note that Christine rarely sits down during these meetings, especially when she is leading the discussion. She stands in front of the staff and remains in the same part of the room for some time. She does walk to other sides of the room, but does not seem nervous or uneasy (field notes, March 4, 2015). Christine appears to deal with her anxiety very well. I ask Christine how she deals with the fact that she does not like conflict or unhappy people when her professional role often involves dealing with both. She confides, “That’s an area
that I’ve had to develop and grow in so much. I will always have to develop and grow in it and I always have to say to myself, ‘Christine, you have to let it go’” (interview 6).

Aside from staff meetings, Christine attends bi-monthly principal meetings, which are held in designated locations throughout the city. The most enjoyable aspect of these meetings for Christine are the beginning moments when a colleague leads the group in a prayer. Christine believes these prayers remind her and her colleagues to be mindful and to appreciate the present moment. She enjoys observing her colleagues “shut down and be peaceful” as they listen to the words in the prayer. Christine enjoys these moments so much that she jokingly admits to making a concerted effort to get to the meetings early to “get a good seat” because “it’s the best part of the meeting” (interview 6).

In various interviews Christine reminisces about moments in her teaching career where she shared her love of literacy with children and with colleagues. Some of her most cherished moments in her teaching career were spent reading books to her students, building extensive libraries in her classrooms, and sharing what she learned at literacy workshops with fellow teachers. As a vice principal, she continued to share her passion for literacy by assisting teachers in organizing their literacy programs. Christine is an avid reader and on occasion shared with me a collection of books from her personal library. I ask her where she could possibly find time to read, given her long hours at work. Christine typically begins her day at 6:00 am and leaves the school at approximately 4:30 pm. She confides that she reads many of her books during the night, when she cannot sleep. She particularly enjoys reading fictional best sellers and participates in a monthly book club. I ask Christine if literacy has had any particular impact on her moral awareness in her professional life. She responds,

The more you read, like you read about different characters, you’re reading about different situations, how people react and you think, “Oh I'd never do that” or “Yeah, that's a really good idea.” I think it [reading] broadens who you are as a person who interacts with others in the way you see the world because we can't possibly have that many situations I suppose, in our own lives, so it just broadens who we are a little bit . . . it broadens our view of the world, so I think that if we're reading a book about homelessness or loss or anything like that, I mean if you've not gone through something like that. Like I just read Still Alice, so for instance that’s a book that could really give you some insight into a person's life, a person
with Alzheimer's, a family dealing with someone with Alzheimer's, so that's just one small aspect of it, but it allows you just a little bit more insight. If you have someone on your staff who's just been told they have Alzheimer's or their parent has Alzheimer's or something, that I think that you sort of carry the message from the book a little bit inside. (interview 6)

Christine believes that the more she reads fictional stories, the more she can empathize with others. She strives to understand what is not within her immediate experience, seeking connections with people. One of the areas where she sees a need to connect with children is in special education. This is evident in her response when I ask her, “If you were designing a set of experiences and courses for a teacher who aspires to be a principal, what are the key areas that you would include to develop sound moral and ethical judgment, and why?” She replies,

I really think that everybody should have Special Ed. I keep telling everybody that but no one's believing me yet [laughs] but I think it is so important. I think really if not Special Ed experience, but definitely Special Ed Part One [the course] at the very least.

I ask Christine to explain why she thinks that it’s ethical to have Special Ed. She clarifies,

Well, because those are the most vulnerable group of children. Often times we have good intentions but don't really know what their rights are, what we should do for them, what things need to be done at what time. . . . it's a daunting thing to manage that Special Ed portfolio and if you're in a school alone [with no vice principal] and you have no idea [then] you're in trouble and the kids are in trouble. (interview 8)

Christine believes that having knowledge of what to do to assist children in Special Education is an ethical responsibility for principals. She indicates that having “good intentions” is not enough and that a principal has to be aware of students’ rights and then know how to respond to those rights. Christine recognizes the vulnerability of children with special needs and believes that knowing what to do to help them is an ethical responsibility. A lack of knowledge, according to Christine, leaves everyone vulnerable, as evident in her warning that the principal and the students “are in trouble.”
In the very last interview, I ask Christine to imagine herself several years into the future, and consider the legacy she hopes to leave behind, once she completes her term at St. Abby School. She reflects,

What I hope is [pause] people will continue just being good to each other and understanding that it’s important to feel cared for and respected and for them to feel supported. . . . I don’t really need to walk away from the school and for people to say, “Wow, she’s changed us forever.” Honestly, I’m glad that people at my last school, for instance, feel like I cared about them, that’s all, that’s all. . . . That’s all I really want is for people to think that someone cared about what they were doing every day. It’s not much of a legacy really [emphasis in original]. It’s not going to go down in history books. . . . Really, if I can be in the building and care about people, then that’s what I’m going to do. I think that’s what I was made for. (interview 9)

I must disagree with Christine that leaving a legacy of care is “not much of a legacy.” If this is indeed her only legacy, I would suggest that it is an honorable one that all stakeholders can share and build on, long after Christine has left the school. I am grateful to Christine for having trusted me enough to share her life story, and for investing the emotional energy needed to partake in the interviews. The data from these biographical interviews have provided the reader with an intimate portrait of Christine and the influences in her life that have shaped her practice.

In the following discussion, I address how Christine’s prior life experiences have made her more aware of the moral and ethical dimensions of her role, and how they have influenced the way she conceptualizes and deals with ethical situations in her practice. Christine often reminds staff members that children should be treated with dignity, compassion and respect. She consistently focuses on the well-being of children, and is concerned that their memories of school be positive and affirming. Christine’s struggles with childhood anxiety, and her recollections of being both understood and misunderstood by adults, influence the decisions she makes as a principal. For example, when Christine asks teachers to remove report card comments that indicate that children are “shy,” she does so because she believes these comments inaccurately label children. Christine empathizes with children and uses opportunities in her practice, such as in report card writing, to ensure that they are not disadvantaged by a label. Her ability to recall the pain she felt as a child when her anxiety was misdiagnosed as shyness, influences her reactions when she
reads similar comments about students. By making teachers aware that children could be anxious or stressed, she uses her prior life experiences and her influence as a principal to encourage teachers to be open-minded, respectful and compassionate.

Christine’s memories of anxiety at school, and her recollections of teachers who understood her, influence her ability to be empathetic toward troubled students. Her grade one teacher, who taught her to read and made her feel “at ease”, and her grade seven teacher who organized clubs as a break from the stresses of school, have influenced how she deals with children who are sent to her office. Her choice to offer children storybooks as a respite from their worries, and to allow them to stay in her office for a short while when the stresses of school overwhelm them, are examples of how Christine draws on her experiences with her own teachers to connect with troubled students. Christine’s ability to recall what her teachers did and said, and to articulate what she does and does not want to emulate from them, reveals how she uses her prior life experiences to guide her practice. Her stated intention to not emulate her high school principal who ruled with “an iron fist,” is an example of how she draws on her childhood memories to deal with the ethical dimensions of her work. When Christine defends her style of discipline to a teacher who is complaining that children sent to her office are allowed to play, she draws on her childhood experiences with her principal. She affirms that she will prioritize the dignity of the child and treat students with respect.

Rather than forgetting painful moments in her life, Christine draws on the moral lessons from them in her daily work. When she asserts her views with expressions like “that’s not going to be who I am” she is using the memories of her childhood experiences to ensure that she leads with integrity, treating the children under her care with respect and compassion. In one of our interviews, Christine speaks about how she has tried to forget painful incidents in her childhood, and remarks that her brother and her best friends remind her of situations that happened in the past and have had her, “in tears in my life, reminding me of stories that I’ve worked really hard [emphasis in original] to let go of. A lot of them I’ve probably hidden away because I always felt so anxious and scared that I just pushed them away” (interview 3). Despite an effort to forget incidents in her childhood, Christine is in fact using these experiences as moral guideposts in her daily practice. The “stories” that she has “worked really hard to let go of” provide her with life lessons that she uses to shape her ideals and beliefs about the way she will lead the school as an institution as well as the people in it. Although she believes she has worked hard to forget
incidents in her past, there seems to be a resonance between memories in her childhood and the ethical views that she expresses in her practice.

The financial hardship that Christine witnessed with her parents and grandparents when she was a child, and the general feeling of struggle that she recalls in her childhood town, may affect the choices she makes as a principal. Christine’s support and involvement in the school’s food bank, charity drives, and initiatives like the Christmas Store, are examples of how she conceptualizes her role as a principal as one who leads the school community in reaching out to families in need. Christine’s support of these school initiatives reveals a belief that schools have a role to play in helping children and their families live with dignity. Reminders to staff to approach her if students need financial help, signals an understanding that the school community is responsible for caring for all students and for making them feel included. Memories of how her own extended family came together when her great aunt suddenly died, and her belief that this event affected the decisions she now makes as a principal, show how she has been influenced by her life story in her role as a school leader (interview 3).

Christine’s prior life experiences have contributed to her understanding that people can be vulnerable and that their dignity can be easily compromised. Christine points to her experience as a sales clerk in a clothing store as an opportunity to be respectful and open-minded in a difficult situation. She recalls a male customer who tried on women’s clothing and believes that the lessons she learned with this customer help her to understand the people she encounters in her daily practice. Christine draws a connection between not judging the male customer and remaining open-minded with teachers and parents, particularly when she does not share their views. Christine believes her jobs prior to becoming a teacher, which included being a sales clerk, a receptionist, and a babysitter made her aware of the importance of respecting and caring for people. These experiences influence Christine in her daily work, evidenced in how she prioritizes respect and care as central virtues in her practice.

This chapter provided an intimate portrait of Christine and a detailed description of the research site, St. Abby School. Although the school community faces many challenges in dealing with hunger, poverty and immigration issues, it confronts these challenges in a manner intended to honour the self-worth of both the child and the adult. In Chapter Five, a description and analysis of the data will continue. Interviews conducted with Christine and with other participants provide
a foundation for understanding Christine as an ethical leader. In addition, insights gleaned from field notes and documents are used to inform the discussion.
Chapter 5

5 Leading Ethically

5.1 Introduction

This chapter captures the morally complex, highly nuanced and often ambiguous nature of one principal’s daily work. It reveals how ethical leadership practices and beliefs are expressed through moral virtues and are made manifest in the principal’s conduct, manner, words, stated intentions, daily practices and rituals. The principal’s steadfast effort to carry out duties and responsibilities in a moral manner is evident in her daily interactions with stakeholders. Virtue ethics has informed the body of knowledge on moral manner (Fallona, 2000; Fenstermacher, 2001; Richardson & Fenstermacher, 2001; Sockett, 1993, 2012) where manner is defined as choice of words, tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, posture, and overall demeanor (Fallona, 2000; Fenstermacher, 1990; Richardson & Fenstermacher, 2001; Jackson et al, 1993; Stengel & Casey, 2013).

There are three themes that guide the analysis and provide the structural framework for this chapter. These three themes include virtues, approaches to action and personal operational paradigms. The virtues that are the focus of discussion are trust, care, respect and fairness. These four virtues provide the foundation for examining the approaches to action and the personal operational paradigms that Christine refers to in her practice. Each virtue comprises a section of the chapter and serves as a structuring device for the discussion. Christine’s approaches to action and personal operational paradigms illustrate the four virtues and provide a detailed analysis that is intricate and complex. The approaches to action and personal operational paradigms are part of the overall conceptual structure of the four virtues and offer a comprehensive portrait of Christine’s leadership.

The first theme explores the virtues of trust, care, respect, and fairness and uncovers how these virtues are expressed in Christine’s conduct, manner, words, stated intentions, daily practices and rituals. The words “daily practices” and “rituals” are used somewhat interchangeably and for the purposes of this study, refer to a pattern of consistent or repeated action over time. The second theme examines Christine’s approaches to action as they are revealed through role modelling, communication, decision-making, building relationships and providing support. More
specifically, Christine believes that she is a role model and sets the tone for students, teachers, staff members and parents. She is a firm believer in communicating with people and views communication as an important aspect of her practice. Her role as a decision maker is one that she takes seriously and she believes she approaches decisions with an appreciation of the influence they have on people’s lives. Christine believes that building relationships is crucial as it establishes trust and facilitates progress in the school. She lends support to students, staff members and parents by helping them overcome challenges and encouraging them to celebrate success.

The third theme explores the personal operational paradigms that Christine employs in her daily practice. Personal operational paradigms are central guiding reference points that Christine uses to deal with ethical situations in her daily work, and to communicate to others that she conceptualizes her leadership in moral terms. These personal operational paradigms include accountability, awareness, best interests of the child, hope and optimism and vulnerability. Accountability and awareness are associated with presence, and in this sense, presence also emerges as a personal operational paradigm. More specifically, accountability involves Christine’s emphasis on the importance of being responsible to students, teachers, parents and community members. Christine’s understanding of how the virtues are revealed in her words and actions show her awareness that what she says and what she does have ethical relevance, and have the potential to influence how people treat each other. Christine often speaks about the best interests of the child when she is trying to explain her reasons for making a decision. She believes she tries to keep the child’s best interests as a central guiding reference point when she is faced with situations that are morally complex and have competing interests. Christine tries to instill a sense of hope and optimism as she assists others in dealing with challenges and hardships. Her efforts to help people be optimistic in situations that appear bleak, reveal her belief that leading ethically means helping others lead hopeful lives. Christine is willing to be vulnerable in situations where she believes she can bring about a moral outcome for others. She tries to help people understand how others can be vulnerable, and in this sense, leads ethically by building a compassionate school.

The order of the data chapters, Chapters Four, Five and Six, is intentional and provides a sense of symmetry. More specifically, Chapter Four began with a detailed description of the school and the context where Christine conducts her practice. It transitioned into a vivid account of
Christine’s life story, offering insight into how significant events and people in her life have shaped who she is as a person and a professional. Chapter Five begins where Chapter Four left off, by exploring in greater depth how Christine conceptualizes her role as a principal in moral terms, and how she engages with the ethical dimensions of her daily work. The ways in which she envisions the moral aspects of her practice, and deals with ethical situations, are illuminated to better comprehend how her efforts to lead ethically help shape the moral tone in the school. Christine’s daily practices and rituals are explored in an effort to better understand the moral influence they have on the people she interacts with on a daily basis.

While Chapters Five and Six both address Christine’s moral and ethical leadership, they are separate and distinct. Chapter Five examines Christine’s daily interactions and the moral influence she has on people who come into contact with her. It looks at how she exemplifies ethical virtues and expresses moral principles in her daily words and deeds. Chapter Six considers her attempts to cultivate ethicality in a wider sense, by encouraging moral behaviour among community members. In Chapter Six, Christine builds relationships and uses communication tools to cultivate ethical interactions. Her consistent efforts to guide moral behaviour give rise to a moral tone or climate in the school.

As Chapter Five begins, I invite the reader to consider how Christine exemplifies a range of virtues in her practice. The following virtues were prevalent in the interview and observation data: trust, respect, care and fairness. The sections that follow will include a definition of each of the virtues as well as examples of how they emerge in the data.

5.2 Trust

Sergiovanni (2005a) links trust with support and vulnerability. He explains that in order for people to feel comfortable enough to take risks, they must be confident that they can make mistakes and still be supported. The establishment of trust in a school determines how people behave toward each other. Sergiovanni (2005a) notes, “Once embedded in the culture of the school, trust works to liberate people to be their best, to give others their best, and to take risks” (Sergiovanni, 2005a, p.90). Fullan (2011) explains that trust develops when there is consistency of action. He states, “Trust is an outcome of modelling - proving yourself through your action over time” (Fullan, 2011, p.116). In this sense, Fullan connects trust with integrity. Looking at these definitions, I argue that three of the distinct attributes of trust are support, vulnerability and
integrity. However, I offer a wider definition of trust that includes courage, which is alluded to when Sergiovanni (2005a) mentions risk in his definition. Following from the above definitions, four of the key attributes of trust are support, vulnerability, integrity and courage. In the context of my study, trust is closely associated with support, vulnerability, integrity and courage. It is also deeply connected to care, respect, fairness, accountability, compassion, dignity, relationships, and presence. Trust is an important virtue in Christine’s daily work and is established through her conduct, manner, words, stated intentions, daily practices and rituals. Situations where people express trust in Christine as well as instances where she demonstrates trust in others are explored. Christine is sometimes challenged in her efforts to trust people, and at times they have difficulty trusting her. This discussion offers a better understanding of how one principal gains trust, and is challenged to maintain it, particularly when confronted with complex situations requiring decisions of significant moral relevance.

Christine demonstrates an ability to build trust in her interactions with parents. In the following excerpt, she discusses a relationship with a mother that was steadily developed over time. Christine’s patience and her steadfast commitment to keep the parent engaged in conversation inspires trust. She explains,

I had a grade one parent that I’ve met with so many times this year. [She is] young, so young. She is willing to talk to me [so] I’m honoured, honestly because she won’t speak to anybody else because she feels that she’s being judged…took me the whole year I’m not kidding, the whole year [emphasis in original], to get her to see the social worker which was a complete disaster but even then, she kept with me, she kept with me. (interview 9)

When Christine states that the mother “won’t speak to anybody else” she is suggesting that a trusting relationship is developing. Christine’s feeling of being “honoured” by the mother’s trust reveals a genuine affection for the parent and a sense of humility. Even though the plan to connect with the social worker did not go well, the mother still continues to trust Christine. This is evident in Christine’s words, “but even then, she kept with me, she kept with me.” Attributes of trust which include vulnerability, integrity, courage and support arise in this interaction. Christine is demonstrating an ability to cultivate a trusting relationship over time with a parent who is particularly vulnerable. The mother has stayed with Christine, which suggests an element
of integrity and support in their interactions. She is able to maintain the parent’s trust even when the outcomes are uncertain, suggesting courage.

The trust Christine establishes with parents can be tested when she is faced with the legal obligation to report a case of abuse or neglect to a Children’s Aid Society. Her first experience of making a report to Children’s Aid was during her practicum in England; a suspected case of neglect involving one of the children in her classroom. Christine recalls having conversations with the staff about what to do in these situations and they provided “great guidance” for her. She now tries to offer that same support to her own staff when they are confronted with situations of suspected child abuse or neglect. Despite many years of experience, Christine still grapples with a range of concerns when she has to contact Children’s Aid. She explains,

> When we call Children's Aid sometimes we know the parents very well, and we really feel like we’re letting them down [and] we’re going behind their back. [We wonder] is there anything more we could do, but when we feel really that a child is at risk, for whatever reason, [and] I’m sure in every case that I’ve ever called and every person that I’ve ever worked with that has called, it is an ethical decision, because you feel like you’re destroying someone’s life on some level. You think, “Wow, will they ever recover from this? The parents won’t trust me and I want to continue to work with them, that’s a big one. What if they pull the kids from the school? Who will love them the way we do?” (interview 2)

Christine’s fear that the trust she has developed with the parents will be broken seems to come from a fundamental concern about the family and the child. She is aware that the family could experience significant upheaval, and that if her report is perceived as a betrayal of trust, it could jeopardize an opportunity for a relationship with them in the future. Her concern that the children may not encounter anyone “who will love them the way we do” conveys a caring disposition. Wondering if there is “anything more” that she could have done shows a sense of accountability to the family and to the child.

Christine is aware that there is a legal obligation to call Children’s Aid but is able to empathize with teachers who find the experience of making the report to Children’s Aid stressful. She remarks,
We still [emphasis in original] struggle with it. You’re still looking for [indicators like] perhaps I’ve made a mistake, obviously that kid is fine, I know his mom so well, but we have the legal obligation now, so that if the child discloses something or we see that they’re neglected, we have to call, that’s all there is to it. (interview 2)

Christine is expressing concern that trusting relationships may be broken which is the essence of the struggle that she refers to. The recognition of the struggle indicates that she values trust. If teachers prefer not to disclose their names when they call Children’s Aid, Christine asks that they give her name as the point of contact, as opposed to allowing the call to remain anonymous. Curious to know why, I ask her to elaborate. Christine explains that when teachers call Children’s Aid and talk to a representative they are making a report because they suspect abuse or neglect. When reporting, teachers are required to leave the name of the school but they do not have to leave their own name. Christine is aware that teachers often do not want to leave their names due to the complications that it can cause in their relationships with parents and students. Christine tells the teachers to explain that their principal is aware that they are calling and that she said that they could use her name as the point of contact when they begin their investigation. Christine is not asking the teachers to lie to Children’s Aid or to deceive them in any way, and she does expect them to fulfill their professional obligation to call Children’s Aid. Christine clarifies,

As a principal, I’ve always said to Children’s Aid, “Yes, you can tell them [the parents] it was me,” because I feel they have the right to know. . . . They [teachers] have to make the call because they don’t want to put the child at risk. It’s a really strange thing that in many cases where a parent has approached me and [has] been upset it’s because I didn’t call them to tell them I was phoning, which is really interesting. Then you explain to parents, “Well I’m not allowed. . . . Once I’ve made the call, I’m no longer in charge. They [Children’s Aid] are in charge and they tell me what to do to ensure that your child [and] every child is safe. Parents don’t like that because they feel like they can’t trust you which is why I always say to [teachers talking to] Children’s Aid, “Yes tell them it was me,” even if it was the teacher. (interview 2)

Curious to know why Christine takes responsibility for calls made to Children’s Aid, I ask her to clarify. She states,
I want the parents not to feel that it was some random person, that it was someone from the school and if I have to have that conversation I want to be able to say to parents, “Yes, I was worried for your child. I was afraid for your child. I was afraid for you.” So, I want to be able to have that conversation and I want them to not wonder who it was [that called]. . .

Sometimes, I suppose, it could backfire and a parent might hate you forever but generally, even when the parent is so angry, and comes in here with guns ablazing, in the end, when I can say, “This is why I called,” in the end, they’re okay…. If they [the parents] are just suspecting, “Oh the school called,” or if they [Children’s Aid] say someone from the school called, then the parent can't really get beyond that. So sometimes I think if they say, “Oh the principal called,” I never hear another word from the parents [because] maybe they're too embarrassed [or] maybe they don't care [or] maybe they knew without telling me. Sometimes a parent will be mad, or sad, and I think if they don’t know it’s me, maybe they can’t get beyond it, and then we can’t continue with our relationship that you know we have in the first place to make sure the child is receiving a good education. (interview 2)

Christine displays courage by offering her support to teachers who may feel nervous about making reports to Children’s Aid. By saying, “I was afraid for your child. I was afraid for you” she keeps the dialogue centred on safety and maintains a tone of concern, rather than a tone of judgment. When Christine states “I want the parents not to feel that it is was some random person” she is stating an intention to avoid confusion about who is the contact person for the call that was placed to Children’s Aid. This demonstrates courage, respect, and accountability to the parents. Christine is aware that her authority as a principal has an influence on having the parent accept what happened and move forward, ultimately for the benefit of the child. She is compassionate toward teachers who are nervous about calling Children’s Aid and seems to have established a climate of trust, where they feel at ease approaching her to express their concerns. She clarifies,

It’s always done in consultation [with the teacher]. I’ve actually never had a situation where a teacher called without telling me. . . . Maybe it’s because I stress all the time, in staff meetings with all the staff members, if a child is at risk we need to protect them, so maybe they feel very comfortable in saying to me, “I’m worried about this child.” [I say] “If you're worried, you call Children's Aid, simple as that.” (interview 2)
Trust is evident in the fact that Christine has “never had a situation” where a teacher has contacted Children’s Aid without first informing her about it. Christine attributes this level of comfort to the open communication that she has at staff meetings. She expresses compassion for teachers who are fearful and offers support to them. She continues,

But I think some teachers are scared. . . . So, I always say [to the teacher], “Tell them it was me.” . . . I guess I’m protecting the teacher as well because parents can become pretty irate, they’re hurt, they’re mad, they’re sad, whatever the reason is, but it can come back to us in a certain way, and I would rather that it came to me and not to the teacher directly. . . . I don’t want to break down the relationship between the parent and teacher, the child and parent and teacher, and sometimes I think that maybe the teacher is not, I don’t want to say able, because I’m sure they’re all able, but brave enough to face some parents who are mad [emphasis in original]. I don't want the parents to be yelling at any teachers. (interview 2)

Christine protects the teacher’s dignity by taking steps to avoid angry confrontations with parents. She assumes responsibility for the relationship between the teacher, the parent, and the child and is aware of how quickly trust can break down which could ultimately harm the child. Christine is demonstrating support for teachers, and her courage is revealed in her willingness to confront angry parents. She maintains,

If they [the parents] need to vent I’m here [emphasis in original] at this desk to get vented to . . . in the end if the parent knows it's the teacher [who called Children’s Aid], without even meaning to, the parent can break down that relationship by being then overly protective [saying to the child], “Don't say anything, don't talk to the teacher,” which I totally understand but it doesn't benefit the child. (interview 2)

Christine communicates to the staff that she will support them. She is trying to ensure that the parent assigns blame to her rather than the teacher. Christine tells the staff that she will take responsibility and she assumes that responsibility. Christine is protecting the student-teacher relationship; she is protecting the child from feeling isolated from the teacher. In this sense, she is using the best interests of the child as a personal operational paradigm to guide her in her practice. Andrew, the field superintendent, believes that Christine considers the needs of the child when faced with complex situations. He comments, “The child is always the centre for Christine and she really tries to distinguish and separate the parent’s perspective from the child,
Sergiovanni (2005a) explains that when leaders are not trusted they lack credibility. When Christine gives permission to leave her name as a point of contact, and then confronts angry or irate parents, over time she establishes credibility, as staff begin to trust that she will support them. Christine is demonstrating support, courage, and vulnerability, all attributes of trust. Sergiovanni (2005a) also argues that a lack of credibility presents a serious challenge for leaders who need to ensure that people carry out their duties. Christine’s efforts to establish credibility are evident in the way that she supports the teachers in their difficult duty of calling Children’s Aid. She is creating an environment where teachers understand that they are not abandoned. Rebore (2014) concurs that all stakeholders who work in schools, and are closely associated with them, must feel that they can trust principals to follow through on what they say and carry out their duties. In this sense, Rebore is associating trust with integrity, another important attribute of trust.

Olivia, an early childhood educator, seeks Christine’s advice when she is concerned about a child whose appearance or behaviour might indicate neglect. For instance, if a child repeatedly comes to school with no lunch or frequently wears clothes that are unclean, Olivia will talk to Christine about her concerns. She explains that she will not call a parent without first getting Christine’s opinion about the situation. Olivia trusts Christine’s advice and seeks her counsel. She indicates that she would go to Christine if she had a challenging behavioural situation with a student. Olivia states,

[If there was] a kid who wasn't listening to me and I really was losing control of the class or a kid was hitting me or something like that, where I felt personally either at harm or like literally frozen, like I don't know what to do, that's when I would feel comfortable to say [to the child], “We’re going to go see Ms. Bray” . . . and [I would] say [to Ms. Bray], “This is what happened. Please can you help me with this or what do you think I should do?”

Definitely she's someone that would guide me in a behavioural situation. (interview, Olivia)

Olivia is indicating that Christine is approachable and that she would trust her advice. She is willing to seek direction and in this sense, she would allow herself to be vulnerable with Christine. Staff members and parents approach Christine for many reasons. Her ability to act
decisively fosters a sense of trust. For example, when Rachael, the French teacher, plans school-wide events, she relies on Christine to make financial decisions so that she can organize these events in a timely manner. She explains, “If she says that she’s going to give us the money, she gives us the money. I don’t feel at all put in a situation where I have to say, ‘Well, you did commit to this. Can we please have it?’” (interview, Rachael). Rachael believes that Christine follows through on what she promises.

Christine values relationships, evident in the following remark: “Building relationships is key and I stand by that in everything I do in the school” (field notes, November 18, 2014). Curious to know what she meant, I followed up with her in a subsequent interview. She explains,

I do stand by it [and] I think it is number one . . . I think that if we’re looking at staff members, most of them feel that I’m here if they need me and they’ll come and talk to me. I just think that without having that personal connection, and without having trust, [emphasis in original] you can’t get things done. . . . People feeling they can trust you is really important. (interview 4)

Rebore (2014) argues that without trust, schools as organizations begin to disintegrate, and principals quickly lose respect. When Christine states, “without having trust [emphasis in original], you can’t get things done…. People feeling they can trust you is really important,” she is emphasizing trust as a central virtue in her practice and in her ability to lead. Christine is recognizing that trust and credibility are related. Christine continues,

I think that people need to be able to take risks [and] have conversations and not feel that they’re judged [and] that you will listen and be able to say what you think. Again, not always agreeing on something but being able to have those conversations. People have come to me having conversations, things that they don’t like that I’m doing, and I think that’s a good thing. I wish more people could do it because there are unhappy people that maybe wouldn’t do that. (interview 4)

Christine is aware that building trust is an ongoing process. She acknowledges that some staff members have difficulty being open and candid with their remarks. Christine values trust and respect, where people feel they can “take risks” and disagree with her. When she states, “People have come to me having conversations, things that they don’t like that I’m doing,” she shows a
willingness to be vulnerable and open to dialogue. Oakley, the child and youth worker, describes Christine as “reliable” because she feels that whenever situations arise, she can sit down and “talk things through with her.” She explains that she “feels quite comfortable” approaching Christine to speak to her about daily issues and concerns. When I ask Oakley why she feels comfortable with Christine she responds, “She’s very open. She’s very honest. I think she shows respect to us by giving us her opinion, whether you like it or don’t like it [but] she does that in a respectful way” (interview, Oakley). Clare, an educational assistant, maintains,

Any time I have to go to Christine and approach her, go into her office, I do feel comfortable doing that, I’m not afraid of, I guess, of her reactions . . . I feel like the door is open, if she is in her office and she’s by herself I just kind of [say], “Hi, look who I have here,” and I do feel very welcomed in bringing whoever [students] I’m working with [into her office]. (interview, Clare)

Clare is expressing trust in Christine. She can rely on Christine to receive her without the need for ceremony. Her feeling that “the door is open” signifies that Christine is approachable. Clare trusts that she will not be turned away, even when she makes spontaneous visits. Levy, a grade four teacher, describes Christine as “friendly” and “engaging.” He states,

I think she builds relationships well with the staff who are open to that. I think she’s always available to talk or just to have a bit of a laugh if that’s what the person needs at the time and I think that’s a good characteristic to have where she’s able to sort of be open with the staff. (interview, Levy)

Levy continues to explain that when Christine is “open” with the staff it creates conditions where “trusting relationships” can be formed. He suggests that Christine’s “friendly” and “engaging” disposition affects the school environment. Levy remarks,

Christine’s trying to build the relationships with staff to really try to foster a bit of a community feeling that really allows people to just show up a little happier at work, and you’re not scared to go in to talk to somebody. You’re a lot more comfortable. It’s a comfortable environment at that point. (interview, Levy)
Christine fosters trusting relationships with staff when she signals to them that they are welcomed in her office. Bryk and Schneider (2003) argue that principals must establish relational trust in a school community. Relational trust means that each person in a relationship, including teachers, students, parents and the principal, has a shared understanding of the obligations that are associated with their role in the school. Bryk and Schneider (2003) maintain that everyone in a school is mutually dependent on the other, and that this dependency produces a feeling of vulnerability. Behaviour that lessens this feeling of vulnerability, allowing people to feel safe and confident, fosters trust in the school community. They further argue that principals establish relational trust by engaging in respectful interactions where they attentively listen to others, and show personal regard by being open to other’s ideas. Christine establishes relational trust by being available and accessible to staff members, and by inviting them into her office to talk about concerns or to have a light-hearted exchange. Her friendly and warm manner allows staff to feel at ease in her presence, and may lead to greater trust, as they know that she will not turn them away, and will listen to them.

Communication is important in the ongoing process of building trust, and in the context of this research, is an approach to action. In an informal conversation with Mark, an ESL teacher, he suggests that Christine is open and candid in her communication. He says that she is “forthcoming” particularly at staff meetings, where she gives detailed accounts of the efforts she has taken to solve a problem. If she is encountering challenges, sometimes due to “bureaucracy or red tape,” she will explain them, and will sometimes state that she is going to keep trying to solve the problem, despite the challenges. Mark characterizes Christine’s style of communication as “respectful” and suggests that she is patient, honest, and diligent, taking the time to outline what actions she has taken, and what she intends to do. He feels “acknowledged” and “heard” at staff meetings because of Christine’s manner. Christine takes additional time if needed to ensure that all staff members have understood what she has said, and that everyone has had an opportunity to be heard. Mark indicates that he feels valued, included and respected and believes that many staff members feel the same way. He confides that staff meetings were not conducted in this manner with a previous administrator. Mark reflects that when items of concern were raised, the principal would glance at the clock and say, “We can’t really stay on that,” or “We don’t have time to talk about that.” Following several attempts to talk about issues, Mark
explains that he became discouraged, and “just didn’t bother to raise items of concern because I felt that they would be dismissed” (field notes, October 31, 2014).

In a separate conversation, Hannah, a grade six teacher, reveals,

Sometimes when you have a boss let's say, if you don't have a word [give your opinion] and things, you don't find that you would give suggestions again. For Christine, you can tell that people always give her suggestions and she does take that to note. (interview, Hannah)

Candice, the guidance teacher, echoes this sentiment when she states,

Never has Christine once said, “I can’t talk to you. I can’t listen to you. Your issue’s not important. I'm busy,” not even an “I'm busy.” She always [emphasis in original] makes time for everybody that comes here [and] not all principals do that. (interview, Candice)

I ask Candice what Christine’s response means to her and she clarifies,

When people come to you they want to talk. There’s a reason why somebody's coming and asking you something. If you turn them away they may never come back again, and maybe to you that was, ‘Well I was busy and I can’t speak to them,’ but to them it could be she doesn't care how I feel [and] she doesn't want to listen to my problem [and] I'm not good enough. (interview, Candice)

Candice associates trust with approachability and accessibility, and views Christine as someone she can rely on for open communication. She seems to be suggesting that Christine is fair, and treats everyone equally, in that she devotes her attention to “everybody that comes here.” She echoes Mark’s sentiments that if people perceive that the principal has no time for them, they may stop bringing their concerns to the principal.

Tatum, Christine’s administrator colleague, recalls what Christine says and does when troubled children or parents approach her in her office. She recalls,

She didn’t necessarily have to say or do anything. She would just say, “Come into my office.” It was just her calmness, her demeanour. She never gave off the feeling that she was too busy for them. She always made the time. There could be explosions anywhere. There could be a lockdown anywhere, but she would stop and take the time and say, “Come in and
sit in my office. She would let them [students and parents] know that they were in a safe, comfortable place and that they had her full attention. There wasn’t looking at the clock. She wasn’t too busy. Everything shut down because this was important. This was somebody’s life, you know, and that was on a regular basis. So, I learned a lot from that in dealing with, and adapting that way into who I was. (interview, Tatum)

These sentiments have been similarly expressed by Place (2011) who states,

Being a successful leader is more than having a great deal of knowledge; you also need to have successful interactions with staff, students, and parents. An administrator needs to give priority to people and relationships and create a climate that promotes a value for the feelings and voices of all community members. (Place, 2011, p. 112)

Christine gives staff members her devoted attention when they approach her which builds trust and fosters open communication. By giving people the time they need to speak with her, she is signaling that they are important and they are valued. On that same note, Olivia believes Christine is genuinely interested in listening to the staff. She indicates that staff members trust Christine enough that if they ever felt they did not say everything that they wanted to say at a staff meeting, they would follow up with her afterwards in a private conversation, to finish what they were trying to say (interview, Olivia). Hannah believes that staff members have confidence in Christine, which creates a feeling of trust. She has observed that people are at ease after a staff meeting, having faith that if a problem has not yet been solved, that it will be solved in the near future (interview, Hannah). Rachael, however, does not share the sense of ease that Hannah describes, and wishes that Christine spent more time at staff meetings giving updates and relaying items of information, a practice she recalls with a previous administrator. Rachael believes that Christine relies too heavily on email communication, which may leave people vulnerable to gossip. She remarks,

Not everybody is diligent about reading emails. . . . if they’re not a person that uses that [emails] they’re missing out on information [and] that’s when rumours start. That’s when people start making, not making things up, but taking one little thing and it grows, and then it’s ‘broken telephone.’ (interview, Rachael)
I asked Rachael if she thought Christine was aware that she may not be offering enough updates at staff meetings, and she indicated that Christine might not be aware of it. Rachael commented that she has not told Christine, but that she would tell her if Christine ever asked her for feedback. She clarified that she was not sure how “receptive” Christine would be to her thoughts because she had never talked to her about it. Barbara, an educational assistant, trusts Christine enough to be open and candid with her, as evident when she says,

I find that Christine’s very personable. I find that you can tell her things and you don’t have to feel bad or you don’t have to [wonder] “Will she hold it against me?” . . . I think once you know that she does support you, I think it makes you feel better. (interview, Barbara)

Hannah believes that Christine strikes a balance between giving updates and allowing staff to engage in dialogue. She states,

Christine does what she has to do, she informs, but she gives the floor to other people, whereas I know in the past in the staff meetings, it usually was administrators just talking and talking . . . Christine’s there to listen, it's a staff [emphasis in original] meeting, it's not a principals’ meeting. She's very much giving us the opportunity to meet as a group to talk and to discuss things and not just to relay messages. (interview, Hannah)

I was present at a staff meeting where a discussion ensued about the advantages and disadvantages of allowing intermediate students to use technology in the absence of teacher supervision. The discussion was initiated by an intermediate teacher, and Christine encouraged the staff to share their views. The dialogue focused specifically on the lunch hour. Staff members gave their opinions about whether intermediate students should be allowed to use their phones, iPads, and computers when their homeroom teachers are not present to supervise them. Some staff expressed a belief that the intermediate students should be trusted to make responsible decisions. Others expressed a concern that intermediate students are still young, and that problems would have to be addressed by lunchtime supervisors, creating added stress for them (field notes, March 4, 2015). I ask Christine in a separate conversation why she encourages such an open discussion of student use of technology. She clarifies,

Well I think we get to hear everybody's concerns. There could be things that I haven't thought about [and] things that the intermediate staff might be perfectly okay [with], some of them,
and others might not, so I think it just gives an opportunity for everybody to have a voice. Then I can take that information and with the two vice principals and/or the intermediate division, make the decision around that. (interview 7)

By listening to everyone’s concerns, Christine fosters respectful communication and encourages discussion. Her commitment to open dialogue suggests that she values staff voices in decision making. As Haynes (2002) argues, “Ethics works most successfully in an open community of inquiry in which each of the participants has an equal voice” (p. 38).

One of the ways that Christine establishes trust is by being present in the school on a consistent basis. She leaves the building only when absolutely necessary such as for meetings or professional development workshops. Christine is aware that a previous principal was frequently out of the building, attending to projects. She clarifies,

I think that the staff members and the community, everybody, was ready to have somebody that was committed to being here, that made it a priority, who avoided things at the board level unless it was really special because it's important to be here. I'm almost certain that was one of the reasons why I was asked to come here [to this school] was because of the way I did things at the previous school [and] the fact that I was there all the time [and] present to the community. Rarely if a parent ever shows up here [do] I say, “I'm sorry I can’t see [you].” It's a very rare occasion. Even if sometimes I don't want to face the music, I try to just be brave [laughs] . . . people feel that, ‘I know Christine is down there (in her office) so I know she’ll support me.’ (interview 7)

Christine believes it is important to be present in the building, as her presence signals support for others. For Christine, supporting others means having the courage to confront difficult situations. In this sense, support and courage, which are two attributes of trust, are evidenced in Christine’s actions. Christine believes that being present is important, as it reassures people that they can rely on her, and that she is accountable to them. In this context, presence is both physical and emotional, and is multilayered. As it is associated with accountability, presence emerges as a personal operational paradigm in Christine’s practice. Christine’s presence inspires trust. For example, she is usually the first person to arrive in the building, and people take advantage of this time to approach her with concerns or engage her in friendly conversation. Miranda, the school secretary, reflects,
In the mornings staff members will go to her office and they’ll be laughing and they’ll be telling her stories and that didn't happen at my other school. I mean a lot of it is because the principal would show up just right when the bell [rang]. Christine's here so early that people are in there [her office] and it gives them a chance to ask questions or [it gives them] that before school time to get their questions answered. She's always available for staff and that makes a big difference I think for them. (interview, Miranda)

Christine makes a point of being present in the yard at the same time every morning before the bell rings. This has become a ritual for her, and she takes great care to structure her time so that she can do it. She offers the following explanation,

At quarter after eight I go out there to the front of the school so I can say, “good morning” to parents and so I can see the kids and say, “good morning”. They see me and I see them. [During] bus times at least [I] get out there and walk around. If it's indoor duty [I] go upstairs into that intermediate hall and talk to them [the students] and just be a part of the scene and build relationships because if we don't [do that] we’re going to miss out on opportunities for growth for the kids and for each other I think. . . . When kids know you and they see you and they know the kind of person that you are and they realize that everything is open for discussion and that I will do my best to be calm, to be respectful with them no matter what they’ve done, even if they know I'm really not happy, even if they know they've really done something that's not good [emphasis in original]. I want the kids to know that we’re going to talk about it. In the end, there could be really severe consequences, but I want them to know that they can trust me, and that I'm going to treat them with respect, even if they've crossed every line in the book [laughs], I just want them to feel that they’re not going to be humiliated or embarrassed. (interview 7)

Christine believes that if the students “see” her and she “sees” them, they will eventually come to trust her, knowing that she will treat them with dignity “no matter what they’ve done”. Her use of the word “see” appears to have two meanings. She literally sees the students and they see her but there is also an implied deeper meaning in “seeing.” Being consistently present to the students enables them to “know the kind of person” that Christine is and to “see” the human being in her. Rather than being perceived as “a ruler that causes fear in the office,” (interview 1) being present enables students to know her as a genuine person. Christine considers this ritual to
be an important way of building and strengthening her relationships. She believes her constant presence garners trust and respect, particularly with the students.

On one occasion, Christine’s relationship with a student was observed by Sophia, a grade three teacher. She recounts, “myself and the former vice principal carried [the student] to the office kicking and screaming . . . and we just had him by the legs and the arms and when Christine saw him she said, ‘Put him down,’ and she just sort of gestured for him and he ran to her.” Sophia implies that the student who is seemingly unresponsive has developed a trusting relationship with Christine. Christine is building relationships and trust by being present in the school. In this instance, Christine appears to draw on the relationship that she has already established with the child to provide a calming and stabilizing influence for everyone involved.

Christine has developed a practice of not carrying any mobile devices when she is walking inside the school building. She does take her cell phone with her when she goes out into the yard, but keeps it in her pocket. If an urgent situation develops in the school, she can respond. If her phone rings and it is an outside caller, she will usually not answer it. Christine is adamant about keeping this practice. Curious to understand why, I ask her to clarify. She states,

I want people to see that I'm present to them and I am not distracted by my phone. I love social media, but at work when I'm with staff and I'm with the kids, I really want them to know that I'm listening and that I'm there for them. (interview 7)

Over time this practice of not looking at her phone may inspire trust, as she communicates to people that they are important and are valued. By avoiding the distraction of mobile devices, Christine’s practice signals her emotional presence to staff, students and parents. Christine demonstrates respect by giving people her devoted as opposed to divided attention. She shows that she cares about people by listening to them. Christine believes that when people are aware that she is listening, she conveys a message to them that they can rely on her for support; she is being actively present.

Olivia believes Christine has built relationships with teachers and students, and is aware of what they are doing in their classrooms, because she is consistently present in the school. She reflects on how Christine spends time in the staffroom, getting to know teachers as individuals, and becoming acquainted with their classes and their students. Christine’s presence in the staffroom
allows her to establish a “connection” with teachers and gain an awareness of “all aspects of the school community, both professionally and personally” (interview, Olivia). Christine is engaging with staff and becoming acquainted with them on a deeper level. Her presence signals a genuine interest in who they are as “individuals.”

Christine’s daily practices of being in the school yard, avoiding distractions, having an open door policy, and going out to busses morning and afternoon, reaffirm a notion of presence as a personal operational paradigm for Christine, where presence is associated with awareness and accountability. Christine uses presence as a way to impart her belief that being aware and accountable inspires and builds trust. Starratt (2013) reflects on the meaning of being present and states,

> Being fully present means being wide awake to what’s in front of you. It could be another person, a passage in a book, a memorandum you are composing to the staff, a flower on your desk. Being present is like inviting a person or an event to communicate or reveal something of itself. We cannot be present to the other if the other is not present to us; the other’s presence must somehow say, this is who I am, this is what I am feeling about this situation, this is the part of me that I want you to really consider right now. Being present means taking the other inside of yourself, looking at the other really closely, listening to the tone of the other, the body language of the other. This being present is also an unspoken message to the other that you are there, attending to the other’s message, responding to the other from your own spontaneous authenticity (Starratt, 2013, p. 56).

There are many ways that Christine conveys a message of presence in the school. Christine devotes time to attending special performances and events. She often stays for the entire duration of the event, and will acknowledge the contributions of others by thanking people at the end of the performance. Her presence signals that she supports the efforts of others and that she respects the time and work required to organize these events (field notes, January 9, 2015). Christine attends school masses, and I observe that she often sits with younger students who are having difficulty behaving. This is likely intended to offer assistance to teachers and to keep students calm. When students proceed to the alter, Christine reminds them that they have to be quieter by placing her hands gently on their shoulders. Her actions remind the children to be aware that they are in a church and must be respectful. Teachers simultaneously quiet their classes down,
implying that they support Christine in her efforts to maintain a respectful atmosphere in church. Christine in turn signals her support to the teachers by interacting with the students to encourage a respectful tone during the ceremony (field notes, January 20, 2015).

Brook, the vice principal comments on Christine’s presence,

Christine makes a point of walking around the building and acknowledging [people], like when we greet the kids every morning on the bus. She makes sure that she pops up in the staff room [and] she's up at the front office giggling with the rest of us. She's always ever present and I think that she's accessible and that's really important. (interview, Brook)

Brook’s comment that Christine is “always ever present” suggests integrity; Christine aligns her words with her actions. Christine states an intention to be in the building and she fulfills it. Brook associates presence with accessibility. When Brook states that Christine laughs “with the rest of us” she implies that Christine manages the leadership and authority of the principalship without disconnecting from her staff.

In my observations, I noted that Christine takes the opportunity to talk about safety when she greets the parents in the yard or in the parking lot in the morning. She suggests to parents other places to drop off their children as the parking lot is small and becomes easily congested. Parents generally respond to Christine in a respectful manner and seem to trust that she is concerned for the well-being of their children (field notes, March 13, 2015).

Christine reflects on lessons that she learned as a vice-principal. William, the principal working with her, reminded her, “Your job is to get to know people.” She has since repeated that advice many times to her own vice principals. Christine clarifies,

I think you have to build relationships and get to know people and have them trust you and see who you are because you know that if people feel you can't be trusted or you don't support them or you're not listening to them, they're going to be reluctant to help you out or they'll do it but it'll be only because you’re making me. (interview 8)

Christine relies on her relationships with trusted colleagues, seeking advice when she is confronted with situations that she has not previously encountered. She values the advice of
colleagues who have experienced a similar circumstance, or who she knows will listen to her concerns. She says,

I think it's important when we’re dealing with complicated issues that we don't become too close minded about it . . . Sometimes I need to have those conversations with people to help me understand that I’m doing the right thing for the child... if I listen to their tone, because some people are like, “Oh my God, that's awful. Suspend them right now.” Then even that [emphasis in original] can help me in my decision making, even though it might be I'm not agreeing with them at all. We've had the conversation, looked at another perspective, from a different lens I suppose and [it] still helps. Even if I don’t listen to a word they say, in the end, it might help me in my decision-making process. It would be people that I talk to and that I trust and can have conversations with [them]. (interview 7)

Christine’s willingness to consider a viewpoint that is different from her own suggests that she values open-mindedness and is willing to be vulnerable. Her stated objective is to do what is in the best interests of the child. She believes that if she maintains an open-mind and explores possibilities, there is a greater chance that she will meet this objective. It is interesting to note that she may not “listen to a word” that her colleagues say which suggests that ultimately she trusts herself to make her own decisions. By paying attention to the tone of her colleagues, she is attuning herself to different nuances in the conversation. Christine believes that tone is important and helps her to gain perspective. She is demonstrating self-awareness by relying on her colleagues to be a sounding board which allow her to gain clarity in her decision-making.

Sockett (2012) reminds us that having an open-mind does not imply that a person will consider any idea proposed or will be receptive to all beliefs. He clarifies, “open-mindedness is not in opposition to one’s having strong beliefs, as if everything were always on the table. Being open-minded does not imply a paralysis of action, a continuous uncertainty because one ought to be open-minded about everything” (Sockett, 2012, p. 85). Christine believes that her decisions and actions must benefit the child, and she seems to be listening to the words of her colleagues to find resonance or dissonance with her beliefs. She considers different courses of action, guided by her concern that they will result in a positive outcome for the child.

Andrew, the field superintendent, shares his thoughts on Christine’s interactions with her colleagues. He remarks,
She has a strong group of peers that are very similar and very supportive of each other and they really do discuss and share and work together on things. I think that’s really important, that piece of having a support team outside the school on your peer level is really important. I think she, her stance, her personality allows people to engage with her and then she certainly supports and works with them. (interview, Andrew)

Christine similarly expresses confidence in Andrew, and indicates that they “usually” share the same purpose or intention, which she believes is to do what is in the best interests of the child. Christine is careful to say that Andrew does not make decisions for her, but rather supports her in making decisions. She elaborates,

The superintendent has so much experience, and he always sees the issue [as] being centred with the people involved. So, I think that he can help in that area because he does have a lot of experience with different situations as a principal and as a superintendent, but also, I know that when he makes, helps me make a decision, helps me work through it, that he’s not going to stray from the important issues. . . . our goal in the end is to support this child [to] become better and I know that he will do that, or he usually does it. Sometimes he does get a little excitable so he might lose track, but usually he’s with me [laughs]. (interview 7)

While Christine values the counsel of her superintendent and colleagues, she trusts her own judgment, making her decisions in accordance with what she believes to be in the best interests of the child. The centrality of the child and the child’s best interests emerge as a guiding principle or personal operational paradigm in Christine’s practice. Christine uses this personal operational paradigm to communicate her belief that the child’s best interests are central in her decision-making. This is different from acting in accordance with virtues, as it reflects a personal conviction or guiding principle upon which she bases her choices. When Christine indicates, “our goal in the end is to support this child (to) become better” she is indicating an intention to align her decisions with what is in the best interests of the child. In this sense, she is applying her ethical knowledge. Campbell defines ethical knowledge in the context of teachers as, “the focused and self-conscious recognition of how moral agency influences their daily actions and interactions” (Campbell, 2008b, p. 603). Ethical knowledge is developed when teachers foster their capacity to identify how moral and ethical principles are either revealed or undermined by their actions, words, decisions and intentions (Campbell, 2008b). Campbell
(2008b) is writing about teachers but her theory is applicable to principals. Christine is a moral agent and she is aware that her decisions can profoundly influence people’s lives. Her ethical knowledge and her ability to apply it when confronted with difficult decisions reveals the awareness she has of her authority as a moral agent. She does not take the advice of others if she believes it undermines her commitment to do what is right for the child. Christine confided to me that she has had respectful disagreements with Andrew, and will propose alternative solutions to him, if she is not comfortable with his advice. She describes Andrew as “open” to these conversations which suggests that he trusts Christine.

Christine has encountered situations where trusting someone has proven difficult. She recalls a situation with a teacher who was unhappy when she learned that she would have to accept a different teaching assignment in September. The teacher complained to the superintendent and to the teacher union. Christine explains that when she attempted to talk to the teacher to offer her an alternative assignment, the teacher “wouldn’t listen.” The biggest challenge for Christine came towards the end of the school year when the teacher appeared to have a change of heart. Christine explains,

Yesterday she came in with cookies, she was crying, and I was thinking [to myself] “Suck it up, Bray” [laughs] because I’m not sure like, I don’t know what it meant, I’m not really, honestly sure if I should trust the action . . . I know she’s been in the staff room saying things about me to teachers because they’ve told me . . . I could say, “You know what? You’re a really mean person and I don’t really trust you, so thank you for the cookies [laughs] off you go,” but I don’t think that’s the right choice . . . we’re a family, we’re a community, and that’s the way it should be, and I will trust [emphasis in original] that her apology is sincere and I accept it, I accept it, and I might be still a little nervous and sort of waiting for the next thing to happen but I don’t want to hold on (to) things. I don’t want to keep negativity around me. (interview 9)

Christine feels vulnerable, and she is uneasy about the teacher’s intentions, admitting that she is “not sure that she should trust the action.” Christine realizes that the apology is not congruent with the teacher’s past behaviour. In this sense, she calls into question the teacher’s integrity, but instead of being candid about her feelings, she accepts the apology. Christine’s willingness to trust the teacher’s sincerity, even though she “might still be a little nervous” shows courage. She
wants to maintain a positive outlook, as she believes being positive supports her vision of the school as a family and a community. This example illustrates how vulnerability, integrity, courage and support, which are key attributes of trust, can manifest in situations where trust has been compromised. Christine’s moral and ethical leadership is made visible in her decision to put aside any hurtful feelings and reestablish trust, as she believes this will ultimately benefit the school community.

Trust is central to Christine’s practice and is made evident in her daily interactions with others. It is interwoven with support, vulnerability, integrity, courage, care, respect, fairness, accountability, compassion, dignity, relationships, and presence. Trust is evident in how people approach her with their concerns, knowing that she will treat them with respect. For Christine, trusting relationships are fundamental to her work and she tries to be present to others to support them and to be accountable to them. She is congruent in her words and actions which inspires trust and reveals her as a person of integrity. The fragility of trust is sometimes made evident when Christine makes moral decisions that impact how people live and work in the school community. She tries to be fair and compassionate towards others, but she is sometimes challenged in her efforts to trust people. Situations where Christine has difficulty building trust reveal her as a human being who has successes and difficulties as she strives to leads ethically. Christine shows courage in her willingness to be vulnerable and she treats others who are vulnerable with dignity, care, and respect. Respect is a prevalent virtue in Christine’s work and is significant in her interactions with students, the staff, parents and community members. The discussion that follows reveals how respect is evident in Christine’s leadership and in her efforts to set a tone in the school.

5.3 Respect

Goodman and Lesnick (2009) offer one interpretation of respect commonly known as the principle of equal respect which is Immanuel Kant’s interpretation of the Golden Rule. From Kant’s perspective, the Golden Rule means that, “we act in ways that respect the equal worth of moral agents. It requires that we regard human beings as having intrinsic worth and treat them accordingly” (p. 65). Goodman and Lesnick (2009) clarify that the principle of equal respect means that people should be treated “as ends rather than means,” that they should be thought of as “free, rational, and responsible moral agents” and that “no matter how people differ, as moral
agents they are of *equal value* [italics in original]” (p. 65). Haynes (1998) clarifies, “The principle of respect for persons is one of justice, requiring the subject to consider all persons as morally equal, which is also a matter of consistency” (p. 12). I agree with Goodman and Lesnick (2009) that respect is the recognition of the “intrinsic” value and “equal worth” of people, regardless of how they “differ”. I interpret their notion of respect as one that involves upholding the dignity in others. This notion of respect is similar to that held by Christine, as she often draws attention to the importance of recognizing and honouring the essential humanity and dignity of each person. Haynes (1998) associates respect with justice. One way that I believe justice can manifest in daily interactions is through the cultivation of fairness. Following from the above definitions, two of the key attributes of respect are dignity and fairness.

In the context of my study, respect is associated with dignity and fairness, and is also deeply connected to trust, care, integrity, empathy and consideration of others. Respect is evident in Christine’s conduct, manner, words, stated intentions, daily practices and rituals. It is exemplified in two ways. First, examples of how Christine shows respect are provided. Respect is evident in how Christine places trust in people, treats them fairly, and addresses student needs in a caring manner. Christine shows respect by trying to be empathetic and by taking into consideration how others might feel. She demonstrates respect by aligning her words with her actions, giving evidence that she is a person of integrity. Christine tries to acknowledge the dignity of others in her daily interactions. Secondly, examples of how Christine gains the respect of others will be discussed. These examples illustrate how respect supports and sustains Christine in her relationships as she strives to set a moral tone in the school.

Respect is an important virtue in Christine’s daily work. Miranda, the school secretary, is located in the main office, and is often the first point of contact for students, staff members and parents. Having numerous interactions with people every day, it is not unusual for her to be involved in an occasional conflict. Miranda recounts a situation where a parent accused her of speaking disrespectfully to her son when he came to the office to collect a form from Christine. Although the parent was not present during the interaction, she claimed that Miranda said to her son, “Get out [of the office]. We don’t care about you.” Miranda relayed to me that Christine’s response to the mother was, “I really, really don’t think that any of my secretaries would ever, ever [emphasis in original] speak to a child like that.” Miranda felt that Christine “supported” her and remarks,
The principal knows that we would never treat a child like that. . . . I was happy to know that the principal would never think that I would speak like that [and] that she has the confidence that the people that are [on the] front [line] of the office, would treat the kids with respect.

(interview, Miranda)

The trust that Christine has in Miranda is associated with respect. In a sense, Christine protects Miranda’s dignity by not placing her in an unfair situation where she has to apologize to the parent for something she adamantly claims she did not do. In this incident, dignity and fairness, two key attributes of respect, are made visible through Christine’s actions. I was struck by Miranda’s sense of upset as she talked to me about this situation. She seemed particularly disturbed at being accused of speaking disrespectfully to a child. Miranda was concerned about the mother’s reaction and did not show any resentment towards her, as evident when she states,

I just wanted reassurance that everything was okay and that the mom was okay, that she wasn’t still angry or that we didn’t do something we shouldn’t have done in the office. I just wanted to make sure that everybody was okay in the end and on the same page. . . . So as much as it upset me that she [the mother] really attacked [emphasis in original] me … if I had said that to him [the student] I can expect an angry parent coming in, that’s fine, and I can accept it. (interview Miranda)

Christine tries to ensure that people are treated with respect and dignity. Miranda’s consideration for the mother’s feelings, even in a situation of conflict, seems to reflect similar values. Christine remarks,

I say to teachers all the time when parents are very upset, “Why is the parent upset? Is the parent upset because they're just being nasty [emphasis in original] or is the parent upset because they're protecting their child?” If they’re protecting their child, although you're not going to put up with any abuse, we can accept the fact that a parent is overly protective, that we can live with, we can work with that, because that comes from a place in the parent, that is the exact same place that we’re coming from. What are we doing to protect the child? What are we doing to help the child? It's only if they're just being nasty that we can't cope [laughs]. (interview 2)
Christine is raising staff awareness of how parents might feel in a situation of conflict. She appeals to a teacher’s ability to empathize with a parent’s concern for the safety and well-being of the child. She does not want staff to be disrespected and “put up with any abuse” but she does want them to carefully consider the intentions of the parent. Christine is encouraging staff to be compassionate and understanding in how they respond. She is, however, making an assumption that every teacher prioritizes and values the best interests of the child which may or may not be true. The message that Christine tries to convey may be lost on teachers who have a different objective or who operate from a personal operational paradigm that does not centre on the best interests of the child.

In a discussion of the best interests of the child, Stefkovich (as cited in Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011) offers insight into this paradigm. She explains that decisions connected to the best interests of the child are,

those incorporating individual rights, accepting and teaching students to accept responsibility for their actions, and respecting students. These three R’s – rights, responsibility and respect – are key to making ethical decisions that are in a student’s best interests and, in turn, to fulfilling one’s professional obligation as educational leaders (p. 27).

While Stefkovich is focusing on decisions, Christine is operating from the same paradigm when she encourages staff to identify with and respect the parent’s motivations during conflict. Christine’s message seems to resonate with Sophia, a grade three teacher, who sometimes finds it difficult to be compassionate with a student. Sophia reflects on a situation when she felt herself losing patience with a student who repeatedly engages in inappropriate behaviour, such as swearing at fellow classmates. Instead of berating the student, she thinks about how she would talk to the student if someone was observing her. She turns the discussion into a “teachable moment” by asking the student to consider whether Sophia should swear at her, if she made Sophia upset. When the student appears genuinely surprised at the suggestion that her teacher might swear at her, Sophia is confident she has helped the student develop empathy. She has taught the student a moral lesson by helping her to understand that expressing anger by swearing is hurtful and disrespectful to others. She has relayed this moral lesson without berating the child or harming her dignity.
Sophia’s approach to disciplining the child echoes the values that Christine tries to instill in the school. Christine shared with me in several discussions that she encourages staff to think about how they are speaking to others, particularly in stressful situations, when they are aware they might be losing their temper. She asks them to consider the following questions: “Am I speaking to this child the way I would want to be spoken to?” (interview 7) and “Pretend the parent is standing next to you when you talk to the child or pretend it is your own child . . . would you speak to that child in that manner if the parent was next to you?” (interview 4) Christine is appealing to the virtues of empathy and respect, and is raising awareness with staff about their conduct.

Christine sends a weekly newsletter to all staff members which includes a calendar of events for the upcoming week. She often attaches uplifting poems, prayers or photographs that she believes will be inspirational to the staff (interview 1). Christine sometimes includes statements that serve as a follow-up to topics that have been discussed in staff meetings or in smaller group conversations. Often these statements are morally laden and could be construed as moral lessons. On one occasion Christine includes the following comments in her newsletter, after discussing classroom management with the staff. She states,

> Even in the most frustrating situations, it must be our goal to help children better manage their stress. We must strive to treat children with dignity and avoid humiliating them. . . . Yelling at kids never helps any of us reach our end goal which is to allow our students to understand why they are stressed and acting out and then manage it. (weekly newsletter, April 12, 2015)

By placing these comments in the staff newsletter, Christine is publicly declaring that she does not condone yelling at children. She draws a direct association between yelling and harming a child’s dignity, and this association makes her comments more than an opinion. Her comments are morally laden, and serve as a reminder to staff members that she expects them to treat children with dignity and respect. Christine is making it known to staff that she is trying to establish a respectful and caring climate where the dignity of the child is valued. By committing her words to paper, and widely circulating her message, she is conveying that she is serious about setting a tone of respect in the school. In an earlier interview, Christine clarifies how she envisions her role in encouraging respectful dialogue. She explains,
For me, I really do think it's my responsibility to be a good role model, and to set an example. People see me talking to kids in the hall or in the classroom or here in the office, [and] no matter what they've done, I want the teacher to see [emphasis in original] that the child is being treated respectfully. I have empathy [and] I'm trying to take in the whole scene, not just what is happening that moment. I think that educating the staff [means] telling the staff what I want to see. (interview 1)

Christine models the virtues for teachers, and in particular she models respect. She believes she is accountable “to be a good role model” and her stated intention is to educate the staff. In this sense, she is leading ethically. Fallona (2000) discusses the significance of calling attention “to the importance and potential impact of a teacher’s manner” (p. 692). Christine is calling attention to how she speaks to the children and is modelling respect. Fallona (2000) also argues that teacher educators “can draw attention to teaching as a moral endeavour grounded in the relationship between student and teacher” (p. 692). Similarly, Christine has stepped into the role of teacher educator and is asking teachers to be mindful of the ethical dimensions of their relationships with students.

I observe one occasion when a group of visibly agitated and very loud grade four students were sent to the office because they were arguing in the school yard and playing soccer which is not allowed during recess. Christine told them calmly but in a firm voice to sit on a row of chairs and wait for her. When she finished the task she was working on, she walked over to them and sat beside them. Christine leaned toward them and spoke to them in a calm and quiet voice. She reminded them that soccer is not allowed during recess because injuries occur. Christine gave one student a Band-Aid for his bleeding arm, and listened attentively to his friend who claimed that he did not intend to hurt this student. As Christine spoke to the students they grew quieter and they looked at her and listened to her (field notes, April 2, 2015).

In another incident, I observe Christine speaking to a kindergarten student who has been sent to the office for inappropriate behaviour during the lunch hour. The student is sitting in a chair in the vice principal’s office waiting for her to return. Christine recognizes the child and decides to speak to him to find out what has occurred. She walks toward the child and kneels down on the floor so that she can speak to him at eye level. Christine speaks very softly and he nods his head.
up and down as she speaks. He then speaks softly to her. As Christine gets up to leave, the student continues to wait for the vice principal to return (field notes, April 2, 2015).

On both of these occasions, by meeting students at eye level or sitting beside them, and speaking in a firm but calm voice, Christine is expressing a caring, respectful and kind manner. Her manner conveys a quiet authority. By looking at the students and meeting them at their eye level, she is giving them her full attention and in this way, she is being present to them. Fenstermacher et al. (2009) define manner as, “the traits and dispositions the teacher exhibits in the course of doing something” and continue to explain that these traits or dispositions might include being, “fair, tolerant, compassionate, respectful, and so forth” (p. 10). Although Fenstermacher et al. (2009) are writing about teachers, their definition is applicable to principals. Christine has a choice about how to respond to these students and chooses to approach them in a calm manner. In a sense, she is role modelling for the students and setting a tone of respect.

Christine comments, “I want to make sure that I’m respecting other people, respecting their work, [what] they’re doing, who they are, the children, even though I’m very unhappy with them at the moment, what they’ve done, not who they are” (interview 9). Christine often thinks about how to communicate her expectations in a way that maintains people’s dignity and honours their work. She is keenly aware that her words have an impact, and tries to consider them carefully before speaking to parents, staff members and students. Charlie, the custodian, explains that he often has to speak to Christine about concerns in the building and that she is “a good listener.” He clarifies that she “let’s you say your piece” and then she shares her feelings and offers advice on what to do. Charlie explains that when he discusses situations with Christine he does not feel “belittled” because of the “tone” of her voice. I ask Charlie to explain what he means by “tone” and he confides, “Her tone is very smooth. She’s never yelled at me. She’s never raised her voice at me. It’s always been a voice of ‘let’s work together.’ She’s been like that with me all the time” (interview, Charlie). Similarly, Ms. Pine, a lunchtime supervisor, comments on Christine’s manner when she is speaking to others. She describes Christine as someone who “doesn’t make you feel like she’s talking down to you. It’s just a normal conversation with a normal [person].” Ms. Pine comments that she has observed Christine interacting with students and explains that she is “kind in the way that she speaks to them. There’s no, like it’s not yelling, it’s just firm” (interview, Ms. Pine).
Christine tries to model the same calm and respectful manner when she deals with discipline. Christine relays to me that when she is concerned about a staff member’s approach to discipline, she visits the classroom to model alternative ways to manage behaviour. If young students are not responding to a teacher’s request, Christine tries to model calm responses such as walking over to them and redirecting them by talking to them and showing them what to do. She intervenes if she feels a staff member is losing patience. Christine states that on one occasion she asked a staff member who was yelling at her young students to leave the classroom and take a break, while she remained with the children. Christine relays to me that she has also had private conversations with staff about the importance of keeping their composure with their students (field notes, January 7, 2015). Christine’s objective is to demonstrate to staff that it is not necessary to yell, and that children can be disciplined in a firm but respectful manner. I ask Christine to explain why it disturbs her when adults yell at children. She clarifies,

I think the number one thing is that we are trusted by the children and parents to guide and teach their children. When we’re yelling at children we’re taking away all their dignity. We’re disrespecting them. We’re breaking the trust that they have with us [and] for us. They just feel humiliated and put down and I don’t think there’s any place in a school for that. I’m not going to pretend [that] I’ve never yelled at a kid, but I believe that if we’re so frustrated that we’re going to scream, then we need to walk away. (interview 4)

Christine believes yelling is a disrespectful action that violates the trust that parents place in staff members and that children place in teachers. She is empathetic towards the child who feels “humiliated” and loses dignity in the process. Christine wants staff to be aware of instances when they are losing their composure and have enough self-control to step away from the situation. She expresses concern for the child’s dignity and associates dignity with respect. Her statement, “I don’t think there’s any place in a school for that” reveals a belief that schools are institutions where respectful relationships are fostered. In this sense, she is emphasizing the importance of respect. Christine is engaging in honest self-reflection when she states, “I’m not going to pretend [that] I’ve never yelled at a kid.” She continues,

Sadly, some people use it [yelling] as their method of discipline, their method of control in a class with the kids and honestly it breaks my heart to think about it, to think about children being spoken to that way [pause] at all [emphasis in original]. I think that they come to
school believing that we love them. It’s a good thing to come to school and then to have someone yell at them – it’s too much. Even as a parent, I don’t yell, I just don’t do it, because I just think I wouldn’t want to be yelled at. (interview 4)

Christine is appealing to the principle of equal respect when she says, “I just don’t do it, because I just think I wouldn’t want to be yelled at.” Christine empathizes with children and believes that they are entitled to receive the same amount of respect that she is entitled to receive. When she states, “they come to school believing that we love them” she is referring to a child’s innocence and trust in adults and in the school. Christine believes that yelling violates children’s innocence which in turn violates their trust. She is aware that teachers can find themselves in very frustrating situations, and is trying to offer them alternative ways to deal with conflict.

In conversation, I ask Christine what she does when she is concerned about a teacher’s approach to discipline. She clarifies that she recognizes that at times teachers “lack compassion and empathy and are lost in frustration” with students as they try to deal with inappropriate behaviour. Christine reassures teachers that she will support them and shows her support by modelling calm responses. These responses include bending down and making eye contact, speaking in a quiet but firm voice, and placing her hand gently on the child’s back. Christine’s body language, gestures and tone of voice comprise her manner and reveal that she has a caring and respectful approach with the children (field notes, December 2, 2014). Fenstermacher et al. (2009) discuss modelling in the context of teaching and explain,

> Modeling is the most prominent form of teaching morality through manner. . . . the teacher who makes moral matters the topic of instruction is also teaching morality by calling the attention of her students to her own moral ideals, rules and expectations…or by developing capacities necessary for good moral conduct (Fenstermacher et al, 2009, p. 10).

While the focus of Fenstermacher et al. (2009) discussion is on teachers, their concept of modelling can be applied to principals. For example, Christine teaches morality by drawing the attention of the teacher to “moral ideals, rules and expectations.” Through role modelling, and by communicating her expectations, she is supporting teachers in their efforts to build relationships with their students. Christine is “teaching morality through manner” by asking the teacher to be mindful of how they approach discipline with students. Modelling is one way that Christine cultivates ethicality and this will be discussed in further depth in the next chapter.
When Christine models compassionate and respectful ways of interacting with students, it may be helpful for some teachers, and can encourage them to reflect on their practice. For example, during an informal exchange that I have with Avery, a grade eight teacher, she states,

You can scream at them all you want but if you find fun ways to get them to stand in line, they will comply. I would be bored too waiting outside in the cold for the teacher to come (and get me). . . . I think if the kids know you care and you have a sense of humour, they will be willing to cooperate. (field notes, November 18, 2014)

Avery relays to me that when she is supervising the students who are in line and waiting for their homeroom teachers, she tries different strategies to keep them calm. She sometimes sings a popular song with them or leads them in a simple dance. Avery seems to be setting a tone of respect and empathy with the intermediate students.

Frances, a special education teacher, recalls overhearing a conversation between Christine and a staff member who “wasn’t coming from a good place when it came to the treatment of a student.” She explains that she overheard Christine reminding this staff member to have perspective and to remember that the child is under the age of ten years old. Christine urged the staff member to maintain self-control. She recalls Christine saying, “I will not have you speak about a child that way. You are the adult and you need to conduct yourself as such and accept this child regardless of their behaviour and their action because they are a child.” Frances believed the staff member was “shocked” by Christine’s reaction. This is an instance where Christine seems to be looking out for the best interests of the child. She is setting a tone of compassion and respect by demanding fair treatment of the child. Christine recognizes that the child is in an unfair position and lacks power and authority. She is conveying a message that the dignity of the child is central. Christine is also holding the staff member accountable for their behaviour. In this instance, dignity and fairness, two of the key attributes of respect, are made manifest in Christine’s response to the staff member. (interview, Frances).

On one occasion during my field work, I was working in my room in the school office and the secretaries were working at their desks. The door to Christine’s office was closed because she was conducting an interview and needed privacy. It was quiet in the office. I heard a significantly raised voice saying, “You are being disrespectful,” and “How dare you talk to me like that.” The significantly raised voice was coming from the general office reception area (field notes, March
I stepped out of my room to see what was happening. Christine opened her office door at the same time with a look of confusion on her face. I looked toward the general office entrance where I saw a staff member pointing her finger at a junior grade student. Christine calmly walked toward the staff member and I stayed back to observe. The staff member had a look of surprise on her face, which I assumed at the time was because she was not aware that she was so loud. She said to Christine that she normally would not yell but “this student has been disrespectful to me and to several other teachers.” Christine remained calm and looked at the student but did not say anything to her. She then looked at the staff member and spoke to her so quietly that I could not hear what she was saying (field notes, March 12, 2015).

Christine then began to walk back toward her office and I returned to my room. As Christine passed my room she quietly said to me, “I wish she wouldn’t yell. She knows I don’t like it. She said that she didn’t realize that I was in the school building.” I then understood that the initial look of surprise on the staff member’s face as Christine opened her door might have been because she was under the impression that Christine was not in the building. Christine returned to her office to continue the interview and I went back to work in my room (field notes, March 12, 2015).

Shortly thereafter the staff member came to my room and commented that she does not normally yell but that the student was disrespectful. I listened but did not offer any remark, as I sensed that she may have been embarrassed by the situation. Later that day Christine spoke to me in private about the situation. She said that she believed that the staff member had not lost control because she was able to quickly regain her composure. She wondered aloud if the staff member had raised her voice for effect in order to make it clear to the student that her behaviour was unacceptable. Christine indicated to me that she did follow up with the staff member who appeared to feel some remorse for her conduct (field notes, March 12, 2015).

My sense was that Christine was trying to show an understanding of the staff member’s frustrations. Christine had treated her with dignity and respect during the interaction by speaking to her quietly in front of the secretaries and the child. I reflected that the staff member did not appear to be concerned that she had yelled at the student in the presence of the office staff, but was concerned that the principal was present. I also noted that while there might have been some concern for the well-being of the child, it was not emphasized in the conversations.
The situation brought into sharper focus the reality that realizing the vision of a respectful school climate takes constant and concerted effort from all stakeholders. Establishing a climate of respect might begin with principals but the realization of that vision cannot be their sole responsibility. People will sometimes act questionably when they believe those in authority are not watching, but it is reasonable for principals to trust that staff will generally do what is right and act with integrity even when they are not present. All stakeholders must be accountable for making the school a respectful place to work and learn, regardless of whether the principal is nearby.

A large part of Christine’s role involves interacting with parents whose children have unique learning and behavioural challenges. She tries to offer perspective for teachers who are dealing with these parents. Christine reflects that in conversations with teachers she reminds them,

[Do] you know how many parents say, “I don’t want to put my child on Ritalin,” or some other behaviour modifying medication and you have to say to parents, “I will support you in every way that I can,” even though sometimes you don’t really agree with their decision . . . because it’s just what parents need to do to sort of follow up on trying to help their own child. Sometimes it might not make sense to you but you’re going to walk with the parent as they go on that journey to try and figure out if it’s going to help their child because that’s what we should do, and you would want someone to do it for you. (interview 5)

By stating “you would want someone to do it for you,” Christine is appealing to the principle of The Golden Rule. She encourages teachers to have an open-mind, to suspend judgment, and to empathize with the parent. Ultimately Christine is modelling respect for parents’ decisions. Slote (2007) associates respect with the willingness to recognize that people are autonomous individuals who are entitled to have their wishes or desires acknowledged. He defines autonomy as, “the capacity for making and acting on one’s own decisions, and the lack of respect at the very least involves not letting the person exercise that capacity” (Slote, 2007, pp. 56-57). According to Slote (2007) there is a lack of empathy in most situations where there is a lack of respect. He argues, “if we enrich the notion of caring so as to make it include empathy, then the ethics of caring will be in a position to account for respect” (Slote, 2007, p. 57). Christine is expressing an ethic of caring by trying to have the teacher respect the parent’s decision. When
Christine notes, “it’s directed at the situation” she is offering teachers perspective and helping them empathize with the pain that parents are experiencing.

The virtue of respect is expressed through attention paid to school procedures. Christine associates diligence with respect. This is evident for example in the firm deadline she gives to teachers for submitting report cards to the office. Christine explains that administrators need time to read and correct the report cards and discuss them with teachers. Ultimately, she is concerned that report cards are sent home on the date that was promised to the parents. Harry, the vice principal, recalls a situation where he was approached by a group of teachers who requested additional time to complete their report cards. He granted them the extra time, not realizing that Christine would confront the teachers and ask them why their report cards were not finished. When the teachers told Harry what had transpired, he revealed to Christine that he had granted them the extra time, because he “wanted to be honest” and “didn’t want them [the teachers] taking the blame.” He continues,

I think Christine was letting everyone know that, because it was her first set of report cards here [at this school], this is my standard. This is what I expect, which is within her purview as principal…. she takes her job seriously [and] she is responsible. I think she looks at it as mentoring too. If we’re not meeting standards that she wants for her school she’ll let us know. That’s one of the things I respect about her, that she is not afraid to have those difficult conversations with people. (interview, Harry)

I ask Christine about her procedures for report cards. She explains,

People are counting on us. I mean certain deadlines are guidelines, I think, but when things need to get done I believe that it is our responsibility to be accountable to the board, to the parents, to the children, staff, because they're counting on us. . . . It's completely about respect . . . and also, I think it's important for people to see that this is what I expect from you. When I say, “This is what I want,” [then] that's what I want, I'm not kidding, because we are accountable, not just to, you're not accountable to me, you're accountable to the board, to the Ministry and most of all to the family. (interview 8)

Christine associates respect with shared accountability. By confronting the teachers who ask for an extension, she is attempting to be consistent and fair in applying her expectations to staff. She
is holding the teachers accountable and holds herself to the same standard. This was made evident when Harry informed me in a casual conversation that Christine took report cards with her to read when she was called out of the country on a family emergency. Not being able to return to work before the report cards were scheduled to be sent home, Christine sent the report cards back to the school using a secure mail service. She demonstrates accountability and models integrity, by holding herself to the same standard that she has set for her staff (field notes, February 3, 2015).

Levy, a grade 4 teacher, describes Christine as “organized.” He explains that she adheres to deadlines and expects teachers to submit work on time. I ask Levy to articulate how it is ethical to be organized. He replies,

It keeps people honest with their job a little bit. I think if you’re allowed to slack a little bit too much, or if things don’t seem important to the person in charge, then people won’t find them important either. . . . I think Christine does a good job, not being too demanding with those things, but being clear about her expectations, and [being] fair that way. (interview, Levy)

Levy associates Christine’s sense of organization with honesty and fairness. He implies that Christine’s clear expectations keeps teachers accountable. When Levy states, “if things don’t seem important to the person in charge then people won’t find them important either,” he is suggesting that Christine is a role model, and that teachers notice what she values.

Levy comments that, “Not all principals are [like that].” I ask him to elaborate. He responds,

There have been principals in the past that haven’t cared… People start to see that. People knew within the school environment what was getting done and what wasn’t getting done and what was important to that particular person and what wasn’t [important]. So, I think the way that they [principals] decide on those things, having a clear focus for themselves is important. (interview, Levy)

Levy associates accountability with care. He suggests that teachers observe the principal and decide what is important based on the expectations that they communicate. Levy indicates that if
teachers perceive that something is not of priority to the principal, then they may not make it a priority themselves.

Christine models respect in her approach to communication. Rachael notes that Christine consistently schedules staff meetings at the same time every month. This practice enables everyone to plan their personal schedules, as meetings take place after school. Rachael explains that a previous administrator would often cancel meetings with short notice, which was a “source of frustration” for staff who had to rearrange personal or childcare obligations (interview, Rachael). Additionally, Mark, the ESL teacher, explains in an informal conversation that he appreciates Christine’s timely response to emails. He confides that the same previous administrator did not respond to his emails, and that over time he just stopped sending them. Mark explains that he assumed that a lack of response meant that the ESL program was not important to this particular principal. When Christine offers him a timely email response, he feels that his concerns and ideas are heard, and that she values his job (field notes, October 31, 2014).

Christine arrives to school early in the morning and sometimes works there on weekends so that she can respond in a timely manner to emails. Christine’s communication practices convey diligence, reliability and respect for her staff. Over time her consistency contributes to a sense of trust in her leadership. Gerard, a grade seven teacher, recounts a situation where he developed respect for Christine due to the sensitive manner in which she dealt with his concerns. Every year Gerard takes his students on a week-long trip out of the city. Part of his preparation involves collecting money from his students, and recording what he has collected. Gerard gives an accurate account of the funds, approaching the task with care and diligence, therefore he was surprised when he received an email from his former principal, asking him to account for the money that he had collected the previous school year. Gerard asked his former principal to explain the situation but he did not receive a response. Fearing that he was being accused of mishandling money, he approached Christine and through his conversation with her, learned that the school was being audited. Christine discreetly revealed to Gerard that she had inherited a financially challenging situation when she had arrived at the school, including outstanding cheques that had not been deposited. Christine reassured Gerard that his accounting practices were not under suspicion, and that the financial issues were far-reaching. I asked Gerard what it meant to him to have Christine explain the situation to him. He states,
I think Christine brought me right back to a comfort level, a comfort zone, that I felt relieved despite the fact that I never had a reply [bangs fist lightly on table] from the former principal . . . I think she realized I’m a serious person when it comes to keeping clinical records and keeping things on the straight and narrow path . . . the trustworthiness developed there. I mean there was a lot of trust that developed on my part and I have a lot of respect for her. (interview, Gerard)

Christine earns Gerard’s trust and respect because she devotes time to talk to Gerard and explain the larger issues to him. She takes his concerns seriously and in this sense, demonstrates compassion. Christine is honest with Gerard by offering him some details about the school’s financial situation without engaging in gossip about her predecessor. In this sense, she demonstrates professionalism and discretion, showing respect to everyone involved.

In the above incident, it is evident that Gerard respects Christine. In contrast to Gerard’s experience, another incident reveals that students and staff may sometimes show disrespect or a lack of courtesy toward Christine. The incident occurred at the end of a school mass that I attended at the church. Christine was at the front of the church offering a message of gratitude to the people who organized the mass. She spoke briefly and clearly and could be easily heard at the microphone. Before Christine finished speaking, a large number of students stood up, including students at the front of the church, and began putting on their coats. It was now hard to see Christine and hard to hear her. Christine did not address their behaviour as she stood at the podium, and instead quickly finished what she was saying. To the best of my knowledge she did not address the situation later with the staff members or students. Standing up to leave the church while Christine was speaking could be attributed to a lack of courtesy and politeness, and may also indicate a lack of respect (field notes, December 10, 2014).

While this is a negative example showing the ethical complexity of issues of respect that occur, Hannah’s experience concurs more with Gerard’s experience. Hannah, a junior grade teacher, recounts an incident between her students and Christine. She recalls that a small group of her junior age girls were playing pranks on the primary age girls and were caught by Christine who was walking by the washroom. The students were crawling under the bathroom stalls and locking them from the inside. Christine spoke to them about the inappropriateness of their behaviour, and reminded them that they are expected to make good choices, and set an example
for the younger students who look up to them. Hannah learned about the incident that same day from her students, who appeared nervous, informing her that they had done something wrong. They indicated that they wanted her to at least be aware of the incident before the principal approached her. Shortly thereafter Christine shared the details of the incident with Hannah and she then followed-up with Hannah’s students. Hannah believes that her students respect Christine because they told her about the incident before Christine could do so and were visibly upset about it. Hannah was present during the follow-up meeting and was struck by Christine’s “calm manner” and her caring and sensitive approach when she spoke with the students. She remembers,

They could have just been scolded and they could’ve had a detention here in the office but for Christine to sit, it was right in the morning…she sat there and it was just her tone of voice with these girls. And I could tell my girls were nervous but right away afterwards one of my girls said, “We’re sorry Ms. Bray,” and Christine said, “I really appreciate that, thank you.” After a situation where you have made the wrong choice, to be talked to like that shows that number one, she’s talking to the students that they mean something [emphasis in original] to her, it’s not just another situation, so I can see that the students see that with her. (interview, Hannah)

Christine models forgiveness by accepting the students’ apologies. She shows respect by taking the time to talk to them calmly. Christine treats the students with dignity which is clear in her choice not to scold or berate them. Hannah implies that Christine cares about the students which is evident in her statement “they mean something (emphasis) to her.” As an observer, Hannah is witnessing Christine’s moral modelling. When she says, “I can see that the students see that with her,” Hannah is recognizing that her students are aware that Christine cares and that they are valued in her eyes. In this sense, Hannah witnesses the students’ understanding that they are being cared for by Christine.

Similarly, Ms. Pine, the lunchtime supervisor, believes the intermediate students respect Christine. Recounting one particular day when she was in the yard with them, she states,

She [Christine] walked through the yard once when I was out there, and I saw everybody sort of stand in line sort of speak, the way we did when we were growing up [laughs] when we saw my dad coming and we sort of behaved. She walked through the yard and I didn’t know
she was there at first and I just saw the kids, not that they were misbehaving, but there was definitely a change in their body language. And then I looked up and I saw the bright red coat and I thought, “Oh, Ms. Bray” [laughs]. (interview, Ms. Pine)

I ask Ms. Pine, “What does that tell you?” and she responds, “Well, that there’s some respect from them toward her and I think that’s good, and I guess whatever she’s saying and doing is working because they know that when Ms. Bray is around, you behave yourself.” (interview, Ms. Pine). Christine’s manner is revealed in the quiet way in which the children notice her presence and respond. Christine does not have to announce that she is there because the children notice her presence and change their “body language” accordingly. This change in “body language” is observed by Ms. Pine who realizes that Christine has an influence on these adolescents and that they treat her with respect.

Respect is a central virtue in Christine’s practice and is associated with dignity and fairness. It is also deeply connected to trust, care, integrity, empathy and consideration of others. Christine’s conduct, manner, words, stated intentions, daily practices and rituals reveal a commitment to setting a tone of respect. She believes she is a role model to staff members and students and that it is her responsibility to model respectful interactions. Respect is central to the way she communicates and her body language, tone of voice and gestures convey a respectful manner. Christine tries to be respectful in her approach to discipline and she prioritizes a child’s sense of dignity. She strives to lead ethically by setting a respectful tone in her daily interactions. By asking others to reflect on how they can be respectful, she engages them in the collaborative effort of building an ethical school. Christine values respect as an integral component in her relationships with students, the staff, parents and community members. As evident in the situation with Hannah and her students, Christine’s expressions of respect reveal that she genuinely cares about others and wants them to know that she cares. In the section that follows, examples of how Christine cares for others and how they care for her will be offered to demonstrate how care is a central and prioritized virtue in her practice.

5.4 Care

Starratt (2012) argues that care is a virtue of central importance and states,
Humans are social beings who need to be validated in caring relationships. More than being fairly treated, they need someone to love them, and someone, in return, to love. We hear some claiming that respect is the basic virtue. However much I am respected, nonetheless, if I am not loved and cherished by someone, the respect I receive from others will not be enough to feel fulfilled in life. Likewise, if I have no one to care about and for, my life is likewise truncated, diminished (Starratt, 2012, p. 37).

According to Noddings (2003), when someone is making a moral decision, a person directed by an ethic of care considers the possible effects on the other person and on the relationship with that person. Noddings (2003) conceptualizes care as relational. She explains,

ethical caring, the relation in which we do meet the other morally, will be described as arising out of natural caring – that relation in which we respond as one-caring out of love or natural inclination. The relations of natural caring will be identified as the human condition that we, consciously or unconsciously, perceive as ‘good.’ It is that condition toward which we long and strive, and it is our longing for caring - to be in that special relation – that provides the motivation for us to be moral (Noddings, 2003, pp. 4-5).

Stengel and Tom (2006) clarify that Noddings portrays caring as a response to the needs expressed by another person. Caring as a virtue, however, means that caregivers operate from their own “framework,” striving to do what they believe the other person needs (Stengel & Tom, 2006, p. 102). Starratt (2012) and Noddings (2003) both highlight the importance of love and relationships in their definitions of care. Stengel and Tom (2006) call attention to role of the caregiver, who attempts to meet another person’s needs according to what they perceive those needs to be. Responding to another person’s needs could be interpreted as showing concern and support. Following from the above definitions, four of the key attributes of care are love, relationships, concern, and support. In the context of my study, care is associated with love, relationships, concern and support. It is also deeply connected to approachability, compassion, communication, empathy, hope, kindness, trust, respect, and presence.

Care emerged as a prevalent virtue, and is manifested in Christine’s conduct, manner, words, stated intentions, daily practices and rituals. Care is illustrated in two ways. First, examples of how Christine expresses care are found in how she shows concern for others and supports them in dealing with uncertainties and challenges. Christine inspires hope by communicating to others
that she cares about them, and will remain with them until a positive outcome is achieved. She tries to be empathetic in her interactions, and communicates to others the importance of empathy. Christine expresses care by being approachable and accessible which inspires trust and gains her respect. She demonstrates kindness and compassion toward others and often refers to the notion of love in describing how she feels about them. Her consistent presence conveys a genuine interest in and respect for people, and allows her to deepen her knowledge of students, staff members and parents. Christine’s efforts to maintain relationships over the long term reveal a commitment to caring about people. Secondly, Christine is cared for by others. Examples of this will be provided in an effort to demonstrate how care sustains Christine in her personal life and in her professional practice.

Christine refers to care and the interrelated virtue of respect as central to her notion of spirituality. She explains,

   I would certainly consider myself to be a spiritual person. I would never in a million years, and my mother would sadly agree that I'm not [emphasis in original] the best Catholic, but I definitely am spiritual and I always say to her, “Mom, you don't need to worry about how many times I go to church. I treat as many people with care and respect as I can [laughs] in my day-to-day dealings with them. I try so hard,” and I say, “That's really what it's all about.”

(interview 6)

Christine points to an unconventional definition of the kind of Catholic she is striving to be. She equates being a spiritual person with living out the virtues in her daily life. When Christine says, “I try so hard,” she is stating her intention to be caring and respectful. She consistently expresses the virtue of care in her practice, and draws on it in discipline situations where she has to make difficult decisions. One situation that stands out in Christine’s memory involved an intermediate student who was just beginning to demonstrate good behaviour, following a challenging period of repeatedly getting into trouble. His improvement was not surprising to Christine, as she had been communicating closely with the family. In an unfortunate turn of events, he had a physical altercation with another intermediate student, and “slammed his head down on the desk.” Christine did not condone such an aggressive and hurtful act, but she was hoping she could discipline the boy with a suspension, and then continue to work him and his mother. His mother
was a single parent, and new to the country, and Christine did not want to give up on them, despite this situation.

After speaking with Andrew, the field superintendent, Christine discovered that she was required to expel the student. This meant that he could not return to Christine’s school. Christine argued against this decision. She was concerned that the victim might have been bullying the perpetrator in this particular incident, as the victim had a history of bullying other children. Andrew told her that she had no choice because the child who was the victim indicated that he did not feel safe at school. When Christine reviewed the board’s expulsion policy she confirmed that if a student’s presence at school generates a serious risk to the safety of another student, a school expulsion is mandatory. She felt disappointed as she had worked so closely with the student and his mother, but she decided to help them with the transition process. She recalls,

I explained the reality of the situation [to the mother], “This is the way it has to be because of this and this,” and then I did everything I could to help with the transition. I went with the family to the new school. I met with the principal. We talked about the kind of child he was. I drove the parent there with the child. It was all I felt I could do to make sure she felt, [that] she didn’t feel alone. We set up bussing. I did everything I could so she felt that he’s not a bad kid, made a bad choice, and now we’re going to move forward in a positive manner and I want the principal to know that this is how I feel about this child, that he made a mistake. And it just so happened that it was a principal who was very open to that and we had a very good meeting and I think mom felt good. Then after the fact I called mom periodically throughout the year just to check on the child, and I called the principal to see that everything was okay. (interview 7)

Christine expresses care and concern by keeping the lines of communication open with the mother, the child, and the receiving principal. She supports the mother by driving her to the school and by attending the meeting with the principal. These actions could be interpreted as showing kindness. Christine’s compassion for the child and genuine affection for him is evident in her remark, “this is how I feel about this child.” She upholds the dignity of the student by making the distinction that, “he’s not a bad kid, made a bad choice.” Christine’s compassion for the mother is evident in the fact that she did not want her to deal with the situation alone. Her kindness and care mitigated the impact of a negative situation by helping the mother and the
child transition to a new situation. There is a sense of hope and optimism in Christine’s approach as she is determined to help the mother and son look to the future, and not dwell on the past. Christine shows that she genuinely cares about the student’s well-being by maintaining communication with the mother and the principal long after the transition period is over. Three of the key attributes of care, which include concern, support and relationships are made manifest in this situation. The fourth attribute, love, is evident in the affection Christine holds for the student.

It is not unusual for Christine to maintain communication with people, even when they are no longer in her school. She stays in close contact with people in her former schools, including a school where she was a teacher. After the students that she had taught in special education graduated from elementary school, Christine had moved on to become a vice principal, but she continued to stay in contact with them throughout their high school years. She explains, “I know that they did well in high school [because] I checked on them, and I followed up, and their principals let me know, and their teachers would email me” (interview 5). Christine offers reasons why she stays in close communication with people when she states,

If you work so hard developing relationships with people how do you just walk away and say, “Okay [laughs] nice knowing ya.” It's challenging, don't get me wrong, I mean it's hard to find the time for sure because life is very busy, but I feel that those relationships are important and valuable and to just let them go would be wrong for me and for them. . . . If you care [emphasis in original] about people, you know when you love them, and I can truly say that every school that I've been in I've loved people, and I’ve cared about people, and I’ve wanted to work to build relationships with staff and students and the community-at-large.

(interview 5)

Christine associates care with love and believes that both of those virtues are expressed in her relationships. She chooses to invest the time to keep these connections, feeling that the alternative choice to “just let them go” would be not only unfortunate but “wrong.” DeMarco (1996) draws a connection between care and love and explains that care is that which, “does not allow suffering, either in the self or in the other, to prevent love from being expressed. . . . In this regard, care is the one virtue that most closely resembles love” (DeMarco, 1996, p. 25). Jackson (2012) argues,
Under ideal conditions the emotion of love in one or another of its many forms touches on all the components of our educational experience. It attaches to persons, to the material being studied, and to the totality of the experience itself. Moreover, it does so, or can do so, for teachers and students alike. Without these attachments in one form or another, education loses much of its appeal. It becomes stripped of its ultimate meaning (Jackson, 2012, p. 91).

Although Jackson is referring to teachers, his argument can be applied to principals and their practice. Jackson draws attention to the importance of feeling a genuine regard towards the people one interacts with and towards one’s work. He argues that without a sense of love, the educational experience becomes meaningless. Candice, the guidance teacher, who worked with Christine in her former school, comments on the relationships that Christine developed with the parents. She says,

Some of them have tried to come here, tried to move their kids to her school. It shows you a lot, absolutely, they trust her, and they feel comfortable with her, and they know because she’s shown it. She doesn’t just say things. She actually does them and follows through. (interview, Candice)

Candice is describing Christine as a person of integrity who inspires trust by being congruent in her words and actions. Christine relates to me her own feelings about her work and her relationships. Her passion is evident when she states,

I feel like everything is amazing in my life. I have the best job in the world. . . . I have great relationships with people. . . . overall when I look at my life I just think, “It’s really good,” and I just feel so privileged to be able to come to this job every day, I really do. (interview 4)

Christine speaks in a manner that reveals a deeply held regard for her work. She operates from a hopeful and optimistic stance. Miranda also worked with Christine in her former school and recalls that Christine provided on-going support for a single mother raising several children, some of whom had special needs. Christine arranged for special bussing so that one of the children, who did not attend Christine’s school during the day, could be transported to her school in the evening. This arrangement allowed the child to attend the daycare in Christine’s school along with his siblings. Miranda reveals that the family still visits Christine, even though she has been away from the school for more than a year. She comments, “Christine really, really cares.
It’s not phony [and] it’s not because she has to. She doesn’t have to [care] once she leaves the school” (interview, Miranda).

Staff members approach Christine when they need advice on how to support their students, particularly when their students are new to the country. I witness an exchange between a grade five teacher named Dakota and Christine. Dakota expresses a concern that one of her students, who has an unpleasant body odour, might be teased by her classmates. She suspects that the odour could be the result of unwashed clothing. Dakota asks Christine for suggestions on how to help her student learn about hygiene, without making her feel embarrassed. Christine advises her to talk privately to the student, since she is at an age where she can understand Dakota’s concerns. She also suggests to her that she contact the family and introduce herself to them. This conversation, Christine explains, could provide an opportunity to discuss concerns and also to inquire about how the family is adjusting to their new home. Christine suggests that Dakota discreetly take her student to the food bank in the school, as it has a stock of toiletry items. She reminds her that the student could be living in an apartment where they share washing machines with other tenants, making it harder for them to do the laundry on a consistent basis (field notes, January 7, 2015).

Christine demonstrates a caring and sensitive approach, not only towards the student and her family, but also towards Dakota. She carefully listens to her and not only gives her several suggestions, but offers her a broader perspective on why the student might be experiencing difficulty. Christine suggests that the phone call to the parents can be a positive experience, thereby easing any possible fears Dakota may have about contacting them. In a sense, Christine provides a starting point for communication between the parents and the teacher, which may benefit the child and help her with this period of transition.

Quinn, a physical education teacher, also approaches Christine for advice, especially when she is having difficulty making a decision. She explains,

Christine is very good to talk to and she is very good at listening to all my ramblings until I finally get the point out and then sort of helping me then see perhaps the different sides and then assisting in making the final decision. I think that’s probably a good strength of hers in just being able to listen.
I ask Quinn how she knows that Christine is listening. She responds,

She generally has eye contact. She lightens the mood often with some quirk or something [and] nodding. . . . She’ll sometimes ask you about it later or talk to you about it so you know that she’s listening because she’ll remember it and usually that means also that she cares about it enough to ask you again. (interview, Quinn)

Christine displays care for the students by greeting them every morning as they disembark from the busses, and every evening as they board the busses to go home. It has become a ritual for Christine to be at the busses every morning and evening, and it is only on rare occasions that she is not at the bus loading zone. She began this ritual when she was a vice principal, and was able to convince William, her principal, to do the same. She remembers,

It was the first day [of school] and we were all outside, and I said to William, “Why aren't you out at the buses?” and he looked at me like I was crazy. He’s like, “Oh, there’s a schedule for that.” I said, “Still, you are the principal” [pause] and because he seemed like such a personable guy . . . I said, “Well, I’ll be on the bus duty schedule.” He said, “Oh, okay.”

Well, you know what? He started going out to the buses every morning and every night, and he did it until he retired. (interview 8)

I accompanied Christine to the busses on many occasions, usually in the evenings. Christine’s vice principals also went with her to bus duty every evening, where they waited outside with her until all of the busses had left for the day. Christine’s presence at the busses makes her identifiable to the children. She views this time as an opportunity to ensure that the students have safely boarded the busses but she also considers it a valuable time to connect with them.

Christine talks to the students while they are waiting for the bus to arrive, and she allows them to play in an enclosed yard if the bus is taking a longer time to arrive than expected. Sometimes Christine and her vice principals wait outside for up to forty-five minutes for all busses to arrive. Christine is aware that staff members assigned to bus duty are only accountable to supervise the students for twenty minutes. She tells them, “Go inside. We will watch the students” (field notes, February 26, 2015).

Christine boards the bus to speak to students if they are having difficulty getting settled in their seats. Sometimes she rides the bus with the students if she receives complaints about their
behaviour from the bus driver or from parents. On one occasion, I ride the bus with Christine, and she tells me that she views this as an opportunity to get to know the students on a more personal level. She remarks, “I like to see where the kids live so that I can understand where they are coming from” (field notes, February 26, 2015). Christine’s daily presence at the busses allows her to build relationships with the children and it conveys to them that she cares about them and is interested in their lives.

Skyler, a bus driver, explains that Christine boards the busses daily to wish the students a “good weekend” or to say “have a great day,” and to help mitigate problematic situations. Skyler states,

The kids, when they’re having a bad day, and I guess another kid has told Christine that this kid is bothering me, the kids get the time to explain themselves. Christine gets to hear both sides of the story before she talks to them and explains things. (interview, Skyler)

Skyler implies that Christine is patient and notes that she gives the children her devoted attention. She is also inferring that Christine is fair in that she listens to “both sides of the story” before she discusses the situation. Skyler continues to explain that every evening, “Christine’s usually outside when we leave, waving at us, and standing at the lights, and saying good bye to all the kids, and they are all looking out the windows and waving and trying to get her attention” (interview, Skyler). I ask Skyler “What do you think that does for the kids?” She replies,

It makes Christine easy to approach so that if they [the children] are having an issue with another student they can go to her . . . whether on the bus or in the playground, they can go and see her. If they don’t see the principal outside, then how are they supposed to talk to her? And then all they think about the principal is this big monster that’s going to punish them. But with seeing her outside and waving at the kids when we leave, she’s easier to go talk to. (interview, Skyler)

Skyler is indicating that Christine’s presence at the busses and in the playground make her accessible to children. She believes that the students feel comfortable approaching Christine with their problems because they consistently see her. Her presence conveys to the children that she cares about them and will listen to them. One afternoon when Christine and I are out at the busses together, Christine comments with excitement that she was able to make eye contact with a kindergarten student who has autism. She explains that often this little girl looks out of the
window of her bus as it pulls away, and that as soon as she sees Christine, she “lets out a big smile” (field notes, March 6, 2015). Christine shared this story when she later met with this little girl’s mother, as a way of updating her on the progress that her daughter was making. The parent smiled and laughed as Christine told her about her daughter’s success. Christine imparts a sense of hope and optimism to the mother (field notes, March 4, 2016).

Christine returns to the bus loading zone if she receives a message that a student is being brought back to the school. One evening, she receives a frantic phone call from a parent whose son in kindergarten has not arrived at the normal drop off point near his home. After noticing on the security camera in the office that a school bus is pulling back into the bus loading zone, Christine and I go out to greet the bus driver and the little boy who has mistakenly boarded the wrong bus. Christine says to the boy, “What happened, buddy?” The boy tries to explain what happened but being so young it is hard for him to communicate. Christine responds, “That’s okay. You’re safe and that’s what matters” (field notes, January 9, 2015). Christine was caring and compassionate toward this young child and she focused on the positive outcome that he was safe.

Christine demonstrates care in her informal interactions with students. Miranda explains that when students are new to the school, Christine extends a welcome to them by saying, “How are you? I’m Ms. Bray. You’re going to love it here.” When children come to the office during recess time because they are hurt, Christine inquires: “What happened? How’s your day going? and [Are you] having a good day?” She shows that she cares about the safety and well-being of the children by keeping them indoors when the temperature is extremely cold. Being aware that students get restless when they are inside all day, Christine will sometimes let them out in the yard to play for a maximum of fifteen minutes, a safe amount of time for them to get much needed exercise (field notes, January 7, 2015; field notes, January 26, 2015). Fifteen minutes also provides relief for staff who find it difficult to keep the children calm when they are inside the school for the entire day. Christine acknowledges the efforts of staff and comments, “I hope that the season of the indoor recess has come to pass. Thanks for all your patience in having the children inside” (weekly newsletter, February 27, 2015).

When it is extremely cold or raining, Christine stands just inside the school entrance that is closest to where the busses unload. She waves at them to come inside, as she does not want them to be out in the yard for long in extreme weather. Christine greets the students by saying, “Good
morning. How was your weekend? Nice hat.” When she sees intermediate students that look particularly tired or gloomy she says, “How are you, sunshine?” The students smile and say, “Good morning, Ms. Bray.” The students can rely on her to be their first person of contact, and her good humour and genuine concern let them know that they matter and that they belong in the school (field notes, January 26, 2015).

Place (2011) notes the importance of affirming interactions in a school. He states,

The way a teacher reacts toward students (or the way a principal reacts to students or teachers) can change the course of their day. One positive interaction can create a chain. Principals can be the catalyst to start a positive chain influencing more people than we imagine. (Place, 2011, p. 24)

When Christine greets the students in a warm and caring manner she is exercising her influence on how the students experience their time at school. Clare, an educational assistant, recounts an incident when she entered Christine’s office with a very young student who immediately went over to Christine’s desk, opened the bottom drawer, took out a Christmas elf, and pressed a button to hear the elf sing a song. Clare was surprised by the student’s level of confidence, exclaiming, “I didn’t even know it [the elf] was there.” There is an implication in Clare’s account that Christine welcomes children into her office without hesitation and is not overly concerned with propriety. The inviting way that Christine receives children is reflective of the “open door” practice that she has incorporated. Clare indicates that Christine has made her office child-centred, containing items that give an indication that she cares about students and has compassion for them. She elaborates,

Christine does have things set up for kids who are having a bad day [or] maybe they’ve had a bad weekend. Maybe they just need that break from the classroom and so it's nice because that’s something that doesn't happen everywhere. Administrators sometimes don't get too involved with the kids because they're overwhelmed I think with everything else. I think that's a choice that she's made that yes, I have to do all of these other [tasks] but I'm going to make sure that if the students come to my office, I'm going to spend some time [with them].

(interview, Clare)
Sophia, a grade three teacher, witnessed a caring exchange between Christine and her students when Christine was not aware that Sophia was watching. Sophia recalls a moment where she stepped out of her classroom, and upon returning found Christine in her classroom speaking with her students. Sophia explains, “I walked in one day and Christine was saying to a student, ‘If ever you need to talk, I’m here.’ I didn’t grow up with principals like that.” I ask Sophia to describe her principals, and she contrasts them to Christine. She explains,

[They were] very intimidating. They were just someone that you never wanted to be in their office. Still to this day, if I get called to the office I get nervous. They didn’t know your name and Christine knows people’s names. They just sort of looked over you. They didn’t look at you as a person. You were just like one of a herd, one of many, that was it. You only saw them when you were in trouble. (interview, Sophia)

Sophia’s descriptions of her childhood principal seem more like the “ruler that causes fear in the office,” that Christine experienced when she was an adolescent, and that she emphatically tries not to be (Christine, interview 1 & 3). Sophia characterizes Christine as a caring and approachable principal, who is genuine in her interactions with students. Place (2011) argues that fear is unwarranted when people have a caring approach towards each other. A caring approach, he argues, cultivates “mutual respect”, which eliminates the need for fear (p. 20).

Christine’s school is chosen to host an evening literacy event for parents across the region and I attend the event. Christine enlists the support of a group of students in grade eight to assist her. These students are placed in charge of greeting parents and giving them directions to various rooms in the school. The students are stationed in small groups throughout the building. After welcoming the parents who had gathered in the gym, Christine walks around the school and thanks the students for their work and invites them to join her for pizza. She engages them in light conversation asking them questions such as, “Are any of you planning to go to summer school?” Most of them answer in the affirmative and she says, “It’s such a good idea because you get to know your high school and your teachers and before you know it, you’ll be rocking the place.” The students laugh and appear comfortable with Christine. Christine expresses care toward the students by taking the time to connect with them and showing appreciation for their volunteer work (field notes, January 22, 2015).
Christine demonstrates care in the way that she approaches the high school application process. Candice, the guidance teacher, who works closely with Christine in this process, explains,

Christine goes through all of those [high school] application forms to make sure everything’s filled out properly. If a student chooses a school out of our boundaries they need to be fully aware of the chances of not getting in and what happens after that. Christine and I would talk to those students [to] make sure that they understood. When the high school acceptance letters come out and the redirection letters come out, we’ll work with the students who’ve been redirected to make sure, and a lot of the times, so I’ll do kind of the front line [work] and then Christine will do [the] calling around and speaking with other principals or guidance departments, whoever needs to do that, to see if there's something we can do to help a student get into a school. (interview, Candice)

Candice’s remarks indicate that Christine is diligent and demonstrates care in her efforts to ensure that students have the knowledge to make informed decisions. Christine dialogues with the students, making them a part of the decision-making process. This inclusive approach demonstrates that she respects the students and understands that they have a right to be informed. Candice implies that Christine is resourceful, taking the time to communicate with principals and guidance teachers. Candice continues to discuss the high school application process and remarks, “That was done on a Saturday because we were texting back and forth. She [Christine] was sending me pictures of things saying, ‘Is this right? Is this done properly?’ and she was here in her office.” Christine is demonstrating care by committing personal time to the forms. This may indicate her concern for the students and their success. Knowing that Candice is a guidance teacher and works with many principals, I asked her if this is normal procedure. She responds,

It varies definitely depending on the principal. Some of them it is what it is, you get into wherever [high school] you get into and that’s that. Christine is very dedicated to the well-being of her students and she wants to make sure these kids get the opportunities and they also get to go [to the high school] where they want to go. She has a lot more applicants, like a lot more kids to look after than the average principal does, so it's a big job. (interview, Candice)

Candice’s comments reveal that Christine genuinely cares about the students and feels accountable to them. Candice clarifies that it is not mandatory for a principal to follow through
to the same extent that Christine follows through. By working in the school on a Saturday, one may interpret that Christine has a sense of moral obligation. When Candice remarks that “Christine is very dedicated to the well-being of her students” she suggests that Christine operates from the paradigm of the best interests of the student. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) stress the importance of the best interests of the student, and argue that there is a “moral imperative” on the part of the administrator to attend to these interests (p. 25). For Christine, having a sense of moral obligation means ensuring that a student is not denied entrance to a high school due to careless errors or incorrect information on an application form.

Christine expresses concern for the well-being of staff members. She explains, “If I notice that someone is just not the person they usually are, I will go and say, ‘Is everything okay? Do you need anything?’ and if they seem surprised I’ll say, ‘Oh I’ve noticed that you’re not yourself and I just wondered if you’re okay.’” Christine clarifies that staff members will often approach her if there is something troubling them in their personal lives and will tell her about it. She believes that they confide in her because they “don’t want me to think that they’re not focused” or that “they don’t care [about their work]” (interview 7). Christine maintains caring connections with staff members and explains,

I try to see people often enough that I would know if [something is wrong] unless they’re in a portable [laughs] then I might not know because it’s so hard for me to get out there, but I still try to interact with them as much as possible . . . that’s what I mean by “open door policy” just so people know that I’m here for them, available to them, yes I’m going to do the managing [emphasis in original] of the school, but that’s just the underlying bit that sort of is necessary. (interview 7)

Christine’s comment on her “open door policy” indicates a practice that she cultivates. Christine views this practice as a metaphor for her availability. She literally leaves her office door open most of the day, and believes that by doing this, she signals to others that she is available to them.

Christine stresses the importance of staff members being caring and compassionate toward each other. I attend a staff meeting where she is speaking about the tentative staffing model, which outlines a plan for the grades and assignments that staff members will have the following school year. She urges staff members at the meeting, “Be mindful of conversations that you have about
each other. Watch your words [because] they can be hurtful. Everyone is anxious. Think about each other. Be mindful of what others are going through.” I observe the staff listening intently to Christine’s words, and giving her their focused attention, which is evidenced by the pervasive silence in the room. Christine knows that the staffing model tends to create anxiety among staff members, because people may not receive the placements that they want. There is also a possibility that staff members may have to transfer to different schools, due to budget cuts or enrollment fluctuations. She understands that the uncertainty tends to create feelings of fear. Being aware of this, and the propensity for gossip, she is trying to guide their conduct by emphasizing virtues of care and compassion (field notes, March 4, 2015).

Christine’s language has moral overtones, which is apparent in her reminders that words can “be hurtful” and to “think about each other.” Her acknowledgement that “everyone is anxious” reveals a sense of compassion and an understanding that people are feeling vulnerable. She is reminding the staff about what brings them together, rather than what divides them, and in this sense, she is encouraging them to support one another. Christine states that gossip can be hurtful and tries to raise people’s awareness by pointing to the harm that it can do. Nash (2002) suggests that a moral language refers to a particular type of moral discourse, containing a certain vocabulary that mirrors and shapes a specific professional organization. This moral language proposes and prohibits certain types of virtuous and hurtful behaviours, as well as particular types of conclusions and decisions. While Christine’s language is not explicitly moral, it does provide moral direction on how staff should treat one another. Christine takes an opportunity when the entire staff is present at a staff meeting to deliver a message. Her words reveal that she is concerned about the relationships that they have with each other. In this situation, three of the four key attributes of care, which include support, concern and relationships, are made evident in Christine’s words and actions. Although she does not specifically make reference to the notion of love, the fourth attribute, she does appeal to the personal regard they hold for each other through the relationships they have forged together.

Christine is also appealing to their sense of honesty and integrity by asking the staff to avoid gossip. In this sense, she is leading in an ethical manner. Sockett (2012) sheds light on the effects of gossip. He states,
Casting an ethical eye on gossip suggests that it can, for these reasons, be particularly damaging to institutions. It is not necessarily that gossips don’t tell the truth, but invariably they qualify what they say with disclaimers, so the damage percolates unverified through an institution. (Sockett, 2012, p. 70)

Christine is being proactive in her leadership by reminding the staff that they can damage their relationships and the school community with gossip. Christine chooses to face a room full of anxious staff which shows courage and a sense of accountability. She could have delivered this message through an alternate mode of communication, such as email, which may have had a different impact. When I ask Hunter, a grade 8 teacher, to provide an example of a situation where Christine uses words with moral overtones, she remarks on the same staff meeting and recalls Christine saying, “‘Remember that we are all working in the building. We are all community.’…she said, ‘Remember, be fair, be nice to each other, be kind to each other because changes are going to come down the pipeline.’” I ask Hunter, “Why do you think she said that?” and she responds,

I think she’s setting it up because we all know that changes are coming and you can’t blame anybody, especially at the school level. I mean there’s going to be a lot of blame out there for others to take but I think she’s wanting us to realize that we are a family, we are a community, and so we need to be kind to each other because if somebody is losing their position and has to take the position of somebody else, that’s going to cause some hurt feelings, so I think she’s sort of setting it up. I mean, I think she knows that not everybody is going to be happy with what’s going to go on so you have to be kind to each other.
(interview, Hunter)

Hunter believes that when Christine conveys her expectations to staff members that they be kind and fair toward one another that she is building a sense of community and a sense of shared accountability. In times of uncertainty and stress, Christine reminds everyone that they have relationships with each other, which means that they each have a responsibility for one another’s well-being. While people “out there” might be in conflict, Christine calls on everyone in the school to come together and support each other, and not allow issues that they cannot control to drive them apart.
For some time, students in Christine’s school have been the recipients of laptop computers which are donated through a program known as *Kids, Cops and Computers*. The program was developed and is managed by the local police force. Hannah, the staff member who coordinates the program, explains that computers are distributed to intermediate students who require them to complete school work, but cannot afford them due to personal financial circumstances. The computers are loaned to the students for the school year, but the students are always allowed to keep them once they finish the program (interview, Hannah; field notes, March 11, 2015).

Although *Kids, Cops and Computers* was introduced to the school by a previous administrator, Hannah explains that Christine actively supports it, and takes care to attend many of the events associated with it. Christine is also directly involved in consultations with teachers when they decide which students are in greatest need of a computer. She knows the students and is familiar with their financial situations, and is able to give informed recommendations. Christine attends “Lunch and Learn” sessions with the students that are held during designated lunch hours. These sessions are facilitated by a police officer and provide an opportunity for students to learn more about the police force and about effective ways to deal with bullying. Hannah notes that Christine also attends the annual launch event in the evening for parents. This event is an opportunity for parents to receive the computers and to learn more about the program. Hannah explains that Christine shows her support for the program “just by her excitement” and indicates that Christine’s presence shows that she is “very much a part of it” (interview, Hannah; field notes, March 11, 2015). The significant time that Christine devotes to this program, and her involvement in it, convey a genuine interest in the students and the parents and a desire to support them. It also signifies that she genuinely cares about the progress of the students and is willing to invest her time to help ensure that they reach their potential.

Christine often attends informal presentations in classrooms. I accompany Christine to several of these presentations. On one occasion, Christine and I are invited to a kindergarten class to hear them sing. Christine stands in front of the students and smiles. When they are finished their song, Christine laughs and tells them what a great job they did. She lingers for a short while to talk to the teacher and does not appear in a hurry. Her manner and the time she spends in the classroom shows that she genuinely cares about the children. It also signals that she supports the teacher who has prepared the children for the song (field notes, March 6, 2015).
Another presentation that Christine and I attend is in an intermediate classroom. Upon entering the classroom, Christine greets everyone and then moves to the middle of the room. I note that Christine has a tendency not to remain at the back of the classroom or near the door when she is invited to watch a classroom presentation. Her actions suggest that she cares and wants to be involved and has a genuine interest in what the students and the teacher are doing. Christine gives the students her full attention by turning her body completely towards them and looking directly at them. Her manner, expressed through her body language and eye contact, suggests that she is fully present to the students, cares about them and respects their work. By remaining for the duration of the presentation, Christine conveys a message to the students and their teachers that they are a priority. Toward the closing of the presentation, Christine receives a message over the public announcement system, telling her that she has a phone call from the field superintendent. She indicates to the students that she will be “right back” and does return to the classroom shortly thereafter. It is interesting to note that the presentation was a science activity where groups of students baked cakes that looked like cells. When the presentation concluded, the students began cutting slices of their cakes and sharing them. Christine took care to go to each group and to eat a portion of each cake. Her actions signal that she is aware of how the students see her as a special guest. Christine is taking care to acknowledge each group’s cake equally, and in this respect, she is demonstrating fairness. She is being sensitive to the students’ efforts (field notes, March 6, 2015).

Barbara, an educational assistant, remarks that Christine “really knows the kids on a personal level.” When I ask her to elaborate, she comments on Christine’s relationship with a special needs student. Barbara explains that Christine is aware that this student does not like fire alarms, so that whenever she plans a fire drill, she gives Barbara advanced warning. This allows Barbara to take her student outside early, thereby avoiding a situation that could bring anxiety for the child (interview, Barbara). Barbara is indicating that Christine cares about her student and takes an interest in learning about his needs. Christine is responsive to his needs by taking steps to reduce his anxiety.

Barbara explains that on one occasion her student practiced the drill with the rest of the class. Christine complimented him, by telling him that he did a “fantastic” job. Barbara describes this as a “great moment for him.” On another occasion the fire fighters conducted the drill and Christine took the student over to meet them. He got his photograph taken with them and he
climbed into the truck. Barbara comments, “Christine just takes that extra, and I know it's busy, but it's just finding those little moments with him, or with any other student, that's great and it's nice to see” (interview, Barbara). Christine shows care and sensitivity in bringing the child to meet the firefighters. Knowing that the child is anxious about fire drills, she seizes the opportunity to make the situation less frightening for him. In this sense, it could be argued that she applies practical wisdom, knowing that this child might respond favourably when given the chance to experience the situation as normal, rather than something to be feared. Ryan and Bohlin (1999) explain that practical wisdom involves understanding a situation, deciding on the right action to take in that situation and then engaging in that action (p. 6). Christine’s relationship with this child allows her to understand his needs, and then to respond in a way that might help him overcome his fears.

Christine takes an opportunity at school-wide events to remind students how to treat one another. At one particular school mass that I attend, she extends her thanks to everyone who organized it, and reminds the students about the importance of being kind, respectful and forgiving. She turns towards the Bishop, who is visiting the school, and says, “This school is a loving place. You are always welcomed.” Before the students leave the church she reminds them, “remember where you are” and “leave the church quietly” (field notes, March 6, 2015). Christine exercises her moral authority by reminding the students to be “kind, respectful, and forgiving.” When Christine describes the school as “a loving place” she calls attention to its moral dimensions. Clearly the school is not always a loving place but Christine is using language to expand imagination and to create a vision of what the school can be. She is suggesting that the school is not just a building, but is “loving” as it embodies the people within it. By telling the students “remember where you are” and “leave the church quietly” she is calling forth their awareness and is signifying the importance of respectful behaviour (field notes, March 6, 2015). Huebner (1996) discusses the importance of moral language and notes, “Much educational language limits awareness and constricts imagination. . . . Teachers need to talk about moral values in such a way that they can recognize their own moral authority and responsibility, since they are often discouraged from exercising either” (Huebner, 1996, p. 268).

Interacting with students allows Christine to know who they are and to be aware of their strengths and needs. Building relationships with them enables her to confidently speak about their progress with greater knowledge and authority. At one particular meeting that I attend,
Christine commends a parent of a special needs child on the “wonderful job” she is doing with her daughter, who is showing great progress. Christine explains to the mother that she often visits her daughter in her classroom where she finds her calm and quiet compared to the previous school year. Christine tells the mother that on her visits she will look around the classroom and then look at her daughter and exclaim, “Oh, I thought you were away! You’re so quiet” at which point the girl starts to laugh. At one point in the meeting the parent starts to cry, and Christine quietly says, “There’s no Kleenex in this room,” and leaves the room to get it. Christine responds to the parent with sensitivity, care and compassion. She is honest in giving her credit for the work she has done with her child. Christine tells joyful stories that instill hope, giving the parent an indication that her child can enjoy success (field notes, March 4, 2015).

Sergiovanni (2005a) provides a perspective on the impact of hope in leadership. He argues,

> Perhaps the most important and most neglected leadership virtue is hope. One reason why hope is neglected is because of management theories that tell us to look at the evidence, to be tough as nails, to be objective, and in other ways to blindly face reality. But facing reality rather than relying on hope means accepting reality as it is. Relying on hope rather than facing reality means working to change reality – hopefully. Leaders can be both hopeful and realistic as long as the possibilities for change remain open (Sergiovanni, 2005a, p. 77).

Christine frequently operates from a hopeful stance. She is open to the possibility that people can change their situations, and she helps them overcome challenges. This is evident when she helps a student get a second chance after committing a serious infraction or when she arranges special transportation so that a single mother can have all her children in one daycare. Christine is aware that parents have faced challenges in their lives that can sometimes have an effect on how they perceive the school as an institution. This perception can in turn influence their interactions with staff members. In an informal conversation with Christine, she tells me what advice she gives to her vice principals. She says,

> When parents hear something about their child, often they are really hearing something about them because the child reflects them. They aren’t hearing what the child is doing wrong. They are hearing what they are doing wrong as a parent. Many times, when a parent walks into an administrator’s office, that parent is reliving his or her school days, and they may not be good memories. Walking back into an administrator’s office can be intimidating so being
compassionate and empathetic towards the parents is important (field notes, December 2, 2014).

Christine is aware that parents have their own life stories that may affect how they interact with administrators. She suggests that the way children are treated in school can have an influence later in life when those children become parents. Christine may be referring to her own life and using its lessons as a mentoring tool with her colleagues. She is asking her vice principals to be receptive to parents who might have their own anxieties or insecurities. By reminding them that parents might feel intimidated when they enter the school, she is calling on their ability to be caring and compassionate.

In an informal conversation, Christine tells me that she often reminds the vice principals and the teachers that words and tone create an impression with parents. She says to them, “We are a vulnerable group of people. You never know who is listening to you. You have to be caring and empathetic at all times. One wrong thing said can cost us” (field notes, December 2, 2014). Christine invites the teachers and the administrators to consider that their words have impact, and in this way, she is raising their awareness of their role as moral agents. She is asking them to pay attention to the professional manner in which they conduct themselves, and she is using moral language such as “caring” and “empathetic.” Christine, however, does not make clear what the “cost” is and does not specify how they are “vulnerable.” There may be an element of self-protection in her message and an implication, even if unintentional, that one should be careful with their words to avoid conflict. Despite some lack of clarity, Christine’s message reminds others that their words have moral import, and in this sense, she is drawing their attention to their role as moral agents in the school.

Examples of how others care for Christine are evidenced in the words and actions of those who interact with her on a daily basis. Christine indicates that her staff members care about her and that they express it through kindness, concern and compassion. When she needed to be away from the school to attend to a family situation, staff members placed cards and notes on her desk and the office staff gave her flowers. Andrew called her on the day that she returned to the school to welcome her back. She thanked him for the time that he gave her to be with her family (field notes, February 18, 2014). Christine acknowledges the staff members’ gestures of care in a message that reads, “Thank you for all the cards, thoughts and prayers over the last few weeks.
and over the past year” (weekly newsletter, February 20, 2015). Christine recounts a particularly
eotional staff gathering at the end of a school year where she expresses her gratitude. She
remembers,

I said to the staff, “Personally and professionally it has been an extremely challenging year,
probably the hardest year of my life,” really it was, and they were so good to me, they were
so kind and good to me and so compassionate. I said, “Everybody knows I don't sleep. My
husband worries about me, and some mornings I think I can’t face another day, I can't do it,
and I walk in here and the moment I get here it all goes away.” . . . I said, “Your [emphasis in
original] work and what you give every day to the children of this school makes me happy.
I'm happy, I'm so happy at work [laughs] all the time even though there’s stress that has to be
dealt with” . . . but just to watch the way people work with the children [and] what they do
every day fills me up. (interview 9)

Christine shows vulnerability and courage by talking about the stress and anxiety that literally
keeps her awake at night. She refers to the caring relationship she has with her husband, which
reveals a more intimate and human side of her. Christine affirms that the school is an uplifting
place where her worries “all go away.” This sentiment echoes her description of the school as a
“loving place” that she used in her address to the bishop during a school mass (field notes, March
6, 2015). Christine shows her gratitude towards staff members by saying that their work “fills me
up” which could be interpreted as giving her hope and fulfillment in her practice. She notes the
expressions of kindness and compassion and believes it sustains her during her most challenging
moments. The four attributes of care which are love, concern, relationships, and support are
evidenced in Christine’s account of how she is cared for by others. When Christine comments
that the staff has been “so good to me” it mirrors her wish, noted in Chapter Four, that the staff
“just continue being good to each other” after she has finished her term at the school (interview
9). Knowing that it is important to feel cared for and to care for others is what Christine hopes
people will remember her for when they reflect on her legacy, and the impact she has had on the
school (interview 9).

Care is a prevalent virtue in Christine’s practice. It is closely associated with love, relationships,
concern and support. It is also profoundly related to approachability, compassion,
communication, empathy, hope, kindness, trust, respect and presence. Christine is supportive and
hopeful in her approach to students, staff members and parents who are dealing with uncertainty in their lives. She shows compassion and empathy in helping others to overcome challenges. Christine communicates to others that she is approachable by being consistently present in the school building, in the school yard, and at the busses. She uses this time to develop relationships with students, staff members and parents and her presence inspires trust. Christine associates care with love and attributes her efforts to maintain relationships out of the love and care that she feels for others. She greets students by name and engages them in conversation, which signals a genuine interest and concern for their well-being. Christine spends time in classrooms and gives students her undivided attention by turning to face them and listening intently to them. Her manner shows that she respects the students and she supports the work that the teacher is doing in the classroom. Christine uses verbal and written communication to direct the moral conduct of staff members, and she often encourages them to be caring, kind and compassionate toward each other. Christine acknowledges that others care about her, both at work and at home. She believes that the care she receives from people in both of these areas of her life sustain her in her role as a principal.

In the section that follows, examples of how Christine demonstrates fairness and the ethical complexities involved in issues of fairness will be discussed. The discussion will make evident how fairness is expressed as a central virtue in Christine’s work.

5.5 Fairness

Campbell (2003a) notes, “The virtue of fairness is rooted in the fundamental ethical principle of justice and implies other associated moral qualities such as consistency, constancy, equality, impartiality, and equity that are not necessarily interpreted in the same ways by all people” (Campbell, 2003a, p. 29). Campbell’s definition of fairness resonates with my study. Christine tries to show consistency when she makes ethical decisions. For example, she applies discipline measures incrementally for all students, so that they have a fair chance of correcting their behaviour. She tries to be fair in ethical situations, and confides that being impartial is a particular challenge for her, especially when she has devoted much time to helping a student. In some situations, Christine demonstrates fairness by treating people equally, and in other instances she demonstrates fairness by treating people in an equitable manner.
Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) offer a definition of equality. They explain that it “looks at the individual and the circumstances surrounding him or her. It does not focus on group differences based on categories such as race, sex, social class, and ethnicity” (p. 114). To provide the reader with an understanding of how equality relates to fairness, one might consider a hypothetical scenario where a principal is trying to deliver fair and equal consequences to a group of students in a discipline situation. Assuming the students are equal in such factors as age and ability, the principal who is trying to be fair and equal would treat all students in the same manner. No student would receive special consideration. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) contrast equality with equity, and explain that equity,

deals with difference and takes into consideration the fact that this society contains many groups that have not always been given equal treatment and/or have not had a level field on which to play. . . . the concept of equity provides a case for unequal treatment for those who have been disadvantaged over time (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011, pp. 114-115).

In the same situation described above, a principal who is trying to deliver fair and equitable consequences to a group of students in a discipline situation might have to take into account that one student is younger and developmentally delayed. The principal might choose a different consequence for this student, understanding that he or she may not fully appreciate the consequences of their behaviour. This would be a fair and equitable decision, that takes into account the differences in the students. Nucci (2009) explains how fairness and equity are associated. He states, “Treating others fairly may mean treating people unequally in the sense that equity requires adjustments that bring people into more comparable statuses” (p.46).

Following from the above definitions, the five attributes of fairness are justice, equity, equality, impartiality, and consistency. In the context of my study, fairness is also profoundly interrelated with trust, respect, care, compassion, honesty, transparency and diligence. Fairness is exemplified in Christine’s conduct, manner, words, stated intentions, daily practices and rituals. Christine demonstrates fairness in her efforts to be honest and transparent in her decision-making. She tries to be respectful of the rights and viewpoints of others, evidenced in her ability to maintain dialogue in difficult situations. Christine is committed to information gathering prior to making decisions, revealing her as someone who is diligent and willing to engage in due process. Her efforts to make decisions that are fair indicate a concern for justice. Christine
endeavours to treat students with care and compassion, even when they are having behavioural challenges. Some of her decisions and actions are perceived as unfair. These situations provide insight into the challenges that principals experience when faced with decisions that are ethically complex and morally ambiguous.

Christine strives to be fair when she interacts with students who repeatedly exhibit inappropriate behaviour. She admits that she is “not a fan of suspending kids” and would rather work with staff members to help students avoid getting into trouble. Christine makes clear that in most situations her decision to suspend is not made in haste, and involves many steps. She explains,

*Usually [emphasis in original] there’s a long road leading up to that suspension. I really believe in progressive discipline where there are many conversations with parents, with the children, with the teachers. I think the times where I have suspended are times when there have been many situations and opportunities for learning and growth. There have been warnings, discussions with the parents, and things leading up to a suspension.* (interview 7)

Christine is committed to due diligence. In such disciplinary situations, she involves as many stakeholders as possible and keeps the dialogue focused on moving forward. Christine includes the children in the dialogue, and respects their right to have a voice, and to hear what other people are saying about their behaviour. She is hopeful that the child can turn things around which is implied in her remark that there are “many opportunities for learning and growth.”

Christine clarifies what she means by “progressive discipline” and states,

*If we’re on a progressive discipline track with the child, we've included social work, parents, teachers, the administrative team, guidance. We've gone to SBSLT [School Based Support Learning Team] meetings, there's a Safety Plan in place, so there's a lot of communication. And then working with the teacher, the parents and our [SBSLT] team [and deciding] what is the next logical step? . . . a lot of times I actually send a warning letter home with the Incident Reports on it. I had that conversation with a couple of girls last week where I told them [emphasis in original], “This is what's going to happen next. I want you to know.” I’m putting it out there for them, so now it's up to them.* (interview 7)
Christine involves various experts with a range of knowledge when she puts supports in place for a child who exhibits inappropriate behaviour. Her efforts to be inclusive and to draw on the perspectives of various professionals reveal her commitment to get as much assistance as possible for the child. Christine is transparent in her communication with the parents and the students by sending warning letters home. This practice respects the parents’ right to know what is happening at school, and what the consequences might be if the child’s behaviour does not improve. Christine makes the students accountable for their behaviour by stating, “I’m putting it out there for them, so now it's up to them.” She is being fair by giving them warnings and time to correct their behaviour. Christine’s open and candid communication with the students indicates that she is honest about her expectations and about what she intends to do if their behaviour does not change.

Christine considers the details of every situation before she decides whether or not to suspend. She comments,

I really try to analyze who benefits from it [and] if that child doesn’t directly benefit in some way (emphasis in original) from being suspended, meaning they’re learning a lesson, or the parent is stepping up to pay attention to the kid, whatever it is, if that child is not going to benefit, then I don’t see the point in it. I’d rather take another [direction]. If my direction’s not working, then who can I help get to support me [to] go in another direction? Is it guidance or social work … or help to get the child involved in [volunteering] in kindergarten? What is it [that] I’m not doing that I can do, because this approach is not working? But it always comes down to, how am I going to help this kid move forward? So, it could be a push to the parents. It could be scaring the daylights out of the kid. [It] could be showing the kid a side of me that child’s never seen before [like saying], “I’ve had it with you. Okay, you’ve crossed too many lines now. My patience is done. Okay, this is where we are with this.” (interview 7)

Christine keeps the needs of the child at the centre, and in so doing, sends a message that suspensions should not be only punitive, but should improve a child’s life in some way. Walker (1995) discusses the role of the principal in advancing the best interests of the child. He states,

The variety of understandings about ‘the best interests of children’ concept does not and should not deter leaders from taking responsibility for the stewardship and the direction of
the educational enterprise. The more articulate a leader is regarding the various notions and visions of the best interests of the children, the better are constituent stakeholders served. The leader’s position, then, is to gain the support of others in facilitating the best interests of children and in realizing benefits for both the delivery agents and, most essentially, the children. (Walker, 1995, p.6)

Walker (1995) is arguing that principals are accountable for guiding their schools toward realizing the notion of the best interests of the child, despite a lack of general consensus about what it means. When principals communicate their understanding of the best interests of the child, the child’s needs are better served. Principals need to have support from others to ensure that the needs of children are served. When they are able to garner this support, not only does the child benefit, but so does the person who assists the child. Christine tries to use the best interests of the child as a personal operational paradigm, particularly when she is dealing with challenging discipline situations. Her stated intention that children “directly benefit in some way” from a suspension becomes a moral guidepost for Christine, as she navigates the difficult and highly nuanced situations where suspension is a viable option.

Christine applies practical wisdom as she tries to assess which approach is most effective in serving the child. Higgs (2012) explains, “Complex decision-making lies at the heart of good practice, which leads to sound professional judgement and actions that can be truly referred to as practical wisdom” (p.79). Christine is not looking for a quick solution, and is willing to consider many options, including reaching out for support. Her overarching goal is to “help this child move forward,” and she is aware that she has to keep an open mind, as evident in her question “What is it [that] I’m not doing that I can do?”

Harry, the vice principal, comments on Christine’s ability to be open-minded and committed to due process. He says, “She’s willing to listen to everybody. She tries to investigate thoroughly before she makes a decision. She doesn’t jump into rash decisions so she wants to find out everything she needs to know before she reacts” (interview, Harry). Strike (2007) explains that due process “concerns the reasonableness and the fairness of decisions. . . . Fair decisions are those that are made for relevant reasons and on the basis of adequate evidence” (p. 124).

Christine is aware that she can become emotionally attached to students and their families in discipline situations. She explains,
There are times I do have to check myself and say, “Am I letting this go too far because I’m so emotionally attached to the child or the family or the situation?” Because I know I can do that, I can be that person. (interview 7)

I ask Christine to articulate what the dilemma is for her, and she elaborates,

Well, I think the dilemma is there's a couple of things: one, am I missing the point of what the kid needs? and two, how are people perceiving how I’m managing the school as an administrator? Am I letting it go too far, because in my goal to set a certain [pause] *culture* [emphasis in original] I think being too lenient goes against my goal. (interview 7)

Curious to know what her goal is, I ask her, and she states, “Just to build that culture of trust and respect for one another, but I think that if there’s a point where I’m letting something go that shouldn't be let go, then I'm losing my audience [laughs]” (interview 7). Christine tries to honestly reflect on her own actions by asking herself, “Am I letting this go too far?” She is demonstrating self-awareness. Christine indicates that she has concerns about how she is perceived as a leader, especially when she has given students several opportunities to change. She clarifies,

[I ask myself] could another child get away with this type of behaviour for so long? Although I look at it individually, there is a point where you need to say to the kids, “This is not good,” and to the staff, “We've done what we can and now we need to take this approach. Thank you for your support everybody but now we’re going to move on to the next level and see how that goes.” . . . I think that fairness looks different in every situation, like it’s not always the same thing, it's not *equal* [emphasis in original] but I think there does come a point where kids are looking at you going, “Well, why does he get to do this all the time?” or “Why does she get to treat people that way and you're not doing anything about it?” because they don't see the other things, but they do see that behaviour, so I think sometimes there comes a point where you have to just say, “Okay, I get it now. We’ll have to move on.” (interview 7)

Christine is aware that she is accountable to all of the students by being sensitive to how they feel when they see their peers engage in inappropriate behaviour with no apparent consequence. She associates fairness with equity when she says, “fairness looks different in every situation.” Christine understands that different supports might need to be in place for different students, in
order to achieve similar outcomes. Despite the fact that students may require different supports, Christine also understands that the students are watching her. She knows they are paying attention to the decisions that she makes, and that these decisions affect the way that they perceive her. Christine knows that students may view her decisions as unjust, and that she has to be consistent in how she deals with discipline situations. If her actions are perceived as unfair because they are unequal, she might compromise the trust and respect of students and staff. Her struggle is to remain impartial, particularly when she knows that she is emotionally invested. Christine acknowledges that there are limitations to what she can do, and when all avenues have been exhausted, that she has to “move on.” The five attributes of fairness which include equity, equality, justice, consistency, and impartiality are evident in this discussion, and illustrate the complexity of ethical situations that confront Christine.

Haslam, Reicher and Platow (as cited in Branson, 2014a) associate fairness with trust and argue that, “the perceived level of the leader’s fairness is the foundation upon which trust in that person’s leadership is built” (p. 450). They suggest that people judge the level of a leader’s fairness based on how that leader treats himself or herself and how that leader treats others. Leaders are perceived as fair if they do not allow themselves preferential treatment and if they do not give special treatment to different members of a group or different subsections of a group. When leaders are perceived as fair, people are more likely to participate in shared goals and to remain committed to working together. Christine is aware that perception is important, and that she can lose her credibility as a leader if she does not balance the rights and interests of everyone involved. She is concerned with consequences which is evident in her struggle to do the right thing to preserve her credibility and to maintain a climate characterized by fairness and trust. Christine realizes that there are only so many concessions that she can make before she will be challenged on the fairness of her decisions. In this instance, she demonstrates a consequentialist orientation to her practice.

Christine draws a distinction between the way she treats intermediate students who commit an infraction of the rules and the way she treats primary or junior students. She expects older students to have more self-control and to have learned through experience how to behave appropriately. Her expectations for younger students are different, because she believes they have less experience and need more guidance and support to understand the consequences of their actions. Christine’s understanding of different levels of child development and her
willingness to take that into consideration shows that she is trying to be fair and reasonable in her approach to discipline (interview 7).

Tatum, an administrator colleague, has also observed Christine’s approach with younger students. She recalls,

She would have a conversation [with the child] . . . so they [the students] felt comfortable and safe [emphasis in original] in telling her anything that was going on. I learned a lot in that way. She would see the child as the six-year-old instead of, when the teacher would come in and say, “I’m not having that child in my class. He did this, he did that.” She [Christine] would say, “He’s six,” so it would deescalate a lot of the situations. (interview, Tatum)

Tatum implies that Christine provides teachers with perspective by trying to get them to be empathetic with a child’s developmental stage. Hunter, a grade 8 teacher, describes Christine as a “compassionate” person. When I ask her to explain what she means, she recalls seeing Christine interacting with kindergarten students in her office. Hunter explains that Christine offers them puzzles to work on, or books to look at while they are in her office, which she believes shows compassion. I ask Hunter to elaborate and she states,

When you’re dealing with kids of that age, shouting at them or reprimanding them, they don’t get that at that age. I mean I taught grade one and it’s very hard to speak with the child and reason with children and some of these little people, especially earlier on in the fall, they were only three years old, so to sit down and have a one-on-one discussion, that’s not going to happen, so you have to give them something to do. Eventually I’m sure Christine starts explaining the behaviour and asks them why they are here and not in their classroom. We all deal with that, and we all have a way of dealing with those things, and that’s her way of dealing with it, so that shows compassion I think for the situation, for both the teacher and the child. (interview, Hunter)

Hunter believes that Christine uses good judgment in her approach to discipline with very young children. She implies that Christine understands that kindergarten students may not be able to fully comprehend what they have done, and she sees the wisdom in Christine’s response. Hunter seems to recognize that Christine’s approach to discipline may be unconventional but she accepts it because “that’s her way of dealing with it.”
By contrast, other staff members believe that Christine’s approach with very young children leads to situations where decisions that are made are too lenient, and her perception as a leader who is fair is challenged. Courtney, a grade two teacher, expresses concerns that Christine is sometimes too tolerant which can undermine her credibility as a principal. She comments on a situation with a kindergarten student who repeatedly has altercations with the staff and with his peers. The student is often brought to the office but does not appear to receive any punishment, and in some cases, receives positive attention from Christine and the office staff. Courtney characterizes Christine’s approach to discipline as “soft” and expresses her frustrations in the following remark, “I don’t know who's running the school because it's that approach. There's that softness. I recognize that she’s seeing the child [and] he’s so young and then the family . . . [but] I don't know how effective that is” (interview, Courtney). I ask Courtney to articulate what troubles her the most about this situation. She elaborates,

        I don't think we're helping. I don't think we’re helping this situation. I mean you might say, “Well you know if he [the student] likes all of us and he likes school,” I'm trying to think of that but I mean what is this? One minute he's on the secretary’s lap . . . and I'm just thinking, [pause] “How is that helping?” because the next minute he'll be down at the end of the hall screaming at the teacher saying, “You’re disgusting,” I think he's [emphasis in original] manipulating the situation. I don't really see it as we are in control of the situation so when I see that, I guess that's how I feel. I feel that we’re not in control of the situation. (interview, Courtney)

Courtney alludes to a lack of fairness, as she perceives that the kindergarten student is not receiving any punishment for his behaviour. The student’s actions are disrespectful, and there does not appear to be any repercussions. The result is a perception of unfairness. When Courtney says “I don’t know who’s running the school” she is indicating a lack of trust in Christine’s authority. This lack of trust may lead to feelings of frustration, evident in Courtney’s comment, “I feel that we’re not in control of the situation.” Courtney appreciates that this student is young and that his age should be considered, however she is concerned that other people have interests that are not being addressed. She explains,

        If you are looking at a student, and I’ve got one in mind, who’s acting out, we can't just think of that student. We have to recognize the parents [and] how they're going to respond to
dealing with the student. We have to think of the teacher. We can't just cater to the child and the parent and forget about the teacher . . . Christine’s all about the family and she said right at the get go her thing was poverty and all about taking that into consideration. For instance, when a child’s acting out constantly, we can’t constantly be phoning them [the parents] to have them take that child home because that parent has to work. So, Christine will look at those other circumstances however [emphasis in original] we also have to look at the teacher and not only the teacher, we have to look at the other students in that classroom and the other parents of those children in that classroom and it's complicated, but that's what they [administrators] are there for, they are there for all of those groups. (interview, Courtney)

Courtney seems to appreciate that Christine is sensitive and compassionate with parents who cannot leave their jobs during the day to pick up their children from school. She does argue, however, that while administrators must consider the interests of the child and the parent, they also need to remember the needs of everyone else who is impacted by the child’s behaviour. This is an issue of fairness to all. Christine’s stated intention to consider the financial situation of parents appears reasonable, and reflects an understanding of the hardship that some of the parents in her community face on a daily basis. However, she is accountable to all stakeholders, and needs to keep their interests in mind. Otherwise, her actions in some cases might be deemed unfair, as they appear to benefit the interests of one group, such as the struggling parent or child, over the other, such as the teacher and other students in the class.

Christine is sometimes faced with complex situations where she has to seek advice in order to make fair decisions. Circumstances that involve weapons are particularly complicated because of the safety risk, but also because attention must be paid to every detail of the situation. In one particular incident that Christine recounts, a teacher came to her office to inform her that a student had discovered a knife in the intermediate boy’s washroom. Christine retrieved the knife and immediately began her investigation. She enlisted Harry’s help and they proceeded to speak to the students to try to find out who owned the knife, who had placed the knife in the washroom, and any other details leading up to the incident (field notes, November 27, 2014 & December 2, 2014).

Harry and Christine spoke to the boy who had told his teacher that there was a knife in the washroom. He explained that when he entered the washroom one of his classmates was already
in there and drew his attention to the knife. His classmate gave every indication that he had simply discovered the knife and did not know who had placed it there. When Christine and Harry spoke to the classmate who had originally claimed he did not know anything about the knife, he confessed that he had actually placed the knife in the washroom, but that it did not belong to him. He also admitted that he had stolen the knife out of a classmate’s school bag. When Christine and Harry spoke to the boy who owned the school bag, it was revealed that the boy had borrowed this knife from his friend, because he was going on a camping trip with his parents (field notes, November 27, 2014 & December 2, 2014).

The boy who owned the knife confided that he had indeed given it to his friend for a camping trip. Christine spoke to the boy’s parents and discovered that one of the parents was a volunteer in the Boy Scouts and that he owned the knife. The two families knew each other outside of school so the parent decided that his son could loan the knife to the other boy for camping. The parent clarified to Christine that there was never any intent to harm anyone. Christine decided to ask the parents to keep the boys at home the next day while she was deliberating on her next steps, and all parents complied. Christine reasoned that by having them remain at home, the boys might realize the severity of the situation. It would also give Christine time to seek advice on what to do. The only boy who was allowed to return to school the next day was the boy who had gone to his teacher to tell her that there was a knife in the washroom. Christine was satisfied through all her conversations that he had not played any direct part in the incident, other than informing his teacher, which was a responsible action to take (field notes, November 27, 2014 & December 2, 2014).

Christine was not sure how to proceed so she enlisted the support of an advisor at the board of education who specializes in safety. The advisor’s role is to help administrators navigate discipline situations, particularly those that may involve suspensions and expulsions. Through speaking to this advisor, Christine discovered that if there was no intent to harm anyone, then a suspension was not warranted, which meant that the boy who owned the knife and the boy who was going on a camping trip should not be suspended. The boy who had placed the knife in the washroom would have to receive a suspension for several reasons. He had committed theft by stealing the knife and had confessed to Christine that he knew it was wrong to place the knife in the washroom, but did so anyways, revealing that the act was premeditated. He did not appear
remorseful and he had stolen another object earlier that week, so there were other infractions on his record (field notes, November 27, 2014 & December 2, 2014).

Christine decided to suspend the student for five days, and she indicated that his parents were very cooperative. They supported Christine’s decision because they believed that it would deliver a message to their son that the situation was serious. The parents had also secured counselling for their son. Christine was happy to hear this because she wanted the student to get the help that he needed. Christine learned from her safety advisor that if parents were getting counselling for their son, then the punishment for their child could be less severe, as it showed the parents’ intent to cooperate with the school. Harry’s role was to follow up with the parents to ensure that counselling had started and he also spoke to the intermediate classes about the importance of making good choices regarding their own safety and the safety of others (field notes, November 27, 2014 & December 2, 2014).

Christine exercises diligence in following due process. She remains impartial by gathering all of the information needed before she makes her decisions. Christine’s commitment to due process enables her to deliver consequences that are fair and just. She treats adults and children with consideration and respect, and engages in open and honest dialogue. Christine is prudent in seeking the advice of someone who is an expert in safety and legislation, having a realistic understanding of the limitations of her knowledge. Christine tries to achieve a fair and equitable resolution by taking into account different levels of culpability. She is consistent in her approach by weighing all the factors of each student’s involvement, and by adhering to the guidelines and rules provided by the safety advisor. Four of the five attributes of fairness, which include impartiality, justice, consistency and equity, are evident in this situation. Together they bring into focus the ethical considerations that are central in rendering fair and just consequences in complex discipline situations.

Christine is drawing on the principle of retributive justice that Starratt (2012) defines as,

the fair imposition of sanctions and punishments for violation of laws and public policies and institutional rules. In schools, retributive justice refers to punishments such as school suspensions for students who have violated rules against fighting or bullying, where it had been made clear to students and their families what those penalties would be. (Starratt, 2012, p. 42)
Christine seems to associate fairness with equity, as she applies a different standard for the boy who stole the knife and then placed it in the washroom. This boy’s intention and actions were different from the intentions and actions of the other boys. Christine considers that his actions were premeditated and she also looks at his prior record of infractions. She demonstrates compassion for him by speaking to his parents about counselling, thereby showing concern for his well-being. Christine demonstrates fairness to the boy who brought the knife to school by taking into account the fact that the parent allowed it. She did not punish the boy for a decision that his parents made. She also considers the well-being of other students who were in danger when the knife was made easily accessible to anyone who entered the washroom.

Haynes (1998) highlights the ethical complexities involved in dealing with situations that require punishment. She states,

> The relationship between the well-being of each student and the longer-term welfare of the school and eventually the community has resulted in a focus on various forms of social control, particularly our notions of punishment and penalties. . . . punishment, unless simply defined legalistically, has ethical implications of blame and worth built into it . . . Legislation is not there to be imposed as an end in itself . . . It is a matter to be discussed with all parties, negotiated if possible through to a resolution that meets the wishes of all relevant parties, and in so doing continues the ongoing dialectic between the well-being of the student and the community. (Haynes, 1998, pp. 63-64)

When deciding on suspensions, Christine considers the welfare of the students directly involved in the incident but she also thinks about the welfare of all the students in the school. She considers what could have happened if a younger or more vulnerable student had found the knife in the washroom. She demonstrates fairness by giving different consequences to the boys as they had different levels of involvement and therefore different levels of blame. She considers what each boy did and delivers a punishment that seems equal to the amount of wrongdoing. In this sense, she is demonstrating fairness associated with equity. Christine treats the boys involved fairly and equitably and in so doing, shows an awareness of the ethical implications involved in serving suspensions. These ethical implications include ensuring that the consequences are fair and reasonable and are neither too harsh nor too lenient.
Near the end of each school year, Christine has to make decisions about the rooms where teachers will be placed the following school year. She must decide whether to move a teacher from a portable into the building, or from the building into a portable. Christine has to consider certain details such as the grade and the age of the children. She tries to place junior division students in portables, as they are old enough to walk across the school yard to the building. This is an important factor because all the washrooms are located in the building. In an informal conversation, Christine recounts that at the end of the previous school year, it came to her attention that she would have to move at least one grade four class into a portable. Christine was informed that a new classroom was scheduled to be built directly beneath one of the grade four classrooms in the building. It would be a health and safety risk to allow people to remain in a classroom where they could smell fumes and be subjected to constant noise (field notes, March 4, 2015).

Christine explained to me that she did not know for certain which classroom would have to be vacated, so she decided to individually approach two grade four teachers, to find out if either would be agreeable to the move. All of the grade four teachers were already in portables except for these two teachers. When Christine approached the first teacher, she agreed to go to a portable as long as the other teacher went to a portable as well. According to Christine, this teacher believed she was making a fair compromise, as all the other grade four teachers were already in portables. When Christine approached the other grade four teacher, Harlow, to discuss the possibility of moving her to a portable, Christine indicated that she became angry and made it clear that she did not want to move. Christine never intended to move two teachers to portables but she was faced with a problem once the first teacher told her that she was only willing to move if Harlow moved, and then Harlow refused to move (field notes, March 4, 2015).

Christine related to me that she offered to help Harlow in any way that she could with the move. She offered to enlist the assistance of the custodians who would move her belongings for her so she would not have to do it. Christine felt she was giving Harlow enough time to adjust to the move; it was the end of the school year, and she would have the summer to make the transition. Christine indicated to me that although help was offered, Harlow still seemed angry. Christine’s final decision was to move both of the grade four teachers to the portables; a decision that she felt was fair as all grade four teachers would now be in the same location (field notes, March 4, 2015). While Christine did not make explicit references to justice, one could say that her
decision to move both teachers was based on equal treatment. Starratt (2012) states, “The ethic of justice demands that the claims of the institution serve both the common good of the community and the rights of the individual in the school” (p. 41). Christine was faced with the option of being fair to one teacher or to both teachers. She applied the principle of fairness as equality by treating them equally and moving both of them.

In an informal exchange with Harlow, her unhappiness about teaching in a portable was evident when she confides, “I have nightmares about it.” She expresses her frustrations at having to walk between her portable and the building several times a day. Harlow says that “nothing is easy” when she has to access resources such as photocopiers and her mailbox, which are located in the building. She explains that she never asked to teach in a portable and never wanted to do so. I did not engage Harlow in a long conversation, out of respect for her feelings. She seemed to grow increasingly agitated as we spoke, even though the situation occurred almost a year prior to our discussion (field notes, April 9, 2015). Teachers seemed to be aware of the tension this situation caused in the school. Various participants referred to it in their interviews.

Courtney offers her thoughts on the incident,

She [the teacher] is right to some degree. She has been with the board for a long time and has done a good job and has put a lot of extracurricular in and does that not count for anything?... I think it all happened the last week [of] June….I’d be devastated if I got tossed out there, I’d hate it [emphasis in original]. (interview, Courtney)

Courtney empathizes with her colleague and considers how she might feel if she had to move to a portable. She reflects on the incident further,

I understand how hard that must've been for Christine…I can see both sides but I do really feel badly for this teacher ... I guess the word would just be fairness but the other grade four [teachers], they're out there [in the portables] too. How do you let just one [teacher] stay in [the school]? I get that but [emphasis in original] you know this teacher's been here [for a long time] and some of those other grade four [teachers], maybe they work really hard too, and it's hard. (interview, Courtney)
Courtney is articulating the challenges involved in making a decision that is fair to everyone. She recognizes that it is difficult to give special treatment to any one teacher because all of the grade four teachers “work really hard.” She is associating fairness with equality. Courtney has concern for her colleague but she is also able to empathize with Christine.

Rachael, a French teacher, offers her perspective,

Christine puts the needs of children first I think above staff members. If she would have to make a choice, then the needs of the children would come first, which I think is difficult because children are little people and adults can be more difficult to deal with and more demanding. Adults sometimes think that their need is more important than the school’s need and that's very difficult to balance. I'm sure Christine’s been challenged through that and by that, I mean a decision to move a teacher to a portable. . . . she's not afraid to make a difficult decision and that's the quality a leader must have; it's not always about being liked but it's about making the right decision for the student. (interview, Rachael)

Rachel is associating Christine’s decision with fairness and with the best interests of the child. She is indicating that Christine has courage as she is willing to be unpopular with adults if she believes her decisions align with the best interests of the child. I ask Rachael why she thought it was in the best interests of the students to move Harlow to a portable. She clarifies that all of the students benefit because Christine’s decision meant that all of the grade four students would now be in portables. It is difficult to know for certain if Rachel is correct in assuming that the best interests of the child are realized in this situation. While keeping one class of grade four students in the school building may appear to privilege them over the other classes, it means that at least one class does not have to endure the hardships that are typical of portables. These hardships include travelling to the washroom and the gymnasium and eating lunch in different rooms throughout the building. While it might seem fair and equal to have all grade four teachers in portables, it is difficult to argue that the best interests of the students are served, especially when no student is spared from enduring the uncomfortable learning conditions of portables. Walker (1995) offers some perspective when he states,

Clearly the ‘best interests of the children’ maxim has enormous potential to direct and to measure the goodness, rightness, and appropriateness of policy and practice. But it has the
same potent capacity to cover non-action or detrimental choices with respect to the long-term quality of children’s lives. (Walker, 1995, p. 5)

Christine may have intended a fair and equal outcome by placing two teachers in portables, but one cannot assume that this decision will serve the child. As Walker (1995) indicates, this “maxim” can create a false impression that the lives of children are improved, when in reality there is no way to know for certain if the children are benefiting. While the decision satisfies a need for equality among the grade four teachers, there is no way to know for sure that having all children in portables will over time serve their best interests.

Rachael continues,

We [the staff] were under the impression only one [teacher] was moving and I thought moving both [teachers] was fair. . . . because it was perceived equality, that all four classes were there and I think, “Gosh, that would've been a tough decision.” . . . all four [classes] of that grade were there and I think she's fair. (interview, Rachael)

Rachael empathizes with Christine as she imagines that the decision was difficult. She also considers how staff members might view her decision. Moving both grade four teachers appears fair, as it brings a resolution where this is “perceived equality.” Through her actions, Christine is seen as a fair leader, who treats everyone equally.

Complex ethical issues sometimes arise when Christine deals with situations involving special education students. She recalls a situation where she had to find high school placements for students with special needs. Christine soon discovers that the local high schools do not have appropriate programs. She explains,

I thought well you’re our local high school. How can you not have a program for these children? I mean in that particular case they were next door so I thought, “How can they be made to go somewhere else? They need to go to their local high school.” . . . they were going to put some of these kids in the ME [Multiple Exceptionality] class but I knew kids that were coming from my former school from the ME class . . . so I mean their needs were so completely different, I thought, “How can this be happening? How come nobody knows how to provide for our children?” [emphasis in original] (interview 5)
When Christine refers to the school “next door,” she is indicating a nearby school, and is thereby using the term in a figurative rather than a literal sense. By asking, “How come nobody knows how to provide for our children?” she is expressing frustration at not receiving direction from the board of education. Christine suggests that it is unfair that the school “next door” does not have resources for special needs children. In this sense, she associates fairness with equity, as she indicates that without special programs, the children’s needs will not be served. Strike (2007) argues that high needs students often require considerably greater resources to attain modest educational achievements. Concerns about where to allocate resources to achieve maximum gain then become central issues of debate. Strike (2007) clarifies that a central issue involved is how to be fair when resources are allocated to students with special needs.

Christine is aware that special education students have a range of exceptionalities. This awareness is most likely a result of her experience with Multiple Exceptionality classes (interview 2). Her awareness allows her to see that the options available may not provide children with a fair chance of success. Everyone receives instruction at one functioning level rather than a range of levels appropriate to their needs. Christine is drawing on her ethical knowledge to identify that the options presented to the students will not give them a fair opportunity to thrive. The Multiple Exceptionality class is one option for the child but Christine believes the child will languish, with needs unmet. She applies her ethical knowledge in guiding the parents in their decision-making. In her association of care with justice, she implies that the students will not receive the care that they deserve. In a discussion of the care perspective, Noddings (1999) states, “Instead of assuming a false universalism, it recognizes deep and perhaps irremovable differences – differences which counsel against sweeping solutions that affect people’s lives directly and preclude their effective use of self-chosen strategies” (Noddings 1999, p.19). Christine recognizes that children have different needs and capabilities and that one type of special education program is not suitable for addressing those differences.

Christine reveals the impact of this situation,

It was actually one of the times in my whole career that I felt sort of distraught and I thought, “I don’t know if I can continue on” [laughs]. [I was having] conversations with these kids and their parents, trying to figure out where they could go, where they were welcomed, in our Catholic board [emphasis in original], it was very disturbing, it was very upsetting for me. I
mean it all worked out in the end, they did all manage to get into the programs in those schools and, but for some of them, I don't think things have really changed that much. (interview 5)

Christine seems to feel that the children and their parents have been abandoned by the “Catholic board [emphasis in original].” There is an implication that the board of education has betrayed Christine’s trust and the trust of the parents and the children. When Christine says, “for some of them, I don't think things have really changed that much,” she is referring to the lack of support offered to these children. I ask Christine what she thinks might be happening in the board of education to bring about this situation. She continues,

I think part of it is just [pause] that it takes money and time I suppose to provide for all the children and what they need so [pause] maybe it's just that the right programs can't be funded in schools, I'm not sure. I think even if decisions have to be made and maybe if it's impossible, if it's really truly impossible to have those kids be in that school because they just don't have the program, which I think is wrong, I think they should have the program, but if it's impossible and the board has said, “No” to the program, then in our interactions with those children and their parents we must find some compassion and we must be the people to guide them to the appropriate place. Where is the appropriate place? Nobody seemed to know [emphasis in original]. (interview 5)

Christine is referring to the notion of equity as fairness when she says, “it takes money and time I suppose to provide for all the children and what they need.” Noddings (1999) discusses the theory of equity as fairness and notes,

the points of emphasis are familiar: people have rights; people are to be regarded as individuals; everyone should have a fair chance at securing desirable positions (equal opportunity); and if rules cannot remove inequalities, they should at least be designed so that inequities favor the least advantaged [emphasis in original]. (Noddings, 1999, p. 9)

Christine acknowledges that children with special needs require resources that the board of education may not be able to afford. She is attuned to issues of distributive justice which Starratt (2012) explains, “refers to issues such as relative equity in per-pupil expenditures in a state’s public education system” (p.42). Christine is able to articulate the moral issues in the situation
when she comments, “I think [it] is wrong, I think they should have the program.” The moral issue is that children with special needs should be offered programs in their neighbouring schools that allow them to reach their fullest potential and that allow them be with their siblings and friends in the communities in which they live. To be denied such programs seems unjust and unfair. Articulating the moral issues is sometimes called “ethical reflection” (Strike et al., 2005, p. 3). Strike et al. (2005) clarify,

Moral issues are usually characterized by certain kinds of language. Words such as right, ought, just and fair are common. Moral issues concern our duties and obligations to one another, what constitutes just or fair treatment of one another, and what rights we each have (Strike et al., 2005, pp. 3-4).

This situation brings to light the ethical complexities involved when two of the attributes of fairness, equity and equality, are in tension with each other. Christine is aware that programs for special needs children often require additional resources, such as “time and money,” which may exceed what other children receive. She also believes that special needs children require such programs, if they are to have a fair chance of succeeding in school. Christine prioritizes equity over equality in this situation, as she believes different types of special education programs are needed to bring about a fair outcome for exceptional students, who have different needs and abilities. This circumstance highlights the need for a school leader to understand the tension between equity and equality when they make decisions with the intention to achieve a fair outcome for everyone involved.

At the end of our conversation, Christine comments that children with special needs are “our most vulnerable children [and] are sort of the unwanted.” In a way, she allows her own self to be vulnerable by persevering despite very challenging obstacles. One can hope that when these children and their families reflect on this situation, they do not remember the system’s imperfections, but rather that they had a principal that was dedicated to bringing about a fair resolution and would not give up on them. The students were admitted to the programs in their neighbouring high schools, which resulted in a fair outcome for them and for their families. Christine’s commitment to being fair is illustrated in her choice to do what is right for the students, parents and the community. In this way, she chooses to lead ethically, and in so doing, enriches and changes people’s lives.
The five attributes of fairness are justice, equity, equality, impartiality, and consistency. In the context of my study, fairness is also deeply connected with trust, respect, care, compassion, honesty, transparency and diligence. Fairness is central to Christine’s efforts to lead ethically. She approaches matters of fairness by trying to be forthright and open about her decisions. Christine listens to the views of others, as evidenced in the open discussions she has with students, staff members and parents. She is sensitive in reaching both equal and equitable outcomes, depending on the nuances of each situation. Christine follows due process and tries to deliver consequences that are fair and considered. She is caring and compassionate with students, and tries to be consistent in giving them opportunities to correct their behaviour. Christine is aware that in some situations she has difficulty being impartial, particularly when she has forged relationships with students and their families. She knows that if she is too lenient, her actions will be perceived as unfair, which could jeopardize her credibility as a leader. She believes that the best interests of the child should be at the centre of her decisions, and she is aware that she can sometimes lose sight of this, particularly when situations are emotionally charged. At times, others perceive Christine’s decisions and actions as unfair. These moments bring to light the difficulty of leading ethically when confronted with challenges that are morally complex and highly nuanced.

5.6 Conclusion

The ethical complexities and moral uncertainties inherent in Christine’s work are uncovered in her daily encounters with stakeholders in the school and in the wider community. Her commitment to lead ethically is made evident in her expression of the ethical virtues in her daily practice. Three interwoven themes guide the analysis and provide the structural framework. These include virtues, approaches to action, and personal operational paradigms. The virtues of trust, care, respect and fairness provide the foundation for examining the approaches to action and the personal operational paradigms that Christine refers to in her practice. The moral essence of Christine’s leadership is revealed in her efforts to lend support to others, and in the hopeful and optimistic stance that she maintains when faced with challenges that sometimes appear insurmountable. In confronting these challenges, she allows herself to be vulnerable, and in so doing, shows herself to be a human being, who is engaged in the process of living and leading ethically.
The virtues of trust, respect, care and fairness interweave and mutually inform each other in Christine’s practice. She lives out these virtues in her daily interactions, which makes visible how she conceptualizes her practice in ethical terms. Christine conceptualizes her role as one who leads by being present to others and supporting them, particularly in their most vulnerable moments. She inspires trust by being present emotionally and physically. Her presence involves being available to people, listening to them, and giving them her undivided attention. Christine prioritizes dignity and builds trusting relationships with others, which signals that she is approachable and is concerned for their well-being. Christine aligns her words with her actions which reveal her as a leader with integrity. She approaches decision-making with honesty and transparency and tries to be fair in how she resolves ethical situations. Christine endeavours to be respectful, caring, fair, and trustworthy in her daily interactions and believes her words and actions guide others in their moral conduct. In this sense, she is a role model who sets the tone for how people treat each other and engage with each other in their daily work. Leading ethically becomes interconnected with cultivating an ethical climate and community, a topic to be explored further in the next chapter.

Chapter Six continues to examine Christine’s moral leadership and her efforts at building an ethical school by taking a closer look at the ethical climate within the school community. The discussion focuses on how Christine builds community by instilling moral values and expressing ethical virtues in her daily interactions. It also focuses on the intentional and unintentional ways that Christine creates and sustains an ethical school climate.
Chapter 6

6 Cultivating Ethicality

6.1 Introduction

“Cultivating Ethicality” embodies the notion that the incorporation of ethics, as a foundation for dealing with situations and for interacting with others, is a process that is often deliberate and planned. In the context of a principal’s practice, the words “cultivating” and “ethicality” conjure up an image of a slow building course of action that involves consistency, commitment and often conscious effort. A school leader understands that cultivating an ethical school climate within a community is a sustained process that develops over time, and involves the focused attention and awareness of stakeholders. A principal who cultivates ethicality shows by example the importance of ethical words and actions and their influence on the climate within the school community. Role modelling, therefore, is an aspect of both Leading Ethically and Cultivating Ethicality.

This chapter is divided into two sections: The School Community and the Ethical School Climate. The first section involves an in-depth discussion of community as an aspect of ethical leadership. It focuses on how the principal builds community by cultivating moral values and expressing ethical virtues in daily interactions, often in an intentional and deliberate manner. The importance of relationship building in sustaining an ethical school community is highlighted.

The second section examines the ethical climate within the school community. The ethical climate of the school is cultivated through the expression of virtues in the principal’s daily practice that is often conscious. Morally-laden messages that convey the principal’s intended vision for how people should treat one another are analyzed, particularly in how they impact the climate or tone of the school.

The order of the sections is deliberate and operates as a way to structure this thesis. It provides a bridge between Chapters Five and Six. Chapter Five outlined in greater detail Christine’s role as a principal and how she leads ethically in her daily work. While Christine is often conscious of her ethical intent, much of how she leads is spontaneous and informal. Chapter Five uncovered how Christine expresses the virtues in her words and actions, in an often unplanned and implicit
Chapter Six commences where Chapter Five concludes, by beginning with a focus on how the ethical dimensions of Christine’s daily work intentionally cultivate and shape the school community. Through her influence on the school community, she often deliberately expresses ethical virtues and fosters moral values in her daily practice. Christine initiates and encourages discussion on how people should treat each other and on how the community should function. She urges reflection on ethical issues and makes ethical treatment a central focus of dialogue. Chapter Six concludes with a closer examination of the ethical climate within the school community in an effort to develop a deeper understanding of how Christine’s words and actions, that are often conscious and planned, over time affect the school climate in a deliberate way.

An ethical climate and school community are interdependent and rely on each other in creating a school where ethical virtues are prioritized. The discussion draws attention to this interdependency, allowing the reader to gain a sense of how both work together to enable an ethical school to flourish. In so far as an ethical climate and school community are mutually dependent, they are also distinct in their characteristics and challenges. A characteristic of the ethical school community is that it embodies the people within and closely connected to the school. One of the challenges is to cultivate a sense of belonging and inclusiveness, so that each and every person feels connected to the school and valued as a community member. A characteristic of the ethical climate is that it embodies the environment or tone in the school. A central challenge is to cultivate a climate where relationships and interactions are characterized by such fundamental virtues as honesty, dignity and compassion and where moral values such as looking out for one another are prioritized. Christine’s efforts to cultivate a climate guided by the virtues and to build a community that is inclusive are fraught with distinct difficulties and challenges, that when illuminated, offer a sense of the complexity of ethical leadership and of cultivating ethicality.

6.2 The School Community

This discussion focuses on how Christine demonstrates ethical leadership by striving to create an inclusive school community where people feel a sense of belonging. Consideration is given to how Christine builds community through the expression of the ethical virtues of honesty, dignity,
care, trust, respect, kindness, compassion and generosity. The discussion reveals that Christine is guided by a notion that relationships are built on virtues such as trust and respect. Her influence in relationship building and how it establishes the school community as a supportive place, where accountability is shared, is explored.

Community is discussed as an indicator of ethical leadership. Christine’s words and actions both directly and indirectly shape the school community and affect the way that it operates on a daily basis. The discussion focuses on how Christine influences community by fostering the moral values of inclusiveness and belonging. It also looks at how she cultivates and builds community through the expression of the ethical virtues. The significance of relationship building as a fundamental approach to fostering a safe, supportive and caring school community is addressed.

Strike (2007) defines the purpose of community and states,

> Good communities pursue worthy aims, and, if they are to function well, they must have a shared conception of the rules and principles that govern the cooperation of their members in pursuit of these aims. Thus, to answer questions about the ends at which a community aims and the principles that govern the interactions of its members is not just to address the question, How shall we live? Instead, it is to address the question, How shall we live well together? Ethics, ultimately, is about the shape of human communities in which people can flourish and about the basis for social cooperation in such communities (Strike, 2007, p. 7).

As a principal, Christine has the ability to shape the school community and influence how children and adults learn and grow. She focuses on ethical principles that promote a shared sense of accountability and cooperation. Christine is aware of her role in fostering a school community that flourishes, and she supports initiatives that foster a sense of inclusion. She endeavours to help people feel that they are a necessary and integral part of the school community. Christine wants students, staff, and parents to feel that they belong in the school.

There are instances in Christine’s practice where she must deal with separate and sometimes conflicting societal norms, church doctrines and the needs of the school community. These situations are multifaceted and layered and present a challenge for Christine in her efforts to cultivate ethicality. Being a leader in a Catholic school, who is trying to foster a sense of belonging and acceptance, Christine attempts to rise to the challenge of shaping the school
community by expressing her values and beliefs. In the following excerpt, Christine describes this challenge in creating an inclusive school community. She considers what she would do in a situation where a child discloses to her that he is gay and in so doing, reveals a struggle to work within the doctrines of the Catholic church. She states,

Although I have my own opinions, and they're very wide-open and accepting, I do work for the Catholic board, that is my job, and if I didn’t want to have those challenges I should've gone somewhere else. I don’t want to go against the board specifically or the church but depending on what that conversation is, if I have a child in front of me who’s saying to me, “I'm pretty sure I'm gay,” there’s no way that I'm going to say to that child. “Oh boy, you're in big trouble mister.” I mean that's not the conversation that's going to happen. (interview 9)

Christine recognizes that she is accountable to the Catholic board and has to work within the parameters of the system. However, when students come to her she is concerned that they feel welcomed, unafraid, and accepted. Christine is present to the individual child and wants to convey a message of belonging. When Christine says, “there’s no way that I'm going to say to that child. ‘Oh boy, you're in big trouble mister’” I ask her “Why not?” She clarifies,

I would never want to do anything that would ever [emphasis in original] make the children feel that they are not as good as anybody else or there is something wrong with them. First of all, it's not true, it's not what I believe, and I wouldn’t want that for any child, but that's just one example of the sort of thing that I find challenging working for the Catholic board. (interview 9)

Christine is mindful of the dignity of the child and the importance of feelings of self-worth. She strives to be authentic in her actions by stating that she will not make children feel ashamed of who they are because “it’s not what I believe.” Her commitment to act in accordance with her beliefs reveals her as a person of integrity. Christine did not only talk about what she would not do, but she also spoke about how she would respond to this situation, and indeed how she has responded. Christine explains,

I just wouldn't want someone to feel bad about him or herself or others [emphasis in original] that are in that situation. I know I've been in a situation where kids are talking about that and I’ve said to them, “You know really, all we really care about is love and kindness and as long
as people are good to one another that's all we should care about. It doesn't matter if they're two men or two women. . . . This is what we really should do, is that we care about each other and we’re kind to each other.” We have kids in the school that are obviously gay, lesbian. We have parents in the school that are same sex partners so I think we have to be very, very careful about what we say and do, whether we’re in a Catholic school or not.

(interview 9)

When Christine hears students talking about same sex relationships she seizes opportunities to share her views. She engages in open and honest dialogue with students that focuses on the virtues of love and kindness. Christine is concerned about the dignity of the child and adult who are gay or lesbian and does not want them to “feel bad” about themselves or those they love. She wants students to feel loved and accepted for who they are and to feel that they belong. Christine is aware that she is a role model and that her opinions have influence on how the community welcomes and embraces students who are gay or lesbian. Her caution about being “careful about what we say and do” shows an awareness that parents can be vulnerable and might be affected by the words and actions of staff members. In this sense, she is cultivating ethicality by encouraging the staff to be sensitive and respectful of the feelings and choices of same sex parents in the community.

Shields (2014) argues that when school leaders uphold the “rightness” of their beliefs instead of community norms that might conflict with those beliefs, they are demonstrating ethical leadership. She comments,

an ethical leader does not develop a rigid set of practices and policies to which every individual must conform . . . instead, she develops a system for determining what is right or wrong in a given situation, informed but not determined entirely by the beliefs of the society in which the school is located (Shields, 2014, p. 26).

As a Catholic school principal, Christine is aware that the church doctrines inform her practice. However, in considering this situation, she is clear that she prioritizes the well-being of the child. Christine works within a system of beliefs about what is right and wrong that is fundamentally grounded in her support of virtue-based behaviour. In this sense, she is leading ethically. She is also being guided by a virtue-based framework that prioritizes kindness, inclusiveness, and
acceptance. She demonstrates integrity by aligning her words and actions with what she believes is right based on the virtues. Starratt (2004) comments,

The leader is responsible to all the students, to all the teachers, to all the parents, and to district officials and agencies governing the schools. When those responsibilities conflict, the leader has to seek the course of action that most benefits the students while taking into consideration his or her responsibilities to the other stakeholders (Starratt, 2004, p. 62).

Christine acts in accordance with the needs of the students by prioritizing their personal dignity and refusing to shame. She acknowledges her responsibility as a leader in the Catholic board but regards the well-being of the child as central to her practice. Christine understands that this can place her in conflict with the Catholic mandate, which does not endorse homosexuality. Christine indicates that she has said to children, “It doesn't matter. If people love each other and they are good to each other and they want to be together then I think God will be happy about that” (interview 9). Christine may be trying to help students incorporate new understandings with more traditional and restrictive Church doctrines. When she considers how she would give children perspective on same sex relationships, she refers to the virtues of love and kindness, and highlights the importance of acceptance. The phrase “good to each other,” indicates kindness. By saying “I think God will be happy about that,” Christine offers guidance by giving young children a reference point that they can understand. She also guides staff members in their interactions with parents. She explains,

A couple of times even this year when people said something about a certain student who has two mothers in the school, and I try to be very clear when I speak to staff because I sense that they find it, like they kind of giggle, they're not really used to it [and] they find it challenging… so when I speak about him [the student] I say, “Did you speak to the parents?” meaning, that's what we would say about any other child, they are his parents. He has two parents, they're both women, or I say, “Are his moms coming to get him?” because I think it's okay for us to say that, “He has two mothers, yes, yes he does, anybody, anybody object? No, good.” (interview 9)

Christine models respectful and inclusive communication as she has a “sense” that some staff members have difficulty discussing situations involving same sex parents. She implies that this difficulty arises from a lack of experience because, “they're not really used to it.” Christine tries
Christine encourages dialogue centred on honesty, respect, kindness and acceptance. She tries to engage the entire school in moral matters by confronting bias and speaking openly about the need to be inclusive. It is reasonable to assume that there may be staff members who have difficulty reconciling their own personal views on homosexuality with Christine’s expectations of an inclusive climate. However, Christine does not appear to be asking staff members to change deeply held beliefs, but is asking them to be sensitive and compassionate in their interactions with community members. Nucci (2009) discusses the influence educators have in shaping the school climate. He explains that even adolescent students who are personally opposed to homosexuality understand that it is wrong to tease their peers on the basis of their sexual orientation. Nucci (2009) argues that educators can use this understanding to foster collaboration between gay and straight students, and in turn facilitate a positive climate. Nucci (2009) states, “Efforts by schools to support students’ moral inclinations against harming fellow students do not require teachers to alter their basic views of homosexuality. However, such efforts do call on teachers to act as moral exemplars of fairness and compassion” (Nucci, 2009, p. 73).

Although Nucci (2009) is writing about adolescent students, his assertion that teachers, and I would argue principals, are moral exemplars, who shape a fair and compassionate climate, has relevance for all students. Christine is leading ethically by modelling how people in the community can treat one another with kindness, dignity and acceptance. Christine’s approach is conducive to the virtue of fairness in that she treats all members of the community equally by
discouraging stigma. I ask Christine to clarify her intentions when she says to staff members, “He has two mothers, yes, yes he does, anybody, anybody object?” I ask her if she is hoping that teachers and support staff will get around that uncomfortableness. She responds,

Yes, by being just very forward about it, very open and to say there is no real difference here, from our perspective. If he [the student] is challenged by it, and we need to help him, then we can, because I think it upsets him sometimes, that he doesn’t see his dad, he has two moms. Nobody else in his class has two moms that he knows of, so until it’s a problem for him that we need to help him overcome and work with his parents, for us it’s no problem. We accept, we don’t judge, we’re all here together. That’s an example of the challenge.

Christine fosters inclusion by focusing on similarities rather than differences. She uses “we” instead of “I” in her statements indicating shared responsibility among community members for supporting each other. Christine demonstrates respect by stating an intention to provide assistance to the child and the parent if they ask. She has compassion for the boy who may be struggling to deal with his family situation, and is concerned that he might be feeling isolated as “nobody else in his class has two moms.” Her commitment to cultivate an ethical school community where people feel they belong is revealed in her statement, “We accept, we don’t judge, we’re all here together.”

Strike (2007) discusses the notion “we are all in this together,” and how it influences community development. He states,

Loyalty and solidarity are at the center of the sense that we are all in this together. Loyalty and solidarity often begin in a commitment to the ends of the community, but in good communities, they grow to include ties of caring and commitment to members of the community that go beyond achieving the ends of the community. (Strike, 2007, p. 83)

Strike (2007) argues that when communities have ties of caring and commitment they move beyond initial motivations for working together. Christine is attempting to move the community beyond initial educational goals by leading with a vision that prioritizes acceptance and caring. She demonstrates ethical leadership by raising awareness that words and actions have moral relevance. She encourages everyone to consider the role they play in creating an ethical school.
Christine has a genuine concern for the well-being of staff members, and conveys this concern in her interactions with them. Barbara, an educational assistant, explains the importance of her informal interactions with Christine. She states,

Through passing in the hallway, even those little conversations of, “How are you? How’s your family? How’s this?” I think people want that connection. . . . I think having connections with the children is good but having connections within your own, the people that you work with, makes it so much better because you feel more of a community. (interview, Barbara)

Olivia, an early childhood educator, is new to her role, comments on her previous experiences in a school where she did her placement as a part of her training. She remarks,

I didn’t feel like I mattered that much in the school. I didn’t feel like she [the principal] even knew who I was. I remember one time asking for a reference and the principal was just very kind of professional and cold . . . I had coached in the school and all these things and the principal said, “No. I didn't ever see you in the classroom so I can't,” and that's fine but I just remember feeling like I didn’t have the opportunity to build a connection . . . whereas with Christine I feel like even if I was a placement student here she would know who I am and I could go into her office and we’d share a laugh and she’d peek in on the class and I would feel like I could chat with her. (interview Olivia)

Barbara and Olivia are commenting on the significance of a connection with the principal. They each refer to the importance of the principal showing a personal interest in them by engaging them in dialogue. Barbara points to the significance of her relationships with colleagues in making her feel that she belongs to a community. Olivia associates feeling as if she “matters” with having a connection with the principal. Her sense of belonging in the school is intricately tied to how the principal receives her in conversation. Olivia and Barbara imply that Christine takes the time to know people, and is accessible, approachable and genuinely interested in connecting with the people in her community. Dakota, a grade five teacher, explains that when she was a teacher candidate she did a practicum in the school where Christine was a vice principal. She recalls that on the first day of the school year she went into the school with several other teacher candidates, and Christine not only greeted them, but spent a great deal of time with them. Dakota remembers that Christine “put them all at ease” because they were nervous but she
was “very welcoming.” After that first day, Christine would occasionally visit her and her fellow teacher candidates in their classrooms to check in on them and ask them how things were going (interview, Dakota).

Christine believes that establishing connections for children with multiple exceptionalities is important. Reflecting on her experiences as a vice principal, she recalls changing the scheduling to allow children to leave their self-contained classrooms and spend time in a “regular” classroom for a portion of the day. Christine explains that additional staff members are needed to supervise in the regular classrooms which makes the process a “scheduling nightmare.” Despite the challenges, Christine thinks it is important because “other kids see them, and they could build relationships with people. The other teachers got to know them, kids got to know them, and they could go into the yard” (interview 2). By altering the schedule Christine is prioritizing the inclusion of children with special needs. Christine suspects that fear is a barrier to creating relationships between children with high needs and “regular” classroom teachers who may not have a responsibility to teach them. She explains,

Sometimes they [the children] are sort of away, in a room, and it can be scary. It can be scary for everybody, I think, to get to know kids that have the most challenging needs, because they get frustrated, they get angry, they get upset, they might soil themselves, there are lots of things. (interview 2)

I ask Christine “What do you think the fear is?” and she replies,

[It is] the fear of the unknown, really, I think, especially for teachers. Most teachers want to help and they want to make sure that kids feel loved, and included, and when they're talking to a child, the child can't tell them what they need, or show them fully what they need. I think teachers kind of panic [and] they think, “What if I do something wrong? What if I don't do the right thing? What if I make the child feel worse than they already do?” (interview 2)

Christine believes that teachers have good intentions but do not feel confident about how to interact with students with multiple exceptionalities. Communication is a challenge if students cannot express what they need which may lead to a greater feeling of unease and uncertainty for the teacher. Christine empathizes with teachers who “kind of panic,” which is evident in her
ability to imagine the questions that they might ask themselves. She suggests that building relationships with these students may help reduce fear and alleviate anxiety.

Curious to know if the teacher’s “fear of the unknown” could be a fear of failure, I ask Christine and she responds,

Yeah, but I don’t think you can fail. I think that if you try from your heart to help, to make sure that a child feels included, or anyone, not just children but anybody, then you can't really go wrong, because you show people that you care. (interview 2)

I ask Christine “Why do you think it's so important to feel included?” and she clarifies,

Well, I think that when a person feels alone there’s no greater pain, really, because in order to feel alive, and like you're part of a community, then you have to be included in something. Sometimes that means having one friend and so we always look at those kids, especially kids we’re sending off to high school [and] we’re so afraid for those kids that have nobody. What we need to have is at least one person that they feel can see them for who they really are. And if we can develop that one relationship then it takes that [feeling of being alone] away and whether that's with an adult or another child or somebody to help start building relationships so they don't feel alone, I think that's the key. (interview 2)

Christine expresses compassion and concern for people who feel alone when she says “there’s no greater pain.” She equates being a member of a community with feeling alive and being included. When Christine states, “we’re so afraid for those kids that have nobody” she is expressing care and concern for children who are leaving the safety of the school community. In using the pronoun “we” she is drawing attention to the importance of shared accountability. Her belief that the community is responsible for the well-being of its members is evident when she points to its role in helping students build relationships that will sustain them as they transition to high school. Christine is concerned about the emotional health of children and believes that authentic relationships are crucial, evidenced when she states, “What we need to have is at least one person that they feel can see them for who they really are.”

Starratt (2012) comments on the importance of community. He remarks, “our humanity reaches its highest moral fulfillment in community. Without the relationships of community, which
constitute not just necessary interdependencies, but also an intrinsic good, life would not be worth living” (Starratt, 2012, p. 28). Starratt (2012) is arguing that people become fully human or “reach their highest moral fulfillment” when they are connected to each other in community. When Christine states, “in order to feel alive, and like you're part of a community, then you have to be included in something,” she is echoing Starratt’s notion that being a part of a community is necessary for living a meaningful life.

Nucci (2009) explains that the need to belong is a lifelong desire for everyone and that schools can play an important role in helping children to feel included. He states,

   Classroom teachers cannot be expected to replace parents and family as basic sources of love and belonging. However, the classroom and school can go a long way toward supporting children’s sense of connection and their beliefs about their own self-worth and the trustworthiness of others. (Nucci, 2009, pp. 69-70)

Christine relays the importance of connectedness by putting in place supports for students to help them feel valued and loved. She tries to foster a sense of belonging by helping students establish relationships with their peers that can sustain them well into the future. As noted in Chapter Four, Christine’s office door has a banner that states “We All Belong.” The prominent placement of this banner may signal that Christine prioritizes inclusiveness. The banner could be regarded as merely rhetoric if Christine did nothing to apply its meaning in practice. Her efforts to cultivate a caring school community reveal a commitment to inclusiveness that goes beyond mere sentiment.

Christine recognizes that the school can be a place where there are many opportunities for children to have a sense of belonging. Over the course of my fieldwork, she discussed strategies for helping children feel that they are a part of the school community. Christine considered implementing a concept known as The Buddy Bench which was brought to her attention by a teacher. The Buddy Bench resembles a park bench but is usually painted with bright colours with the words “Buddy Bench” on it. The bench is placed in the school yard in an area where students play. If a student is having difficulty making friends, he or she sits on the bench until a classmate goes over to the bench to invite the student to play. If two students sit on the bench, ideally, they start talking and then leave the bench and play together. The goal is to have all the students “buddy” up with each other so that no student is excluded or lonely in the yard (weekly
Christine had an informal meeting with a small group of teachers to discuss possible ways to implement this initiative. She also met with the school safety committee, comprised of staff members from various grades, to continue discussions (field notes, December 10, 2014 & January 14, 2015). Christine highlighted “The Buddy Bench” in her weekly staff newsletter and included a link to an informational video (weekly newsletter, January 15, 2015).

Christine and the staff intended to have at least one Buddy Bench in the school yard in the late Spring or early Fall of the coming year. They planned to start the initiative with the primary students who they thought might be more receptive to it. The Buddy Bench initiative had not been implemented when I finished my fieldwork, however the meetings that I attended with Christine revealed that she is aware that some students need help connecting with their peers. Christine’s time in the yard may have increased her awareness. She commented that she has seen young children go over to their peers who are standing alone and invite them to play (field notes, January 14, 2015). I believe the initiative has potential for allowing children to learn how to include each other. The “Buddy Bench” might help students develop empathy as they understand that others are communicating that they are looking for companionship.

Despite the strengths of this initiative, I believe the “Buddy Bench” would have to be closely monitored by staff members and carefully explained to students. Close supervision and careful communication, at least at the outset, might help to mitigate any possibilities of a student being targeted or teased for being on the bench. Initiatives like the “Buddy Bench” have potential for raising awareness about inclusion, which is particularly important in a school where many children are recent immigrants and are trying to feel a sense of belonging.

Students who have recently immigrated to Canada from various countries enroll in the school at different points throughout the year. Some of them have a very difficult time adjusting to their new country and new school. I observe an incident where Christine assists a primary grade student who has just arrived and is quite distressed. Christine learns about the student’s situation when her teacher comes to the office. The teacher asks Christine if she would go to her classroom and speak to the child to try to calm her down. I wait in the main office while Christine and the teacher go to the classroom. Within minutes Christine returns to the main foyer of the school, just outside the office, with the teacher and the student. The student is crying and
appears very upset. She is wearing her coat, boots, and backpack. Christine is gently but firmly holding the child as she tries to push herself away. The child appears strong and determined to flee the school. Christine tries to speak reassuring words but the girl does not answer her and keeps crying. It becomes evident that the girl speaks very little English (field notes, March 10, 2015).

Christine asks a secretary to call the student’s older brother down to the office. She reasons aloud that he might be able to talk to his sister in her native language to find out what is wrong, and to tell her that she has to remain at the school. When her brother comes to the office he tells Christine that his sister has a small vocabulary, even in her native language, as she is young, and is still learning her first language. He explains that she will understand people if the small number of words that she does know are spoken to her. The brother is eventually able to console his sister to the point where she is no longer trying to leave the school. The teacher returns to her class, and Christine stays with the young girl and brother for close to an hour until their father arrives. The father appears to have a good command of English when he converses with Christine. He smiles often during the conversation and expresses gratitude for all that she and the staff have done. Christine reassures the father that if a similar situation occurs again, that she will call on the brother to assist. She invites the father to come back to the school once the girl is feeling better to share some information about his daughter so that they can devise a plan together to help her transition to her new school (field notes, March 10, 2015).

Christine builds community by drawing on the resources of others. She involves the teacher, secretary, father and brother, and in this way, creates a shared sense of accountability for the girl’s well-being. Christine recognizes that in the moment of distress, the brother’s presence may provide comfort to the child. She understands that the teacher has a class of students and provides assistance to her by remaining with the little girl and her brother. By involving the older brother, she raises his awareness that his sister is having a difficult time which may facilitate support for her in the future. Christine initiates a relationship with the family by suggesting to the father that they meet to strategize ways to support his daughter. By asking the father to be a part of the process, she is inviting him to be involved in the school community as his daughter makes a difficult transition.
Following the incident Christine and I return to the main office. One of the staff comments, “It must be scary to be in a new school thousands of miles away from your homeland.” Christine responds, “I’m actually surprised at how many kids don’t get as upset as she did when they are new to the school and to the country. I’m always amazed when they go to class and just carry on with things.” Christine asks the secretary to search through lists of students in the school to find others who speak the girl’s native language. She reasons aloud that if they can find friends for the little girl who speak her native language, it might lessen her fears and give her a greater sense of belonging. Christine empathizes with the young girl by commenting to staff members that she is surprised that more children do not have difficulty adjusting (field notes, March 10, 2015).

Helping the girl make connections with other children and enlisting the help of her brother and father may suggest that Christine is using practical wisdom. Dunne (2011) explains that when people employ practical wisdom they are able to differentiate between a routine problem from a problem that is less routine and may require a less conventional solution. A person who employs practical wisdom can exercise good judgment in both situations and effectively deal with them. Dunne (2011) states,

One’s adeptness as a person of judgment, then, lies neither in the knowledge of the general as such nor in an entirely unprincipled dealing with particulars. Rather, it lies precisely in the mediation between general and particular, in the ability to bring forth into illuminating connection with each other. This requires perceptiveness in reading particular situations as much as flexibility in one’s way of possessing, being informed by, and ‘applying’ general knowledge. (Dunne, 2011, p.18)

Christine understands immediately that this is an extreme situation, and that this young child is so distressed that she is trying to flee the school. She is able to think of ways to calm this student’s fears and take appropriate action. Recognizing a communication barrier, Christine enlists the help of others and puts a plan in place to address the problem. She is accessing the community’s resources to provide support for the child. Christine’s responses are observed by the office staff who speak about the girl with compassion. Their comments reflect the tone that Christine sets in the way that she handled the situation. Christine is showing by example that the school is a kind and caring place where children and their families can feel safe and experience a sense of belonging.
It is interesting to note that I did speak to the classroom teacher the following day to find out how the little girl was doing. The teacher reported that the girl came to school much happier. The teacher was searching for picture dictionaries and basic skill exercise books to help her learn English, and she was considering speaking to the ESL teachers for additional guidance. The teacher also arranged for one of the educational assistants to take the girl on a tour around the school so that she could become acquainted with the building and the people. Later that day the little girl and the educational assistant walked by my room. I said “hello” to the girl and she returned my greeting with a smile (field notes, March 11, 2015).

Goodman and Lesnick (2009) comment on how a caring community fosters a sense of belonging. They state,

Belonging is the first step on the way toward independence. . . . Being a part of a group, caring about it, sharing its interests and values – is as important to a maturing sense of self as the freedom to resist it and the system of justice to regulate it. A caring moral community gives children that sense of belonging which is particularly central to the early moral life. (Goodman & Lesnick, 2009, p. 275)

Christine recognizes that children need to build relationships with their peers in order to have a sense of belonging. Her efforts to help children establish friendships in a new school reveal an understanding that children need to feel a part of the community in order to fully grow as individuals.

Christine is responsive to the emotional needs of children. Candice, the guidance teacher, who often works with Christine to assist children in crisis explains,

If Christine hears a child crying outside, she will leave her office to go see what's happening with that child. She's always helping out in different ways in different situations [and] in crisis situations she's right in there too. (interview, Candice)

Candice’s observations about Christine’s presence and her readiness to look out for others and support them continue when she states,

That's a part of the role of a good principal, showing everyone that it's not just your [emphasis in original] job to handle this [situation]. This school is all of ours, we all own this
school together [and] we are all responsible for making sure our students and our families are
happy, healthy and safe. . . . Christine’s showing everyone, ‘I’m going to do the same thing
as everybody else is doing, so if a student’s crying, I will be there too, I’ll help out.’
(interview, Candice)

Candice believes that Christine is a role model who “shows everyone” that people in the
community are accountable for one another’s safety and well-being. Christine’s offer of support
to a student who is vulnerable “shows” that she is looking out for others. Candice suggests that
when Christine attends to the child in distress, she is imparting a belief that everyone shares
ownership for what happens in the school, and in this sense, she is leading ethically.

Similarly, Logan, a resource teacher with the board of education, recalls being in a meeting at the
school when Christine is called out to help a young child in distress. She describes Christine’s
reaction when she is notified that the child needs help. She recalls,

There was no eye rolling, it was just, ‘excuse me I need to do this’ and to me that’s behaviour
that respects the dignity of the child. There was never any [indication that] this child is a real
pest or I have to settle this kid down . . . There was no comment like that. (interview, Logan)

On another occasion, Logan witnesses Christine interacting with this same child who was having
a tantrum. She explains,

[Christine was] just walking and holding his hand and just trying to be with him. She was just
trying to be with him because that’s I think what he needed most at that time or that’s what
she felt [he needed]. She wasn’t trying to preach, she wasn’t trying to correct, and there were
times when I’m sure that correction is part of what she would do, but at that time she was just
being with that person and I think that’s, to me there was a lot of dignity in the way that she
was responding to that child. (interview, Logan)

I ask Logan how the child reacts to Christine. She remarks that he becomes calmer and appears
content as he is walking with her. Logan comments that because Christine left the meeting to
attend to the child when “he needed her,” it showed that for Christine “that child came first.”
Logan is speaking about Christine’s manner when she notes that Christine is respectful of the
child’s needs in the presence of adults. Christine calms the child by holding his hand and
walking with him. Logan implies that Christine is attending to the best interests of the child. She indicates that Christine is attuned to the child because she understands in the moment of distress what the child needs. In this sense, she is observing Christine expressing kindness and care.

Christine makes a conscious effort to welcome parents and to make them feel included in the school community. In our conversations, she often stresses the importance of not judging parents. Curious to know what she means, I ask Christine to elaborate. She states,

If we are judging them [the parents] and we say, “You are wrong [emphasis in original] because you're doing it this way,” I think then we stop being helpful because we’ve separated ourselves based on our own opinions from the people we’re dealing with a little bit. Does that make sense? Because we're just saying, “What you're doing is wrong. What I do is right.” All I can do is try and help you [the parent] come up with a solution to try something different and see if it works. (interview 9)

Christine believes that in order for staff members to be helpful to parents, they need to be connected to them. This connection is jeopardized by judgements, because judgments lead to separation. Christine implies that a self-righteous attitude on the part of the school keeps parents separated, which is counterproductive to supporting them. She is solution oriented and wants to focus on making changes rather than dwelling on what might be wrong with the parents’ choices.

I ask Christine if she is trying to encourage the staff to be more open to parents. She responds,

We do have parents that we know are on social assistance, or they have drug problems or whatever, yeah they do, they are, that's right. They’re still ours, they’re ours, those kids are ours, those parents are ours, whether we think what they're doing in their own lives is what we would do, it’s what they do, and we still, we work with them [and] try to help the kids along. That's it, that's it, that's why we’re here [emphasis in original] so I think that's the whole judgment thing for me. It's not our place. It's not what we’re paid to do [pause] is it? [laughs] (interview 9)

Christine builds an inclusive community by respecting parents and upholding their dignity. She accepts the parents for who they are although she may not agree with their life choices. Christine is expressing hope through her sense of optimism when she says, “we work with them [and] try to help the kids along.” She acknowledges that connecting with the parent in turn helps the child.
Christine declares that everyone belongs to the school community, and she makes explicit the connection between the parent feeling included and the child feeling included. Christine’s non-judgmental approach with parents is fundamentally ethical because when children see their parents accepted in the school community, they may in turn feel that they belong. When Christine laughs, she seems to be laughing at herself, as she realizes the passion evident in her response.

I observe Christine expressing strong convictions in several community situations. When Christine makes decisions about how to allocate space for programs, she has to consider the needs of different stakeholders. When I began my fieldwork, plans were in progress to set up a nutritional program in the school that would provide meals for the students. The program is funded through the board of education and requires space for fridges and other equipment for food preparation. Christine met with board personnel to discuss possible spaces in the school to set up and run the program. One of the spaces that was considered was a room used by the parent council to organize fundraising activities and community events. The room is modest but comfortable and is frequently used by parent volunteers and community members. It was suggested that the room be converted into a space for the nutritional program. Christine appeared hesitant to move the parents out of the room and stated, “The parents do so much in the school. They are here every day doing something” (field notes, April 9, 2015).

It was suggested that the parent council could share the space, so that part of the room could be used for the nutritional program. Christine spoke against this idea and explained that the parent council has many supplies and materials in the room that are used for community events and fundraising activities. Christine commented, “I don’t want them [the parents] to be discouraged because they are here in the school every day and they do use the materials.” No final decision was made but all parties agreed to work through the challenges to get the program started in the near future, and the parents remained in their room (field notes, April 9, 2015). Christine respects parent volunteers, is grateful for their work, and is committed to providing them with space. She values the parent volunteers and the time and energy they devote to the community which is clear in her resolve not to “discourage” them. She conveys a message that the parents belong in the school by advocating for the space that they need.
The major school fundraising activity, which is organized by the parent council and supported by Christine, is the annual dance-a-thon. A school-wide assembly launches the event. Students receive sponsorship forms at the assembly and are encouraged to enlist the support of family members and friends. There is a prize structure and students who participate are entered into a draw for prizes. The assembly offers students a preview of prizes available. Donations of prizes are solicited from parents as well as businesses in the community. Money raised at the dance-a-thon subsidizes various student programs throughout the year including science presentations, drama and art performances, author talks and anti-bullying initiatives. The cost of busses to take students on trips and to sporting events is also subsidized through these funds. All grades partake in the dance-a-thon, and there is a schedule that designates a time for each class. Several classes dance at the same time, along with staff and parents, which makes it a fun experience, and brings the community together (parent newsletter, October 20, 2014).

As mentioned in Chapter Four, the school community comes together for monthly school masses held at the local church. Family members, including parents and grandparents, regularly attend, but some masses include members from the wider community. I attended the Remembrance Day mass that honours veterans from the community. As the mass begins, students form a line on each side of the centre aisle and the veterans proceed to the front of the church. The choir sings songs with themes of remembrance. At the conclusion of the service a small group of students perform a dance for the veterans. An intermediate student plays “The Last Post” on his trumpet as everyone stands for a minute of silence. The final segment involves the distribution of academic and virtue awards. When the students proceed to the front of the church, they receive their awards from the veterans. The national anthem is played at the end of the mass, and students once again form a line on each side of the centre aisle as the veterans proceed out of the church. This mass provides an opportunity for the school to connect with the wider community. The presence of the veterans affords an inter-generational experience and a chance to envision community as reaching beyond the boundaries of the school (field notes, November 10, 2014).

During the Remembrance Day mass, I notice signs indicating the grades and names of the teachers on the seats throughout the church. Curious to know why the signs are there, I ask Morgan, a primary grade teacher who posts the signs, to explain their purpose. In an informal conversation, she explains that she and a fellow teacher had implemented a seating plan for the church because they noticed that students were having a difficult time finding seats. Classes that
arrived late would have a hard time finding a place to sit. Younger students would find themselves sitting at the back of the church. Morgan comments that the seating plan allows everyone to feel included in the masses (field notes, November 17, 2014). Although the seating plan was initiated several years ago, it continues to be supported by Christine. The seating plan ensures that every child and adult has a reserved place in the church. Morgan emails the seating plan to the staff the day prior to the mass. The plan is permanent except that the class conducting the readings is relocated temporarily to the front of the church (field notes, November 17, 2014 & email communication to the staff, February 18, 2015).

The seating plan is devised so that the youngest students sit at the front while the oldest students sit at the back. The youngest students, who are generally smaller, have a clearer view of what is happening at the front of the church. This procedure creates a sense of fairness and encourages participation. Designated seating ensures a safe experience as students always know they will have a place to sit, even if they arrive late. Knowing that a seat is reserved for them creates a feeling of inclusion and a sense of belonging. Parents and grandparents also have designated seating at the back of the church, which creates a sense that the whole community is welcomed at the masses (field notes, November 17, 2014 & email communication to the staff, February 18, 2015).

I attended several masses, and the only time I observed a problem with seating was at the mass that marks the beginning of the Easter season. The children were seated but there were so many family and community members in attendance that adults had to stand at the back and along the sides of the church. In an earlier informal conversation with Christine, she indicated to me that she had gone out to the staff parking lot early that morning to direct traffic, as numerous cars were parking outside the school. She said that several teachers saw her and went over to assist her. When Christine made this comment, I noted that she felt supported in her efforts to create a safer situation on a very busy day (field notes, February 18, 2015).

Easter is celebrated in the school with the annual Easter craft day, which is organized by the parents in consultation with Christine. Easter craft day allows students the chance to create a simple craft that is fun to make and can be given as an Easter gift to a family member. Unlike the dance-a-thon, there is no fundraising involved. The event is fun and light-hearted and is sometimes combined with an opportunity for students to wear clothing outside of the usual dress
code. The Easter craft day that I attended was also declared a “pajama day” where students, staff members and parents were encouraged to wear their pajamas to add to the festivities.

On the day of the event parents and grandparents arrive at the school as early as 7:00 am to set up the materials. This is a large endeavor that requires a significant amount of preparation on the part of the parent and grandparent volunteers. When the students walk into the gymnasium, they see long rows of brown mural paper covering the floor, with individual place settings of art materials for each of them. The students sit on the floor beside each other to make their craft, which facilitates conversation and creates a feeling of working together. Classes have scheduled times to make their art work, and the primary classes are the first to attend. Each primary student is partnered with an intermediate student who assists them in making the craft. This allows the youngest and oldest students the chance to get to know each other which is sometimes difficult in such a large school. As the day progresses the students in the higher grades create their own crafts which are more complicated and sophisticated than those created by students in the lower grades. The differing levels of skill required makes the event engaging and inclusive for all ages. Parents and grandparents remain in the gymnasium throughout the day to assist the students and to set up the materials for the next classes scheduled to attend (field notes, March 27, 2015).

There was a spirit of collaboration in the school community at this event, as parents and grandparents worked together with students and the staff. All students participating in this event gave it a sense of community across all grades and abilities. Different projects tailored to different grades created a sense of inclusion. Students were smiling as they lined up beside Christine to show her their creations. They seemed proud of their art, which was challenging to make, but not difficult or confusing. There were different levels of art for different age groups which created a sense of fairness because all students could equally partake in the activities. There was always an adult nearby to assist which provided a fun and supportive experience. Christine expressed gratitude to the parents and grandparents for their work in planning and organizing the day, and they expressed satisfaction with how everything was unfolding. The interactions between the children and the adults were respectful, and the intermediate students were patient and caring toward the primary students. Placing students of different age levels together built a sense of inclusion and made the event fair and equitable because everyone had a chance to complete artwork that was similar to their peers (field notes, March 27, 2015).
Annual events such as the dance-a-thon and Easter craft day as well as monthly masses are examples of how the school community gathers together to support one another in a spirit of celebration. These occasions provide students of various ages with the opportunity to interact with one another which creates a greater sense of belonging as caring and trusting relationships begin to develop. Christine shows her support for these events by being involved in the planning stages, advertising them in newsletters, and being present and actively participating in them.

While Christine recognizes that community is built through a spirit of celebration, she is also aware that community is created through reaching out in a spirit of generosity. In Chapter Four, the school’s food bank, clothing and toiletry drives, as well as donations of gift cards to families in need were discussed. These are ways Christine builds community through the expression of compassion, particularly for those who are most vulnerable. Christine expresses her vision of a community when she states,

> When I was a teacher my goal was to provide for the community and whatever I could do to help that community with Christmas presents. As a vice principal and at my first school as a principal, [I was] sending kids to camp [and asking], “What can I do to help you [the kids] grow? What can I do to help you eat? Can I get you towels? Do you have towels?” To me, that is Christian behaviour, in helping others, and I think that's what we teach the children. (interview 9)

Christine is aware of her role as an active participant in community building efforts and sees herself as a role model for children. Since her days of teaching, she has conceptualized some aspects of her leadership as engaging in acts of charity. Christine indicates that children learn how to be Christian by watching adults assist those who are less fortunate. Her vision of a Christian community is one that reaches out in a spirit of love, compassion and generosity. Christine’s concern with whether or not people have basic life necessities, such as food and towels, is reflective of her desire to ensure that people are cared for and that they are afforded the chance to live with dignity.

Olivia, an early childhood educator, comments on how Christine reaches out to the community. She states,
Christine’s told me before that she helped out around Christmas time with giving gifts for families in the school that were less fortunate. I don't know if all principals would do that but I know she's done that. That's how she thinks [and] it's who she is. (interview, Olivia)

Olivia infers that Christine is a compassionate and generous person who reaches out to people who are “less fortunate.” She believes Christine is an authentic leader who helps the community because it’s “how she thinks [and] it’s who she is.” Olivia suggests that Christine is acting out of her own sense of what is right and not from a mandate or a directive, which is implied when she says, “I don't know if all principals would do that.”

Noddings (2002) argues that people have a deep desire to belong to a community. She explains, “Human beings are social animals. We seek not only love and compassion but civic association. The longing for community arises from a deep need to feel a part of something larger than ourselves” (Noddings, 2002, p. 65). For Christine being a member of a community involves reaching outward and continually asking herself how she can better the lives of others. In this sense, she is modelling for children the importance of viewing community as something larger than what exists within the confines of the school building.

Noddings (2002) cautions that community has a “bright side” and a “dark side” and that for most people, the desire to belong is balanced by a yearning to experience freedom. The “bright side” involves acts of love and compassion. The “dark side” involves a tendency for communities to become coercive when people do not comply with the dominant views espoused by the community. Noddings (2002) argues that whenever the notion of community is stressed, character education will be significant. The rules of the community and what people do are measured largely by their outcomes for character. The challenge, she points out, is determining what type of character traits to endorse. When people in a community fail to live up to an idealized image, it is easy to assume that they are not enlightened or informed. The result might be that people are coerced into complying with dominant views. Noddings’s (2002) argument is a caution to school leaders to remain vigilant in ensuring that their school communities remain open and accepting of divergent ideas. Christine’s commitment to actively modelling a principle of acceptance is key to building a community that inspires a sense of belonging and inclusiveness. This was evident in the situations previously discussed, where she encouraged staff members and students to be inclusive with same-sex parents and gay and lesbian students.
Her challenge is to remain aware that other people do not always share her value of acceptance. In her efforts to cultivate an ethical school community she will be challenged to find ways to address this reality.

Christine experiences struggles and successes as she engages others in the process of building an ethical school community. An ethical school community is characterized by a sense of belonging and inclusiveness where people feel accountable for one another’s well-being. It is caring and welcoming and is comprised of relationships that are built on trust and respect. Christine develops an ethical school community by prioritizing relationships and this in turn establishes the community as a supportive place. Central to the process of community building are interactions that are guided by the expression of ethical virtues. Christine bases her interactions on virtues by expressing care, emphasizing respect, and showing kindness and compassion toward others. She treats people with dignity and respect and supports initiatives that inspire generosity. Christine fosters moral values by being a role model and by trying to guide the moral conduct of others. Role modelling is central to her practice and reveals her efforts to cultivate ethicality. She conceptualizes her role as a leader who can have a moral influence on others, and strives to realize this influence through her words and actions. In this sense, leading ethically and cultivating ethicality are mutually dependent on each other and inform one another.

While building an ethical school community is as an important aspect of school leadership, so is shaping and influencing the ethical climate. The ethical climate and school community are interrelated and dependent on each other. Together they comprise a school where people are guided in their interactions by notions of what is good and right. While an ethical climate and school community are interrelated, they are also distinct in their struggles and complexities. Christine’s attempts at fostering a climate where virtues are expressed, and building a community where people feel they belong, are filled with their own distinct challenges. When climate and community are considered both individually and together, one gains a greater appreciation of the multilayered and nuanced aspects of ethical leadership. The discussion now turns to a consideration of the ethical school climate and the principal’s influence in cultivating it.
6.3 The Ethical School Climate

Christine conceptualizes herself as a role model who sets the tone for an ethical school climate. The ethical school climate is characterized by the virtues of honesty, dignity, compassion, love, respect, trust, forgiveness, integrity and hope. It is also characterized by the empathy and sensitivity towards others that Christine reflects through her pervasive sense of optimism and encouragement. Christine incorporates slogans in her daily practice such as “look out for each other,” “support one another,” and “be kind to each other” that convey moral messages. She encourages relationship building in an effort to foster a kind, caring and inclusive climate where belonging and acceptance are valued. In addition, Christine repeatedly uses the slogan “do your best,” a statement that is morally-laden. When Christine uses this slogan, she intends to convey that she is aware that people, including herself, have limitations, and that acknowledging these limitations is important to maintaining a sense of well-being.

Christine often refers to “the best interests of the child” in her decision-making, and in this sense, it serves as a personal operational paradigm in her practice. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) argue that attending to the “best interests of the student” should be “a moral imperative” for school leaders (p. 25). For the purposes of my study, “the best interests of the child” is sometimes, but not always, morally-laden. Analyzing what Christine means when she claims that she is acting in the “best interests of the child” will help to illuminate the complexity of using this as a personal operational paradigm in her practice.

Zubay and Soltis (2005) outline the most important components of an ethical school. One of these components is an “ethical environment” which they define as, “a morally sensitive community that acts with civility, virtue, and justice in the daily business of living together” (p. 18). Christine’s efforts to create a school climate where interactions are characterized by such virtues as kindness, compassion and forgiveness help inspire a sense of ethical community. In this way, an ethical school climate and an ethical school community are interconnected. Through her conduct, manner, words, stated intentions, daily practices and rituals, Christine urges stakeholders to be mindful of how they treat each other. She refers to the virtues as the central guiding principles to guide them in their interactions with each other. Christine seeks to cultivate an ethical school ‘environment’, which in this study I have termed an ethical school “climate.”
For the purposes of this study, an ethical school “climate” refers to the moral tone that Christine is trying to establish in the school.

A key aspect of Christine’s efforts to cultivate an ethical school climate is to mediate conflict among stakeholders and to navigate it when she finds herself in conflict with others. She believes that how she responds to conflict and how she manages her feelings affect the climate of the school. In the following conversation, Christine reflects on forgiveness as a way to create a positive school climate. She states,

   I want things to be positive. We say that to the children, “If someone says to you, ‘I am sorry’ and you think they’re sincere, then we accept the apology,” until it’s repeated behaviour [laughs] and then we say, “Okay don't apologize anymore,” because I think we all have to work together. I don't want negativity. I don't want to hold on to that. (interview 9)

Christine associates forgiveness with a positive school climate. Forgiveness fosters positive feelings where people release resentment and move forward. Christine indicates that adults can follow the same advice they give to children and practice forgiveness in their own lives. I ask Christine what she thinks will happen if she holds on to that negativity. She responds,

   Well for me, I just think that you’re the person who will be affected and in turn affect those around you. If you're holding on to resentment [pause] I don't think it's healthy emotionally [and] physically. I just think you have to move on. . . . I think for me, I just say, “It's okay, it's okay. Don’t hate, don’t judge, just do your best.” It's hard sometimes obviously, very hard, but just do your best to move on and let stuff go. (interview 9)

Christine believes that what affects her will in turn affect the climate of the school. She knows that if she holds onto negativity then others will perceive it. Christine also believes that releasing her anger through forgiveness is preferable to holding onto it. She acknowledges that forgiving others can present a very real struggle. There is an element of empathy in her statement “just do your best to move on” which may arise from her own struggles to forgive. She continues to explain,

   Don't harbor stuff that can taint your point of view. I think that we see people here in this very building who are angry, angry people, kids, adults, they’re no different. So, I always
think that as an adult you’re holding on to something if you're so angry, whatever's happened in your life. I mean things have happened to me, I have not always had it so easy, but I don't feel angry. (interview 9)

For Christine, “harboring stuff” or holding onto angry feelings can “taint your point of view.” She seems to indicate that anger can be consuming and influence the opinions or perspectives one holds. Such beliefs draw on her life story and life experiences that have taught her that letting go of angry feelings is possible. It is interesting to note that during the five months that I was with Christine, I rarely saw her angry, except for one occasion when she was noticeably angry with a parent. The parent had recently obtained the legal right to have access to his daughter and was committed to picking her up from school every second Friday to spend the weekend with her. On one particular Friday, at approximately 4:00 pm, I was with Christine in her office when the secretary notified her that the girl had been waiting in the general office since school ended at 3:00 pm for her father to pick her up. Christine turned to me and said, “[the father] does this every second Friday. I am going to make it clear to him when I speak to him that this is unacceptable and that he cannot continue to do this” Christine paused for a moment and then continued, “I am going to take that child home with me because I love her so much” (field notes, April 24, 2015). She laughed but her body language was tenser than usual and her face showed anger and frustration. It became clear to me that she was very upset with this father and was trying to manage her anger using humour. I was not present for the interaction between Christine and the father, but I did note that Christine seemed to be angry at what she perceived to be insensitivity and disrespect on the part of the father toward his daughter. She appeared to be trying to release her anger by focusing on the affection that she had for the girl and by venting her anger in the privacy of her office (field notes, April 24, 2015). I ask Christine, “If you hang on to the anger as a principal, what do you think it does to the school?” She replies,

Well I think that if you hold on to the anger and you’re bringing it out into the community, well you’re changing the whole feeling of the school…. if I'm holding onto anger and I’m going out into the school and people are getting on my nerves and that climate of compassion and love is going to go away because if I'm in a bad mood, well then everybody else is going to be in a bad mood. If I’m yelling because I'm annoyed, well why wouldn’t the teachers yell at the children? Why wouldn't the kids yell at each other? You work hard to develop the climate [and] it's pretty easy to break it down, it doesn't take much. (interview 9)
Christine believes that if she “holds on to the anger” then it has consequences and affects “the whole feeling of the school,” which to her constitutes the school climate. In this sense, she is aware that her anger can directly influence other people. Christine knows that she is being observed by teachers and children, and that her actions have a direct effect on how people treat each other. In this way, she conceptualizes herself as a role model whose disposition affects the school climate. In claiming that, “You work hard to develop the climate,” Christine acknowledges that effort and struggle are involved. Her statement that “it’s pretty easy to break it down, it doesn’t take much” reveals a belief that the school climate has an element of fragility.

J.G. Murphy (1992) offers the following insight,

 Forgiveness may be viewed as the principled overcoming of feelings of resentment that are naturally (and perhaps properly) directed toward a person who has done one a moral injury. . . . Within the Christian tradition, forgiveness is typically taken to be a good thing, and the tendency to bestow it is typically taken to be a virtue. It may be regarded as a way of showing a commitment to love and compassion . . . Perhaps most important of all, given that the people who are closest to us are the ones who can and often do harm us most deeply, forgiveness allows the restoration of some of our most valued relationships – relationships that would forever remain fragmented if infected by resentment (J.G. Murphy, 1992, pp. 380-381).

In letting go of angry feelings, Christine is expressing forgiveness. She believes that if she does not forgive, then her anger will eventually erode feelings of “compassion and love” in the school. Christine chooses to overcome resentment because she believes that holding onto it is unhealthy, both for her, and for those who interact with her. Forgiveness allows the opportunity for continued relationships.

Christine understands that in order to work productively, there must be a commitment to move forward. There can be drawbacks, however, if one is too ready to forgive. J.G. Murphy (1992) points out that there are times when forgiveness may be seen more as a vice than a virtue and resentment may not be “an unvirtuous disposition of character.” He explains that if people have a tendency to willingly and readily forgive, it could be a signal that they do not respect themselves. Furthermore, if people have been genuinely mistreated, and a moral injury has been committed, then failing to resent it may indicate a concordance with the immoral act. When Christine states,
“If someone says to you, ‘I am sorry’ and you think they’re sincere then we accept the apology” until it’s repeated behaviour,” she reveals an awareness that there are limitations to forgiveness. These limitations depend on the sincerity of the apology and whether or not the wrongful act is repeated. Christine is mindful of these limitations in her conversations with children, as she shares moral lessons with them. To her, forgiveness involves trust and a certain amount of vulnerability, as even when “you think they’re sincere,” one cannot be certain that the apology is sincere; therefore, trust is necessary in order to forgive.

Christine believes her daily interactions can set a tone in the school. She reflects,

I want, as everybody wants, a certain climate, so I think people are okay if I steer off the course every now and then and if I feel I do, I usually say, “I'm very sorry about that. You know I didn't handle that properly.” I think if people expect a certain thing from me, then that's what they should get, because if this is what I want for all this whole group of people, that we’re going to be compassionate, caring educators for our children, and the children are going to be the same in turn, that if I start doing something different in my relationships. (interview 9)

Christine has an awareness that a climate of care and compassion begins with the nature of her relationships. She has expectations of the climate that she “wants” for the school and acknowledges that she is responsible for times when she does not live up to her own expectations. In this way, she is demonstrating a concern for the integrity of her behaviour. Christine realizes that establishing a climate is a process cultivated in many interactions over time, and she leads by example. She takes responsibility for mistakes that take her away from the tone she is trying to set. Christine demonstrates honesty when she states a willingness to apologize. She believes that if her actions are consistent, people will follow her example as she establishes credibility. Consistency of action earns trust that is not withdrawn when she “steers off the course,” behaving in ways that do not align with her vision.

I ask Christine to reflect on elements of her practice that she believes hold the most ethical relevance as she strives to set a tone in the school. She responds,

Well, these questions are hard Kelly. The relationship piece is number one and that can come in all different ways . . . in dealing with the parents, the children, the community and the
staff. I think that [pause] every single thing, every interaction, every interaction that we have in a day, every day, it's that whole piece, the relationship piece [and] how do we want to be seen by others because what you do and what you say is showing people what you want. There’s no way that I'm going to say that every time I speak to someone I’m completely patient [laughs] but I would hope to be every day. Sometimes people are throwing things at me and I get a little impatient but I think that whole interaction, daily interaction, what people expect from you, you have to live up to it. (interview 9)

Christine understands that the quality of interactions in relationships sets the tone in the school. She appreciates the importance of how people are “seen by others.” Christine seems to be saying that people observe each other in their relationships, and take cues from these observations to guide their own behaviour, thereby influencing the climate of the school. She calls attention to the significance of actions and words. As a leader, Christine’s own actions and words convey her expectations of how people should treat each other, and thereby contribute to the tone of the school. Christine is self-aware and able to laugh at herself as she recognizes her shortcomings in daily interactions, such as getting impatient with people.

Christine knows that everyone has limitations, and may not always be able to consistently work at the same level of involvement in the school. She explains how differing contributions from staff members affect the school climate and states,

I always hold on to the fact that everybody’s doing their best. Their best might be different from year to year. . . . I think that when we ask [emphasis in original] people to work with you, to do what you want them to do to create that climate, then it can't be too much. It can't be more than they can handle. It has to be open, I think, to them [that] this is what we would like to accomplish [and] what do you have to offer us? What do you have to offer the children? What you have to offer is good, it's good, thank you for that. (interview 9)

Christine has a sense that people are different in what they are able to do to support the type of environment that she is trying to establish. She implies that these differences have to be respected. Christine is trying to be transparent and respectful by outlining what she would ideally like to achieve and then inviting others to tell her what they can reasonably do. According to Christine, people’s “best might be different from year to year,” which indicates an awareness that their best can change. For example, Dorothy, a grade one teacher, who is new to the school,
found it hard when she first arrived to take on leadership roles, such as coordinating clubs, because the other teachers had already volunteered. Even though she had been involved in many extra-curricular activities at her former school, she was not entirely disappointed, as she was finding it challenging enough to adjust to a new school. Wanting to ensure that Christine did not think she was “lazy”, she approached her to explain why she had not volunteered, and Christine offered her reassuring words. She reminded Dorothy that it was only her first year at the school, and that once she got used to things, she could always take on some leadership roles the following year. Dorothy was relieved at Christine’s response and explained, “Christine is understanding. . . . I find her easy to talk to. I can approach her with my concerns. She’s not judging me on the fact that I’m not doing anything. She knows that it’s not coming from laziness” (interview, Dorothy). When Christine encourages people to do their best, she understands that this might have a different meaning, not only to different people, but to the same person over time. In this sense “do your best” is a slogan that is morally-laden. It is interpreted as a reminder to recognize your limitations and to attend to your well-being.

Christine attempts to communicate to her staff that she wants them to contribute to the community in a worthwhile way that builds on their strengths and acknowledges their limits. As Starratt (2004) explains,

As a human being [emphasis in original], the leader is responsible for taking a stand with other human beings – not above them, as someone removed from the human condition, but as one sharing fully in it. That implies both an expectation of the best that humans are capable of and an acknowledgment of human limitations and failings. (Starratt, 2004, p. 49)

Christine is mindful of not overwhelming staff members when school-wide events or new initiatives are planned. To offer an example, she spoke about the Student Led Learning Walk, a complex event that had recently taken place at the school. I attended the Student Led Learning Walk where students from every classroom display their work in the hallways. Guests at this morning event included the field superintendent, the trustee, and parents. Student representatives led the guests around the building to view the displays of student work. The morning ended with a special luncheon for staff and special guests (field notes, March 10, 2015).

Christine explains the process of preparing for the event. She states,
When we did the big Student Led Learning Walk we wanted everybody to contribute. We wanted it to be a full school initiative and everybody did get involved . . . but there were different levels of involvement and creativity, right up to working with the vice principal and preparing everything and getting it all ready, or working in a group and just saying, “Okay here’s our piece” or just [working] in their own classroom. It was a big range and I think we have to be respectful of that, we really do . . . I think it's okay to push a little bit, to say, “Come on, you can do it. This is going to be fun. You're going to learn this and this and this. We’re going to show our superintendent [and] we’re going to show our parents and the kids what we can do, and each other.” But you really don't want to push someone [the teacher] to the point where they're angry in their classroom and now they're yelling at the kids. I don't see that as beneficial to anybody because what you hope is that people grow a little bit and feel proud of what they've done and say, “Oh gosh, I didn't think we could do it but we did it and look, it was really fun.” (interview 9)

Christine is open-minded and accepting of different levels of contribution from the staff. She recognizes that there is a “range” of participation, and respects people’s limitations in what they are able to do. Christine believes that her role is to help staff experience joy and take pride in their work and in each other’s accomplishments. She is cautious, however, to not place too much pressure on the staff to the point where they get angry. Christine knows her words and actions have an influence on teachers which in turn can influence the classroom climate. Christine may be implying that the classroom climate is a microcosm of the school atmosphere. Beckner (2004) argues, “Educational administrators will best approach basic philosophical and ethical questions by remembering that their central moral obligation is to serve the interests of students, and those of teachers, as they attempt to facilitate student maturation and learning” (Beckner, 2004, pp. 5-6). Christine seems to understand that the well-being of the teacher directly affects children, and keeps this in mind when she encourages the staff to take on only as much responsibility as they can reasonably manage. I ask Christine, “How do you know somebody's taking on too much and might get angry about that? What helps you to know that, because you’ve got a big staff? She responds,

Well, I wouldn't always know. I hope that people know what I [emphasis in original] feel is appropriate for them, not individually, I mean as a group, that you do the best you can, because I say it a lot. I try to get people to understand that my hope is that they just try their
best and that whatever they can offer is good. I try to keep a sense of people, by just walking around [and] if there's snack day, going into [the classrooms], just listening . . . I'll just walk up to people and say, “Are you okay? You know I haven't seen you here”. . . and just try and keep a pulse, and I'll say to people sometimes, “You know you need to be careful. You don't want to be doing too much. You don't want to push yourself. You have to look after yourself, your health, your well-being.” (interview 9)

I ask Christine if she thinks checking in with the staff to see how they are doing is an ethical action. She replies, “Yes, of course, because you’re trying hard to look after everybody but you can't, but you have to make sure they feel that it's okay for them to look after themselves” (interview 9). Christine believes she has an ethical obligation to care for her staff, and acts on this obligation by trying to gain a sense of their personal well-being. Her overall intention to avoid undue pressure on the staff shows concern for their welfare. Christine demonstrates ethical leadership by being sensitive to the needs of others and encouraging them to care for themselves. However, when Christine speaks of her expectations and says, “whatever they can offer is good” her words are somewhat ambiguous. Her intention may be to protect staff members from feeling overly burdened by demands, but her lack of clarity leaves room for interpretation of professional responsibility. Without a clear idea of what their “best” means, an unfair situation could result, where some staff members meet or exceed their professional responsibilities, while others do as little as possible, justifying their behaviour by claiming that they are simply doing their “best.” Christine may be inadvertently setting the bar too low by giving permission, even if unintentionally, for some staff members to exert minimal effort, while other staff members devote much time and energy to their work.

Christine tries to encourage teachers to look after their welfare when they come to her in need of advice. She explains that she has had conversations with teachers who are seeking ways to achieve a work-life balance. Sometimes teachers struggle with workload decisions such as whether or not to teach a split grade with two curriculums or a straight grade. Christine recounts that in one discussion a teacher wanted to teach a split grade but was concerned the she had too many responsibilities in her personal life to be able to handle the preparation and the marking. Christine offers her perspective to the teacher by advising, “You're not doing anything for the children if you’re not healthy, mentally and physically” (interview 9).
Christine seems to be indicating that if teachers do not attend to their own interests, then they cannot take care of the student’s interests. Here she is referring to the notion of the “best interests of the child.” The difficulty in this situation lies in determining what is in fact in the best interests of the child. Sometimes what appears to be in the best interests of the child is in fact in the best interests of adults. Christine may be trying to help the teacher consider the needs of the children, however, because the children do not have a voice in the final decision, it is difficult to know for certain if their needs are served.

In my interviews, staff members commented on the tone that Christine sets in the school. Rachael, a French teacher, believes that Christine’s staff meetings and public announcements affect the tone of the school. She has observed that since Christine became the principal of the school, the tone of staff meetings has changed. Rachael explains that the emphasis is, “much more on children, like having presentations on bullying, having presentations on poverty [and] when Christine chooses it, that would be the focus of our staff meeting, even though there were many issues (that) she could have chosen” (interview, Rachael). Rachael observes that Christine focuses on issues that directly impact a child’s safety and well-being. In this sense, she implies that Christine is child-centred, and when presented with a range of options, will prioritize topics that address the needs of the child. Rachael also believes that Christine’s practice of reciting special prayers from her personal prayer books during morning announcements affect the tone in the school. She states,

I start my day with grade two [students] . . . the words are simpler, the stories, the messages, the metaphors, children can understand them. . . . if I look at the little faces [of the students] they're just waiting, so I like that Christine chooses [prayers]. I think that's a really nice way to start the day. (interview, Rachael)

Rachael indicates that Christine’s prayers are meaningful to students because they contain images and storylines that are age appropriate. The students relate to the prayers and look forward to them, which she notes when she looks at the expressions on their faces. In the remainder of the interview, Rachael speaks about a prayer that Christine recites that reminds people of the importance of “seeing God in the face of each child.” Rachael indicates to me that the prayer “speaks to her heart” because it reminds her to “keep that perspective in mind when you’re faced with challenging children and challenging classes” (interview, Rachael).
When Christine has small group meetings with staff members and parents, her conduct and manner set a tone. Sophia, a grade three teacher, comments on the experience that she had in one such meeting with a parent and Christine. Sophia states,

Christine’s become such a role model on how I model my way of dealing with people. We had a parent meeting one time where this parent was irate . . . The vice principal had called Children's Aid about something her child had said and she [the parent] just came in and she just blasted us and we sat there. . . . Christine let her just sit there and yell, whereas me being just the person that I am, my response would be to sort of cut her off and say, “Okay no, you're getting this wrong.” Christine just let it go and so that actually changed the tone of how I dealt with the parent. I found myself in the course of the meeting, all of a sudden my back was down. I was becoming more compassionate because of the example that Christine was setting across the table. She wasn’t perched forward. She was leaning back, she was listening, and it just changed the way that I reacted. (interview, Sophia)

Christine’s manner makes an impression on Sophia to the extent that she models her own “way of dealing with people” on what she observes Christine do. Christine’s patient and non-defensive approach changes Sophia’s behaviour. By watching Christine, Sophia believes she becomes more receptive, as “all of a sudden my back was down.” Sophia feels greater compassion for the parent as she observes Christine remain calm. She comments on Christine’s manner, how she is “leaning back” and “listening.” As Sophia observes Christine’s calm demeanor, she begins to feel calm, and in this sense Christine changes the tone of the meeting. I ask Sophia, “What did Christine model for you, if you were to really sum it up?” Sophia replies, “Being calm . . . I think Christine changed what the parent saw, because she [Christine] actually listened so it wasn’t about, ‘I’m right, you’re wrong,’ [and] she changed it. I clarify with Sophia, “So Christine showed you to be calm?” She responds,

To be calm, to listen, to give people an opportunity to be heard. . . . Christine was intellectual and she spoke very intelligently and eloquently and just in a way that it almost made it hard to argue with her. . . . She [the parent] came away feeling that people appreciated her and that she actually educated us on something, which she did, and that she had defended her child in a way that she saw fit and defended her parenting. (interview, Sophia)
Christine is leading by example. Sophia says that she watches Christine’s behaviour and takes cues from her on how to respond to the parent. When Sophia states that Christine shows her how to “give people an opportunity to be heard,” she is suggesting that Christine is fair and respectful. Sophia refers to Christine’s manner when she remarks that Christine speaks “very intelligently and eloquently and just in a way that it almost made it hard to argue with her.” She suggests that Christine is well-informed and articulate but communicates her knowledge in a subtle manner that is not boastful. Christine gains the respect of others who find it difficult to dispute what she says. She upholds the dignity of the parent who leaves the meeting feeling calmer and “appreciated.”

It is interesting to note that according to Sophia, Christine allows the parent to “just sit there and yell.” As explained in this study, Christine does not condone yelling, especially at children, and takes several opportunities to remind staff members that this is a value that she holds. In this particular meeting, Sophia recounts that the parent “blasted us and we sat there.” It is possible that Christine thought that the parent’s anger was directed at her, and in this way, she could justify allowing the parent to yell. It is also conceivable that because there were no children in the room, Christine did not interpret the yelling as harmful. The difficulty in allowing the parent to yell is that Christine may be sending mixed messages about conduct that is expected from parents and conduct that is expected from the staff. In this sense, she may be creating a double standard, which could be perceived as unfair. By permitting the parent to vent her anger, Christine may be undermining her efforts to foster an ethical climate where people can disagree while still being respectful. This may have been a missed opportunity for Christine to cultivate ethicality, by redirecting the conversation to encourage a more respectful tone in the room. This particular situation suggests that fostering an ethical climate presents a challenge for educational leaders, particularly where strong emotions are involved.

In her role as a guidance teacher, Candice is often in meetings with Christine. She remarks,

> She's very welcoming, kind, she’s so kind [pause] not just to the students and the staff but also to families. I’ve been here where parents are irate and she's able to sit here with them and talk them through it and calm them down to a point where they understand the perspective that she’s trying to get them to understand. (interview, Candice)
Candice suggests that Christine sets the tone in her meetings. Christine’s “welcoming” and kind approach puts children and adults at ease. Christine’s manner is revealed when “she's able to sit here with them and talk them through it and calm them down.” Candice believes that Christine is able to connect with parents, who in turn become open to what she is saying.

Mrs. Maple, a parent of a primary grade student, explains that her daughter has experienced “social anxiety” at school for several years. Although her daughter has friends, she experiences difficulty reaching out to other children and talking to them. Recently her daughter has been having anxiety attacks at school which manifest as chest pain. Mrs. Maple phoned Christine to inform her about the anxiety attacks. Mrs. Maple explains,

I called Ms. Bray and I discussed it with her first. [I asked] “Can she come down to the office? Is there somebody that she interacts well with in the office? And that’s when she opened up her office. She said, “You know what? Have them find me. I’ll come down. I’ll sit down with her. We’ll chit chat for fifteen minutes. I’ll make her a hot chocolate. We’ll just have girl talk. And then once she’s calmed down and I feel comfortable sending her back to class, then she can go.” It was very nice and comforting as a parent to know that we have that kind of support. (interview, Mrs. Maple)

Christine makes herself available to students and understands that they sometimes need a place to retreat from the stresses of school. It is possible that Christine’s ability to understand this child’s anxiety arises from her own experiences with anxiety as a child. In Chapter Four, Christine recalls that her grandmothers and her grade one teacher just “let her be” when she was anxious and she seems to be adopting a similar approach with this child. Mrs. Maple describes Christine’s office as a “safe place” for her daughter. She also relates that she has had “a couple of face-to-face conversations” with her daughter’s teacher about her daughter’s anxiety and that “everybody’s been really wonderful.” I ask Mrs. Maple if her daughter has actually gone to Christine’s office when she is feeling anxious and she replies, “I think twice, and then she seems to be feeling better so we’re seeing a turnaround” (interview, Mrs. Maple).

Christine holds meetings with parents who have children with high needs to discuss their progress and to plan for future supports. On one occasion, she helps a parent explore options for placements for her autistic son who is not progressing well in the regular classroom. I attend the meeting along with the parent, vice principal, teacher and educational assistant. Christine invites
everyone to sit at her round table. She explains to the parent that she is concerned that her son is not making the kind of progress in the regular classroom that they had all hoped he would make. Christine notes that the student may not receive the support of an educational assistant next year, as the board is facing budgetary cuts. She suggests a multiple exceptionality class where specific programs would be available to him. Christine says to the parent, “We really want to find the best placement for your son. . . . even with one-on-one support in a school of this size, he might get lost” (field notes, April 21, 2015).

Christine facilitates a tone or climate of respect and open communication by inviting everyone to sit at her round table where they make eye contact. She is honest and candid in suggesting a multiple exceptionality placement which may be difficult for the parent to hear. Her words clarify that the purpose of the meeting is to do what is right for the child, and she expresses concern that the child may otherwise not thrive and learn to his full potential. In this sense, she is referring to what she believes is in the “best interests of the child.”

The parent listens closely to Christine. Christine explains to the parent that “there are some options that we can investigate” and offers to bring her to different schools to look at their programs. Christine says, “We love him so we want what is best for him. In the end the choice is yours. You have to make a decision about what is best for him.” At the close of the meeting Christine comments, “We don’t want your son to go because we love him but that’s a bit selfish of us” (field notes, April 21, 2015).

Christine expresses hope through her sense of optimism by telling the mother that she has found “options to investigate” for her son. She shows kindness and support by offering to take the mother to visit other schools. Christine states that “We love him” which suggests care and affection for the child. She is conveying a message that the child belongs, but the school may not be the best place for him, as it might not be serving his needs. Christine sets a tone of respect by stating that the parent has the right to make the final decision. She keeps the meeting focused on the child’s interests by affirming “we want what is best for him.”

The teacher at this meeting remarks, “We love him but I am concerned that once he gets to grade one he will be overwhelmed.” She comments to the parent that she does not want to overwhelm her either and understands that she needs time to think about her options. The educational assistant also shares how excited she and the teacher become whenever the little boy makes
strides. Christine recounts a visit she made to the classroom where the little boy stopped his work to show her a creation that he had made out of plasticine. Christine laughs and says, “I was so excited by it that I came back to the office and told everybody about it.” The parent becomes emotional at the end of the meeting and expresses gratitude for the work everyone had done with her son (field notes, April 21, 2015).

Like Christine, the teacher frames her concerns about the student using moral language. By using the word “love” to express how she feels about the little boy, she expresses a tone of warmth and care. The teacher demonstrates respect for the parent by indicating that she does “not want to overwhelm her” and by acknowledging that the parent needs time to make her decision. The teacher’s caring and respectful manner may be a reflection of Christine’s influence. When the educational assistant notes that she and the teacher take delight in the student’s success, she is expressing hope through her sense of optimism and encouragement. Christine reinforces a hopeful feeling by relaying an anecdote about the student sharing his artwork with her. Christine seems to have built a relationship with this student as he stops what he is doing to show her what he has created. Christine’s genuine affection for this boy is evident when she reveals that she shared the interaction with the office staff. The parent seems to appreciate the compassion and genuine concern expressed at the table, as evident when she becomes emotional and extends her gratitude.

Christine is often guided by the needs of the child in her daily practice. This meeting is an example of how she prioritizes the “best interests of the child.” According to Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011),

Not all those who write about the importance of the study of ethics in educational leadership discuss the needs of children; however, this focus on students is clearly consistent with the backbone of our profession. Other professions often have one basic principle driving the profession. In medicine, it is ‘First, do not harm.’ In law, it is the assertion that all clients deserve ‘zealous representation.’ In educational leadership, we believe that if there is a moral imperative for the profession, it is to serve the ‘best interests of the student.’ Consequently, this ideal must lie at the heart of any professional paradigm for educational leaders. (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011, p. 25)
Christine spoke candidly about the school’s inability to provide for the child which may have enabled the staff to speak openly. It appeared to be a sincere exchange between the parent and the staff, and the interests of the child remained central to the discussion. Respect for the parent was evident in the open dialogue that repeatedly centred on the parent’s right to decide what is best for her child. Beckner (2004) comments, “When a decision or choice is required, the ethical behaviour will be that which develops trust, confidence, and integrity in relationships. Ethical behaviour will facilitate cooperation and enhance self-respect, avoiding the barriers created by distrust, suspicion and misunderstanding” (Beckner, 2004, p.138). The tone that Christine set at the meeting was candid but supportive, which established a feeling of trust. There was no discernable tension in the room, as concerns were expressed openly and genuinely. The meeting concluded with expressions of gratitude and a spirit of commitment to work together to find the best possible solution for the child.

Christine incorporates slogans in her daily practice that convey moral messages. These include: “look out for each other,” “support one another,” and “be kind to each other.” These slogans are multifaceted and are significant to understanding how Christine approaches the ethical dimensions of her work. I attend a staff meeting where Christine speaks about a student who is showing signs of stress due to a difficult family situation. Without revealing the name of the student, she asks that staff members “watch out for” students who appear upset and approach them to ask them how they are doing. Christine clarifies that “even a student who is not in your class” should be approached if they appear stressed (field notes, December 5, 2014). Christine encourages a sense of shared accountability for the well-being of children. She builds community by asking the staff to show concern for all students, and in this way cultivates a caring and inclusive school climate. Christine is raising awareness about the emotional fragility of children, and is signaling to the staff that they are responsible for attending to students’ emotional as well as academic needs. This is reminiscent of Starratt (2004) who remarks, “Specifically, as an educational leader, he or she is responsible for cultivating a caring and productive learning environment within the school for all the students” (p. 55).

As the meeting progresses, Christine reminds the staff that Christmas can be a stressful time for many students. She says, “Be gentle with one another and the kids, even if they are not gentle with us.” Christine’s compassion for students who find the Christmas season difficult is evident. She asks the staff to be role models by being kind to kids, even in challenging situations.
Christine’s recognition that staff members could be stressed, and that kindness and compassion are needed are evident in her request to “be gentle with one another.” Public statements such as these make it known to staff members that Christine is trying to cultivate a school climate where people approach each other with sensitivity and concern (field notes, December 5, 2014).

Such reminders may influence how the staff responds to community needs. In an informal conversation, Harry, the vice principal, talked about recent changes to the process of assigning staff yard duties. Christine and the vice principals had determined that the former process was unfair, because teachers who travel between two schools at lunch time were always assigned the most unpopular duties. When Harry announced to the staff that he needed volunteers to take these duties, several teachers offered. Harry commented that at first he was surprised that teachers so readily offered, and that he had thought that the administrators would have to do it. After reflecting he remarked, “There is always someone willing to step up. A large number of staff are here for the greater good. They see it’s a need, not a whim. They demonstrate selflessness” (field notes, November 24, 2014).

When Christine and the vice principals decide to correct an unfair process, they seem to be “looking out for” and “supporting” the teachers who are being treated unfairly. Harry acknowledges the staff’s sense of shared accountability and spirit of good will. He suggests that they are motivated to serve the needs of the community. It is difficult to know for certain if all teachers were motivated out of “selflessness” or if there were other reasons for volunteering. A lunch duty might fit better with personal routines or it may be a preferred option to another duty. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that Harry was surprised by the unexpected response, because these lunch duties have traditionally been unpopular.

Peyton, a Physical Education teacher, was one of the staff members who responded to Harry’s request. In an informal conversation, I ask her why she volunteered. She explains,

Harry has been supportive of me in getting materials needed for gym for the kindergartens. I said to the kindergartens, “Every time you see the vice principal thank him,” and they have done so four times. I am trying to teach them to be appreciative. Kids tend to think things fall out of the ceiling. We have to appreciate one another. . . . Harry has a lot of responsibility put on him . . . I decided to do the middle yard duty. Someone has to thank him. (field notes, November 13, 2014)
Peyton volunteers as a way of extending her appreciation to Harry because he has been “supportive” of her. When Peyton reminds the children to thank Harry, her words affect the school climate. She is making the children aware that the school is a community where people support and appreciate each other. When Peyton states, “I am trying to teach them to be appreciative,” she is conveying the virtue of gratitude to the children. Peyton’s statements are an acknowledgement that generosity and support inspire gratitude. She in turn indicates compassion and her support for Harry. Is it possible that Christine’s reminders to “support one another,” “look out for one another” and “be kind to each other” influences individual interactions that over time affect the school climate? (field notes, November 13, 2014) This rhetorical question has relevance in thinking about Christine’s influence on the ethical school climate. These frequently repeated statements reflect the moral values that Christine holds, and the vision she has for how people should work together. They serve as reminders for how the staff should treat one another, setting a moral tone in the school. Christine’s continual efforts to cultivate an ethical school climate may be realized in acts of kindness and generosity, such as Peyton’s actions towards Harry. Christine encourages relationship building in an effort to foster a kind, caring and inclusive climate where belonging and acceptance are valued.

Christine sends a weekly newsletter to the staff where she regularly includes value-laden messages. Some of these messages are straightforward while others are multi-layered. In one newsletter, Christine succinctly comments, “Have a wonderful weekend and as always . . . thank you for all you do” (weekly newsletter, November 7, 2014). In another newsletter, Christine inserts a cartoon of two girls holding umbrellas in the rain with words across the picture that read, “Appreciate those who are happy for your happiness and sad for your sadness. These are people to truly treasure” (weekly newsletter, November 28, 2014). The cartoon offers a light-hearted perspective at the conclusion of a busy week, and reminds the reader to appreciate having a friend who can empathize.

In another newsletter, Christine sends a link to an Elton John song, highlighting the refrain, “I thank the Lord there’s people out there like you” (weekly newsletter, November 14, 2014). In the same newsletter, she extends her gratitude to the staff after parent-teacher interviews and states,

Thanks to all of you for your wonderful, professional and kind interactions with our parents.

I know that it sometimes can be difficult to have courageous conversations and I commend
you all on your gentle approach to seek the best outcome for our children. (weekly newsletter, November 14, 2014)

Christine uses the pronoun “our” in the phrases “our parents” and “our children”. This creates a sense of connection and community and establishes a feeling of shared accountability. She uses moral language such as “kind” to characterize the interactions between staff members and parents, and in this sense, is drawing attention to moral conduct. Christine describes the dialogue between staff members and parents as “courageous” and although she does not define it, in the context of parent-teacher interviews, “courageous” likely means candid communication. Christine remarks on the staff’s “gentle” or kind approach to seek the “best outcome for our children” and in this sense, is indicating what is in the “best interests of the child.” She is suggesting that a child’s best interests are served when staff members approach parents with kindness and sensitivity. By including this message in her newsletter, Christine is publicly stating her expectations of how staff members should interact with parents. While she may be genuinely expressing appreciation to the staff, she is also reminding them that she wants to see kindness, courage, and honesty expressed in their exchanges with parents. While this message to staff is serious in tone, other messages are very light-hearted. For example, a cartoon featuring a cat, dog and bird together with the words, “Be kind to one another, even if you disagree on stuff” is a humorous reminder of the need for respectful communication (weekly newsletter, November 14, 2015).

Another newsletter features a serene photo of falling raindrops with the words, “BE KIND WHENEVER POSSIBLE. IT IS ALWAYS POSSIBLE!” (January 6, 2015) A picture of a globe, apple and books placed on a table in front of a blackboard is included in a different newsletter. The words ‘The influence of a good teacher can never be erased,’ are written on the blackboard (January 23, 2015). These two messages support Christine’s vision of a school where people value kindness and are mindful of the lasting impact of their work with children. It is interesting to note that Christine had many recollections of her childhood teachers, as discussed in Chapter Four. In her biographical interviews, she frequently referred to the impressions and impact her teachers have had on her life. In this sense, she understands the lasting influence of a teacher.

Christine shares why she includes messages in her weekly newsletter. She states,
I always find, especially at this school, that there's so much information in the weekly newsletter, like bombarded, as it is in every school, but because we’re so large, that I just think [pause] it can be overwhelming. I think that we all get caught up in the ins and outs of everyday that we just [sighs] it's overwhelming sometimes, and we forget that there’s joy in the job. We get tired [and] we forget why we come to work every day, and I just look for something every week no matter what it is, some little thing, that I can attach, that people can see . . . I just try to bring them [staff] back, bring them back to why we come to work every day, and just let them know, we have the best job in the world and this is why. (interview 1)

Christine is sensitive to the emotional needs of her staff, which is evident when she acknowledges that daily details can be “overwhelming.” She is aware that people can get caught in minutiae, that can narrow their perspective. Christine sighs after she says, “I think that we all get caught up in the ins and outs of everyday,” which suggests that she also sometimes finds the daily grind “overwhelming” and can empathize with the staff. Her sensitivity to other people’s feelings is evident in her words. Christine wants the staff to reflect on their higher purpose as educators. She provides perspective to the staff by “bringing them back” to the reasons they became educators. Christine expresses hope in her sense of optimism when she says, “we have the best job in the world,” revealing a deep affection for the profession. She cultivates an ethical climate where the staff are encouraged to reflect on the meaning of their work and to feel pride in what they do.

These newsletter messages focus on the importance of virtues as fundamental reference points in relationships. As Johnson (2011) states,

> Ethical understanding and action encompasses principles, ideas, values, rules, and emotions related to how human beings should relate to each other and to the world. It includes the development of an internal moral code that governs behaviour. It is concerned with the questions: How should we live together? How should we treat one another, including all forms of life? (Johnson, 2011, pp. 7-8)

When Christine asks her staff to “support one another,” “look out for one another” and “be kind to each other” she is raising their awareness that how they treat one another contributes to the climate in the school community. She is guiding their interactions by suggesting that virtues be central to their relationships, in particular the virtues of care, kindness and compassion.
The staff observes seasons like Christmas by gathering together for various reasons. There is a Christmas celebration where staff socialize together with a catered lunch in the library. The library is close to the staffroom which provides easy access to stoves and fridges while offering a change from the normal routine of eating in the staffroom. This celebration offers an opportunity for staff to connect and engage in informal conversations with each other. The staff also gathers for fundraising events, such as the “Empty Bowls” luncheon which occurs once a year, near the beginning of the Christmas season. This event raises money for gift cards to be donated to needy families in the school community. Staff members bring empty bowls from home to symbolize need and these bowls are filled with food at lunchtime in exchange for a monetary donation. The ingredients are purchased with the money collected from the staff, and a staff member cooks the food which keeps costs to a minimum. Money remaining after the purchase of the food is donated towards gift cards that are given to families so they can buy food at Christmas time. The event is organized by the Social Justice Committee and spearheaded by Geraldine, an intermediate teacher (email communication, November 21, 2014 & interview, Geraldine).

Christine supports the Empty Bowls and seasonal luncheons by advertising them in her weekly newsletters and by attending them. She remarks on the importance of these events,

> It is such a big school and not everybody hangs out together . . . I think that people are respectful of one another, but I think that doing things like the Student Led Learning Walk and having our staff parties and luncheons and all that stuff really brings people together.

(interview 9)

Christine continues to discuss the importance of staff celebrations. She comments,

> When you go into the staffroom you can see and feel that people get along and there’s a good feeling and [I do] whatever I can do to support that and make sure that people are feeling that [and] give them opportunities to have our socials or have Treat Day or the Faith Day, to have that opportunity to interact with one another and [for me to] be involved with it too.

(interview 4)

Christine indicates that staff gatherings help people build relationships and feel more connected. When she is in the staffroom she “feels” that people “get along”, which suggests that she is attuned to the climate or tone in the room. Christine indicates a responsibility for providing
“support” for these gatherings so that she can promote that “good feeling” in the staffroom. She wants others to share in that feeling and indicates a desire to be connected to staff.

Treat Days are held on the same day each week and involve the entire staff. Groups of three or four staff members bring in snacks on a rotating schedule and set them out in the staffroom. It has been a tradition at the school for many years, and has always been held during recess time, so that staff can gather and linger for a while. I had an informal conversation with Cameron, a junior grade teacher, who comments on what Treat Days mean for him. He states, “It’s not about the food. It’s about having that time to gather as a staff. It’s the social aspect. Because our school is large, you don’t get to interact regularly. Regular interactions strengthen relationships and build relationships.” Cameron continues to explain that he feels “connected” to people at the school, despite its size, and believes this feeling of connection is due to traditions like Treat Day. He confides that he taught at a different school but did not feel as “connected” to that staff. He believes that the consistency of having Treat Day once a week provides staff with an opportunity to get to know one another. This is evident when he states, “Regular interactions strengthen relationships and build relationships.” Cameron notes that school traditions like Treat Day allow him to feel “connected” to his colleagues, a feeling that he has not been able to attain in schools that do not share the same tradition (field notes, November 27, 2014).

Starratt (2004) argues that educational leaders need to recognize that staff members derive fulfillment not only from their work, but also from spending time with friends in social gatherings. He states, “Parties, musical and dramatic performances, socials, competitions, and celebrations should be a natural complement to the ongoing focus on academic learning” (Starratt, 2004, p. 50). Christine supports staff festivities by providing time for the staff to come together and by celebrating with them. In this way, she signals a belief that relationships should be nurtured, and that a balance of work and recreation is important in fostering a caring and inclusive climate. Charlie, the custodian, shares with me that sometimes he feels “separated from the staff”. He confides that he feels this way for two reasons. It is a large school but also the social committee, who organizes staff socials, sometimes exclude the custodians with the language they use in their invitations. For example, Charlie once received an email that invited “all teachers” to a social so he assumed that he was not invited. Christine approached him on the day of the social and said, “Come up. Come socialize. Have a bite to eat or whatever.” I ask Charlie what Christine’s words meant to him and he replies,
[That was] very nice. Christine’s a caring person. She doesn’t have to say that. She may go along thinking that we’re already invited so she doesn’t have to do that. She asked anyways, it didn’t matter, because she cares. (interview, Charlie)

Christine demonstrates sensitivity toward Charlie and recognizes that she has a role to play in making him feel included in the school. She uses her authority as a leader to convey a message that all staff members belong at “staff socials” and takes the initiative to reach out to staff members who may feel excluded or forgotten; in this sense, she demonstrates care.

Christine believes she is a role model who is responsible for setting a tone that establishes an ethical school climate. Tone is the pervasive feeling or atmosphere in the school that has an influence on the way staff members, students, parents, and community members interact with each other. The school climate that Christine cultivates is infused by the virtues of honesty, dignity, compassion, love, respect, trust, forgiveness, integrity and hope. Christine’s pervasive sense of optimism and encouragement helps to foster a climate where people are empathetic and sensitive toward one another. Christine incorporates repeated slogans into her daily work that convey moral messages and are central to her ethical practice. They signify her moral values and help her realize her vision of how people should treat one another. Christine builds relationships with others that advance her efforts in fostering a school climate defined by kindness and care. She endeavors to create an inclusive school where people feel that they belong. Christine tries to show concern for the well-being of staff members by using phrases such as “do your best.” Although this phrase can offer perspective to someone who is overwhelmed, it may have unintentional consequences. It could be perceived by some staff members as permission to offer minimal effort, which could unintentionally contribute to a sense of unfairness. This particular example illustrates the complex task Christine has in cultivating an ethical climate; a task that is filled with opportunities but is also fraught with challenges.

6.4 Conclusion

An ethical climate and school community work in a symbiotic fashion to create a school where daily interactions are guided by the virtues. Over time, people feel a sense of belonging and connection in a school community sustained by a climate that upholds these virtues. In turn, a community formed by caring and trusting relationships lends itself to the cultivation of a climate where people feel supported and committed to working together. An ethical climate and school
community are interrelated, inviting people to feel they are vital members of a school in a web of relationships supported and guided by the school principal.

For Christine, ethical leadership entails cultivating an ethical climate with the school community. Cultivating an ethical climate is a process that emerges through her daily interactions with others. Christine’s relationships and her focus on relationship building shape the school community which in turn influence the climate. For Christine, relationships are central, and support and challenge her as she strives to lead ethically. Christine consistently makes reference to ethical virtues and moral values, and expresses them in her conduct, manner, words, stated intentions, daily practices and rituals. She conceptualizes her work and the work of every educator as having profound moral significance and engages all stakeholders in the process of building an ethical school. The situations and challenges that Christine confronts and her responses to them reveal her as someone who seeks opportunities to cultivate ethicality on a daily basis. Her successes and setbacks reveal her as someone who is fundamentally human, and is striving to live an ethical life, both within and beyond the school. For Christine, leading ethically and cultivating ethicality are central to her role as a school principal, and are intertwined in such a way that they are both necessary and vital to her practice.

The next chapter, Chapter Seven, provides a discussion of the insights and understandings that have been gleaned from this study. The discussion is rooted in the research questions that guided this work. Chapter Seven explores the implications of the study and the possibilities for further research.
Chapter 7

7 Conclusion

The central purpose of this study is to uncover how one elementary school principal thinks about her work in moral terms, and to understand how she employs ethical practices. It explores the elements of the principal’s work that she believes have ethical significance. This study considers how the principal views the moral components of her practice in relation to various stakeholders. It investigates situations that the principal confronts that comprise ethical actions and decisions, and uncovers how she deals with these situations in her daily work. There are two further purposes to this study. The first is to explore how the principal believes her earlier life experiences have affected the way she understands and responds to ethical situations in her daily work. The second is to uncover how the principal believes her prior professional experiences have shaped the way that she thinks about and resolves ethical issues in her practice.

The guiding perspectives and concepts of my study are supported by virtue ethics. Virtue ethics, as compared to other normative theories, emphasizes the significance of character. Actions arise from a person’s character, distinguishing patterns of behaviour, and the values they hold. As a result of these considerations, actions, for the most part, do not result from isolated decisions (Curran & Fullam, 2011; Fedler, 2006; Thompson, 2015). It is largely understood that people are not born virtuous, but instead come to be virtuous by attaining good habits by, for instance, spending time with virtuous people and obtaining the virtues through moral development (Carr, 2007; DeMarco, 1996; Fenstermacher, 2001; Fallona, 2000; Sergiovanni 2005b; Sockett, 2012; Wagner & Simpson, 2009). Virtues can also be imparted by modelling and through training (Bohlin, Farmer & Ryan, 2001; Carr, 2007; Lickona, 2000; Sockett, 2012).

The preceding three data chapters convey a rich and illustrative portrait of a principal that contributes broadly to the literature on ethical school leadership. A key theme in Chapter Four includes showing how Christine uses her prior life experiences to influence teacher practice. For example, her memories of being labelled as “shy” when she was a student influence her interactions with teachers during the reporting period. Her efforts to encourage teachers to carefully consider how comments in report cards can inaccurately label children, reveal Christine as a leader who uses her own memories to have a moral influence in her practice. An additional
theme in Chapter Four involves Christine drawing on her own childhood experiences to
determine how to approach children in discipline situations. Her choice to offer young children
storybooks and toys, and to encourage them to stay in her office, reveal her efforts to empathize
with children, as she believes her teachers empathized with her. Christine’s stated intention to
discipline differently than her own principal, who used tactics of fear, and to treat children with
dignity and respect, are examples of how she draws on her childhood memories to influence the
moral aspects of her leadership.

Three themes are central in Chapter Five and they include virtues, approaches to action, and
personal operational paradigms. The virtues that are central in Christine’s practice include trust,
care, respect and fairness. These virtues establish the basis for exploring the approaches to action
and personal operational paradigms that Christine refers to in her daily work. Her efforts to
support others and her ability to express hope and convey a sense of optimism, even in situations
that appear overwhelming, reveal her as someone who is able to be vulnerable as she strives to
lead ethically. Christine inspires trust by being present to people, emotionally and physically,
which enables her to build relationships, as she makes herself available to others. Christine
attempts to be fair in her decisions, particularly with respect to discipline. She tries to be
respectful and caring in her interactions, and she is aware that she is a role model, who guides the
ethical conduct of others. In this sense, her efforts to lead ethically become deeply connected to
her attempts to cultivate ethicality, which form the basis of the themes explored in Chapter Six.

Chapter Six examined Christine’s conscious efforts to cultivate ethicality. Her influence in
fostering a school community where ethical virtues are expressed, and where relationships are
prioritized, reveals how she conceptualizes her role as one who leads others in building an ethical
school. Christine’s deliberate attempts to cultivate an ethical school climate are made visible in
how she lives out the virtues in her daily interactions. She communicates to others how she
wants them to speak and act in their daily exchanges, and in this way, her messages help to
create a moral tone or climate in the school. While cultivating an ethical school community and
ethical school climate have distinct challenges, the discussion in Chapter Six illuminated the
interdependency of each in creating a school where virtue-based interactions are central.
Christine’s struggles to foster a community that is inclusive, and to create a climate where
compassion and concern for others is central, are often experienced together in such a way as to
reveal the complex nature of ethical school leadership.
Chapter Seven outlines the discoveries made in this study, and their implications for moral and ethical school leadership. It begins with an examination of findings related to the primary research question, followed by a consideration of discoveries emerging from the secondary research question. A discussion of how my study corroborates, adds to, and differs from prior scholarly literature on the ethical teacher and the ethical principal, is offered in an attempt to situate my findings in relation to previous work conducted in the field. Implications for professional learning for principals are uncovered as a way to provide suggestions for how principals can be supported in thinking about and dealing with the ethical elements of their work. The implications of this study and what they mean for further academic investigation are provided in an effort to explore how future research can lead to a better understanding of the essential and enduring role of the ethical principal. The benefits and challenges of conducting research in schools that will further our understanding of moral and ethical school leadership are outlined. This discussion serves as a way to spark reflection on what the future holds, and what remains to be discovered, for both the scholar and the practitioner who strive to understand the complex yet equally compelling role of the ethical principal.

7.1 Discoveries and Implications

What follows is an outline of findings or “discoveries” that are connected to the primary research question. It is important to note that implications with respect to the principalship are speculative, as a case study of one principal does not allow for generalizations that extend beyond one principal and her practice.

This study contains a primary and a secondary research question. The primary research question asks, *How does one elementary school principal conceptualize her work in moral terms and engage in ethical practices?* This research question is interested in Christine’s perception of her work as having ethical relevance, how she thinks about her work in these terms and the kinds of situations that she encounters that involve ethical actions and decisions. Results show that Christine believes many aspects of her work are ethically relevant. For example, when I ask Christine if she recalls discussing the ethical aspects of teaching in her preservice years, her response is, “I think the discussion always comes back to ethics” (interview 2). Although she is referring to her teaching years, her perception of ethics as a pervasive aspect of education is evident in her work as a principal. Christine believes that words spoken and actions taken
influence the moral tone of the school, and that every interaction conveys moral values and expectations. Christine envisions herself as a role model, and this is made evident in how she communicates, makes decisions, builds relationships and provides support to others. Role modelling, in the context of this study, is an approach to action. Christine sets an example through her conduct, manner, stated intentions, daily practices and rituals. She often aligns her words with her actions, and in this way role modelling is closely associated with trust and integrity. Christine believes her words and actions affect the tone or climate in the school, and she tries to be mindful of this by prioritizing the virtues of kindness, compassion and respect in her daily interactions. These findings have implications for ethical school leadership, suggesting that a range of elements and factors are relevant to a principal’s work. These include building a respectful and compassionate school and trying to influence a positive climate that is inclusive, caring and inspires a sense of belonging.

Christine’s communication practices involve engaging in dialogue with others and listening attentively to them. Her expressed willingness to engage in face-to-face communication, and to give people her undivided attention, shows care and respect and inspires a sense of trust. She uses her weekly newsletters as a mechanism for conveying moral values and expectations. Christine includes slogans in her verbal and written communication that are explicitly moral or have moral overtones. They reveal her efforts to foster a moral climate using words and expressions. For example, the reminder to “be kind to each other” conveys an expectation that the school climate should be caring and compassionate, while the message to “look out for one another” communicates a desire that people show concern for each other. “Do your best” is a repeated slogan that Christine uses to convey that she understands that people have limitations, and that recognizing these limitations is important in maintaining a sense of well-being. Despite Christine’s intentions, staff members may interpret this slogan differently. Some may feel more able to take risks, while others may feel less inclined to try hard, and in turn perform below their capabilities. This dual interpretation points to the ethical challenges involved in using slogans that over time might lose their intended meaning. This is not to say that principals should not use slogans, but that maintaining awareness of the ethical implications of slogans is an important task, particularly when one’s words carry moral weight.

Christine uses her weekly newsletters to relay moral messages, such as commending the staff for having “professional and kind” interactions with parents and for seeking “the best outcome for
our children” (weekly newsletter, November 14, 2014). Christine is aware that what she communicates to the school community has an influence on how people treat each other that in turn affects the school climate. Her use of communication tools, such as newsletters and announcements in meetings to relay moral messages, reveals her approach to leading ethically. These findings suggest that the communication practices and tools that a school leader consistently employs provide a means for understanding the moral values that he or she holds. The implications of these findings are that school leaders can attempt to shape an ethical school climate and influence a school community by using communication tools and practices that signal their vision of an ethical school.

Christine believes that her actions and decisions influence the climate and tone of the school and she approaches each situation with that in mind. The kinds of situations that Christine encounters are many and varied, and often require her to be a source of support and leadership for others. When Christine works with teachers, comforts children, and reassures worried and anxious parents, she tries to remain aware of the moral influence of her words and actions. The implications of these findings are that when principals are consistently present to staff members, students and parents, they can create opportunities to establish caring and trusting connections with them, and in so doing, help to cultivate an ethical climate. These findings suggest that being available to others, in a physical and emotional sense, may be significant in helping principals realize the moral relevance in their work.

Christine advises teachers to be caring and kind with distressed children, and she approaches families who are new to the country with sensitivity. Her guidance and moral influence provide support, particularly to vulnerable people. For example, when Christine enlists the help of an older brother in consoling his little sister who is trying to flee the school, she expresses kindness and compassion. She considers what is unique about the situation, the communication barriers, the girl’s level of distress and physical strength, and responds in a manner that addresses immediate safety risks. Christine incorporates practical wisdom in her approach. Sherman (1992) offers an explanation of practical wisdom as that which, “leaves much more to practical judgment than to rule, much more to deliberations about individual case than to systematic execution of an antecedent plan” (p.1000). This situation calls attention to the significance of practical wisdom and its role in dealing with ethical challenges. Considering that principals deal with a range of issues on a daily basis, Christine’s experience might imply that principals can
benefit from talking about practical wisdom and how it is significant in their work. In this sense, my study has implications for the education of principals. Encouraging principals to dialogue about how they resolve ethical challenges by using practical wisdom could empower administrators to approach situations with greater confidence and articulate reasons for their approach. The findings of this study support the notion that practical wisdom can be helpful for principals to use in their practice, particularly when they are dealing with ethical situations. The implications of these findings are that principals would benefit from learning how to develop and use practical wisdom in their daily work. Professional development courses and workshops that encourage principals to consider how practical wisdom can bring much needed clarity to complex ethical challenges might be of benefit.

Christine imparts a belief that her role as a principal is to convey moral lessons in discipline situations. Children who come to Christine’s office when they are having difficulty meeting expectations of good behaviour are greeted by a kind and caring principal. For example, Christine takes the time to sit with a group of junior age girls, and to explain to them why they cannot play pranks on primary age girls who look up to them as role models. Her patient and caring disposition with these girls during a busy morning reveal a belief that the needs of the child are central to her practice. She understands that the junior age girls are not malicious in their intent, and need an adult to explain the implications of their actions. Christine’s discussions with children who come to her office when they are in trouble, and her efforts to reach out to them through storybooks, show that she welcomes children into her office and wants to spend time with them. Christine views these situations as opportunities for children to connect with her. Her reassurance to children that they are “not in trouble forever” reveals a hopeful and optimistic stance. Christine’s ways of dealing with discipline are sometimes met with disapproval by staff members who believe her approach is too lenient. The competing demands of what teachers expect her to do when a child is sent to her office, and what she believes is the right thing to do, present ethical challenges as she strives to foster a climate where trust, care, respect and fairness are prioritized. Her struggle to remain aware of times when she might be too emotionally invested, and might not be making decisions in the best interests of the child, reveals an understanding that her work is morally complex. Her desire to maintain a climate of trust and respect, and her concern that it could be jeopardized if she is too lenient, shows an awareness that her work is fraught with moral challenges.
These findings suggest that principals who are struggling to incorporate discipline practices that are firm and consistent but also fair and compassionate, may find it helpful to engage the school community in open and on-going discussions about discipline. These discussions could take place in staff meetings and in smaller divisional meetings. Teachers could have opportunities to discuss how they approach discipline in situations in the classroom and in the school yard. Over time the principal and the staff may come to a shared understanding of how the school can be a caring place, where children are held accountable for their actions in a way that protects their dignity, and supports their efforts to improve.

While prior scholarly literature (Fallona, 2000) has shown that the ethical elements of a teacher’s work can be recognized and understood, my study confirms that a principal’s ethical practices and beliefs can be observed and understood within the context of her daily work. For example, Christine can be seen to be building trusting and respectful relationships when she invites people into her office, gives them her undivided attention, and encourages open and honest dialogue. One can observe her caring manner by the way she helps teachers sort through ethical issues with their students, listens to children as they negotiate conflict with their peers, and offers assistance to parents who are struggling to help their children with special needs. Christine’s efforts to treat people fairly can be witnessed in the way that she employs due process in situations of student misconduct, offers children opportunities to improve their behaviour, and helps parents and their children gain equal access to their local high schools. Her beliefs about what it means to be an ethical principal can be observed in written and verbal messages to staff members that are explicitly moral or have moral overtones, and that over time affect the ethical climate within the school community.

The discoveries in my research corroborate and extend Fallona’s (2000) findings. Fallona concluded that one could witness and understand a teacher’s manner as a manifestation of ethical virtues. She proposed that those who train teacher candidates should draw their attention to their manner, and encourage them to think about how it might be affecting their students. Fallona (2000) urged teacher educators to help aspiring teachers understand that teaching is essentially a moral undertaking, and that its moral essence can be found in the relationship between the teacher and the student. While Fallona’s study focused on teachers, it is applicable to my study that focused on a principal. Similar to Fallona (2000) I found that a principal’s moral manner can be observed in her daily interactions with others. I also discovered that relationships based on the
expression of the ethical virtues are significant in understanding the moral elements of a principal’s practice. My study extends Fallona’s (2000) findings by investigating how the principal believes her manner influences the moral tone or climate within the school community. It also adds to what we learned from Fallona by exploring the principal’s relationships with a wider variety of people, including students, teachers, support staff, parents, and members in the wider community. In this way, my study offers a broader sense of how ethical virtues, that are prioritized and expressed in relationships, over time contribute to an ethical climate within the school community.

While Fallona (2000) draws attention to the importance of aspiring teachers reflecting on their manner, my study suggests that aspiring principals could benefit from opportunities to consider how their manner influences others. My study expands on Fallona’s (2000) research by suggesting that manner is also significant in a principal’s work. As principals interact with teachers on a daily basis, and are looked upon as leaders, they show by example the importance of engaging in virtue-based behaviours and actions. As role models who are being watched by teachers, the importance of considering one’s manner gains significance in the education of principals. Furthermore, as teachers become principals, and engage with others in various roles, their influence becomes broader, and affects a wider range of people. In this way, a principal’s manner and how it is expressed in their practice takes on considerable importance, as one deliberates on what it means to be an ethical principal.

My study examines a principal’s awareness of how ethical virtues guide her decisions, and how she understands the moral influence of her decisions on others. It uncovers how the principal believes her decisions influence the moral tone or climate within the school community. For example, when Christine makes decisions to support school-wide initiatives such as the food bank, and can articulate that it teaches children the importance of being generous, she reveals an awareness that her decisions affect the moral development of students. Christine decides to go out to the school yard every morning, be consistently present at the busses and leaves her office door open on a regular basis during the day. She can articulate that her decision to engage in these rituals enables her to be available to others, and to build relationships through her presence. Christine regularly communicates with staff members the importance of establishing relationships based on the virtues, such as care, compassion and respect. She chooses to devote time at staff meetings to speaking about the significance of treating each other with compassion,
and devotes space in her weekly newsletters to emphasizing the importance of treating parents with kindness. These choices show that Christine is aware of the potential moral influence she has on how people conduct themselves, and on what they come to value and prioritize in their relationships.

My research resonates with studies by Cranston and Kusanovich (2013, 2014). They found that when principals participated in role-play, and observed their colleagues in role-play, they began to understand “relational trust” and to develop empathy for those impacted by their ethical decisions (p.48). Their studies found that dialogue and reflection helped principals develop empathy and create trusting relationships with the people who were affected by their decisions. My study corroborates the findings of Cranston and Kusanovich (2013, 2014). The principal makes decisions that repeatedly involve reflection and ongoing dialogue with stakeholders. For example, her decision to involve the school in community work, arises from dialogue and reflection on the needs of the community. The principal’s physical and emotional presence, established through rituals, such as an open door policy, foster opportunities for the development of dialogue and trusting relationships. Communication of virtue-based messages, in meetings and newsletters, signal her belief that relational trust is important in the community. My study adds to what we learn from Cranston and Kusanovich (2013, 2014). While they focused on trust and empathy, I considered the significance of the virtues of trust, care, respect and fairness. It was revealed that these virtues were central to ethical decision making, and to guiding the community towards cultivating ethicality in a school. My study demonstrates that the principal is aware of how her decisions are impacting the community, and some of the participants could articulate their awareness of being impacted by the ethical aspects of her decisions. Although empathy did not arise as a central virtue, it was fundamentally connected with care and compassion.

The preceding discussion has looked at the primary research question and the discoveries and implications that emerged. Possible implications for the principalship and for further academic research that pertain to the primary research question will be explored later. The following discussion highlights the discoveries and implications that arise out of the secondary research question.

The secondary research question asks, *In what ways does one elementary school principal believe her previous professional experiences and prior life experiences have made her more*
aware of the moral and ethical dimensions of her role and influenced the way she conceptualizes and deals with ethical situations in her practice? The first part of this research question aims to have Christine consider her previous professional work and how she thinks it has influenced her role as a principal. Christine believes her experiences as a teacher candidate had a profound influence on her awareness of the moral dimensions of her work. Reflecting on how she came to understand her influence in the lives of children, she recounts her practicum in England and remarks, “I’m not even sure if up until that point I realized what I had to offer kids” (interview 2). Christine suggests that her practicum years raised her awareness, and gave her experience in how to conceptualize and address ethical situations in her daily work. She relied on experienced teachers to help her understand how to meet the needs of families facing emotional turmoil and financial hardship. Christine remembers observing a team of educators in a multiple exceptionality class who taught her two important lessons. One lesson was to pay attention to children who are “always trying to tell us something” (interview 2). Another lesson was that when children with multiple challenges are treated with love and kindness by their teachers, they can develop a sense of belonging in the school, and can feel a part of a community.

Christine incorporated the lessons she learned in this multiple exceptionality class and applied them in her work as a teacher and as an administrator. She learned to be “patient” and “kind” as a special education teacher, and as a vice principal, she scheduled opportunities for high needs children to be included in the daily life of the school. Christine believes that she can be a positive moral force for children who may feel excluded or marginalized. As a principal, she continues to draw on her special education experiences to ensure that children with special needs are placed in schools where they can continue to be vital members of their community. Christine encountered distressed parents who were trying to come to terms with their child’s diagnosis. She learned in these experiences to have compassion for parents, and she draws on these experiences as a principal to encourage teachers to have compassion. Her prior involvement with students in special education made her aware that all children are capable of learning. She uses that awareness to express hope to distraught parents and to convey optimistic messages that their children can live productive and fulfilling lives. Christine is empathetic with teachers who struggle with the emotional response of parents, and is able to assist them in understanding their role in helping a child succeed. Her prior professional experiences have influenced her as a
principal, allowing her to share much needed knowledge and wisdom with parents and teachers who are feeling particularly vulnerable.

In one interview, I ask Christine to explain the ethical challenges involved in servicing children with special needs. She responds,

I think if you look at Special Education [emphasis in original] in a broad perspective, that's what it does, it values the child. It values who they are, what they're good at, and you build on it. You're not pressuring them to be something they're not. You help them understand who they are and how they learn and how they can grow, and by doing that you're empowering them to be learners. . . . if we look at ethics and morals, that's where it ties in, the empowerment that the children are focusing on, they’re being empowered to learn how they are learning. (interview 6)

Christine’s experiences in special education classrooms provided her with insights about the uniqueness of students with special needs. As a principal, she can speak with authority about academic and behavioural exceptionalities, and can provide parents and teachers with knowledge that they might otherwise find hard to acquire. In her role as a principal, she can confidently convey optimistic messages to parents who are worried or stressed about their child’s diagnosis. Although Christine has qualifications in special education, she often points to her practical experiences as a special education teacher, rather than what she learned in courses, to explain how she deals with ethical challenges in her administrator role. The implications of my study for ethical leadership is that principals might benefit from practical experiences in special education. These experiences might include spending time in special education classrooms, having discussions with special education teachers about ethical issues, and arranging common planning time so special education teachers can share their perspectives. In addition, the results suggest more broadly that it is valuable for prospective principals to gain insight and exposure into other areas of education, such as English as a Second Language. This might enable principals to be sensitive to the needs of different groups of students, and provide a broader range of experience to draw on in their principal practice.

When Christine reflects on her professional experiences, she recalls important mentors in her life. One mentor was a teaching colleague who impressed upon her the importance of accepting children as they are, reaching out to families in need and approaching every situation with an
open mind. Similarly, a principal colleague, whom she describes as having “a major influence” on her when she was a vice principal, encouraged her to observe, listen, reflect and remain aware of everything happening around her. He taught her the importance of making her own decisions and keeping an open mind in every situation she encounters. In her first year as a principal, she called him every day, and his words of advice helped her to deal with the enormity of responsibility that she felt at the time. The influence of mentors in raising Christine’s awareness of the ethical aspects of her role may suggest that there is value in providing mentoring opportunities for principals. While formal mentoring programs may be of benefit, the implications of my study point to the significance of informal mentorship that develops naturally out of relationships with colleagues. Trusted mentors who are able to help administrators gain clarity and perspective on possible ethical choices might lead to greater confidence in addressing challenges inherent in the role.

Christine has taken many professional courses throughout her career. She recalls that the courses she took as a teacher candidate prepared her to be well-rounded in her teaching as she learned “science, law and every type of art” (interview 2). Although she found her courses to be of benefit, Christine attributes her numerous and varied teaching practicums with having a significant influence on the way she thinks about and deals with ethical situations in her role as a principal. She believes these teaching practicums gave her the opportunity to interact with a variety of people in the school community, and to make ethical decisions that are a necessary and integral aspect of teaching. Christine also attributes several Master’s courses in education with raising her awareness of the ethical dimensions of her role as a teacher and as a principal. She recounts applying techniques of mindfulness and meditation that she learned in these courses to help children in her classroom cope with stressful life situations. Christine applies what she learned about meditation in her principal practice, by repeating positive and reassuring messages to herself that keep her calm during stressful situations.

Christine’s ability to apply what she learned in her teaching practicums to her work as a principal point to the benefit of practical experience for teachers who are aspiring to be principals. These findings suggest that practicums in the preservice years that include opportunities to address and reflect on ethical situations can be valuable. Additionally, prospective principals may benefit from a form of job shadowing to gain insight and understanding into the ethical challenges faced by a principal on a daily basis. Job shadowing could be coupled with an opportunity to reflect
with others about the moral nuances and ethical implications of situations that arise. Meaningful dialogue with supportive colleagues can inspire awareness, and allow for a deeper understanding of the ethical dimensions of teaching and leading in a school.

The secondary research question also aims to have Christine consider her prior life experiences as a child, as a student, and as an adult who held various jobs before becoming a teacher. It asks her to reflect on how she thinks these experiences in different stages of her life influenced her in her role as a principal. The extent to which she sees a resonance between past and present beliefs and practices is explored.

Christine expects teachers to approach their reporting of student achievement with the well-being of the child in mind. She asks them to avoid using certain words such as “shy”, in their report card comments, believing they inaccurately label children. Christine believes that her sensitivity to this element of reporting stems from her experiences as a child, when her anxiety was misinterpreted as shyness. She uses the events of her childhood and her moral influence as a principal to ensure that children who might be anxious or stressed are treated with compassion and respect. These findings indicate that prior life experiences can enable principals to be more aware of the ethical dimensions of their role. They also suggest that prior life experiences can have an influence on the way that principals conceptualize and deal with ethical situations.

The implications of these findings are that principals might benefit from opportunities to explore their life experiences with others, thereby bringing these experiences into awareness. This awareness may help principals develop strategies for dealing with ethical issues in their practice, by using the lessons they glean from these stories as a guide. Opportunities for discussion of life events could be offered in principal preparation courses or in professional development meetings and workshops for principals who have assumed the role.

Christine’s approach to discipline is guided by her memories of her experiences in school when she was a student. She recalls getting a break from her anxieties at school by attending clubs organized by her grade seven teacher. Spending time in these clubs offered her reprieve from social stresses. Christine draws on this memory and allows students who are sent to her office to remain there for a short while. She offers them storybooks or comforting toys as a way to help them gain respite from their worries. Christine remembers how her grade one teacher taught her to read and how she felt “at ease” with her. She shares her own love of reading with children to
help them realize that they can move beyond what is troubling them. Christine recalls the compassionate ways that her teachers reached out to her, and uses these memories to inform her interactions with children. She also recalls her high school principal’s methods of discipline and how he used violence and intimidation. When she defends her own approach to discipline, she states that she will not emulate her former principal, and will uphold the dignity of the child. By calling into consciousness the impact of significant role models, Christine gains clarity about the moral influence of her words, actions, stated intentions, and decisions. The implications of these findings are that school leaders may benefit from reflecting on lessons learned from important role models in their lives. Reflection on these lessons might guide them in thinking about and in dealing with the ethical elements of their work. Reflection with colleagues through guided discussion at meetings or through informal discussions with mentors could help principals develop awareness of how they can use their life stories to lead ethically and to cultivate an ethical school.

Christine’s stated reminder to teachers to approach her if students require financial help conveys a belief that the school is a compassionate place. Christine states a connection between watching her family support one another when her great aunt died, and how she reaches out to help families in need in the school. This stated connection shows how her life story influences her conceptualization of her role as a principal, and affects how she responds to ethical issues in her practice. Christine understands that school encompasses a large aspect of a child’s world, and that the experiences they have leave an indelible impression on them. She strives to ensure that children and their families feel valued and supported, and that no child is excluded from school activities and field trips for financial reasons. The implications of my research are that principals can be influential in establishing a moral climate or tone where students and their families feel a sense of belonging in the school community, regardless of their personal financial situations. By supporting programs that address child hunger and poverty, principals can ensure that schools are inclusive institutions that advance academic learning while safeguarding the well-being of every child. Barth (2013) maintains that if a school is to be “a community of learners” it must be,

A place full of adults and youngsters who care about, look after, and root for one another, and who work together for the good of the whole, in times of need as well as times of celebration. Every member of a community holds some responsibility for the welfare of every other and for the welfare of the community as a whole. (Barth, 2013, p. 201)
Christine believes that the experiences she had in her jobs, before she became a teacher, taught her the importance of helping others maintain their dignity, particularly when they are vulnerable. She remembers her interaction with a male customer when she was a salesperson in a clothing store, and believes that what she learned from this interaction now influences how she deals with teachers and parents in her practice. Christine makes an association between her ability to stay open-minded and respectful with teachers and parents, particularly when she does not share their opinions or views, with the respectful way that she treated this customer.

Christine’s ability to recall events in her childhood and early adulthood, and to apply what she learned from these events to her practice, suggests that principals may benefit from opportunities to reflect on prior life experiences. Such opportunities for reflection may involve inviting principals to participate in biographical interviews, such as Christine did, in an effort to uncover how their life experiences influence and shape the ethical elements of their practice. Biographical interviews, however, require a measure of trust, as the principal needs to feel at ease in sharing personal life stories with the researcher. A case study, such as the one conducted for this research, helped to facilitate a trusting relationship, as the researcher spent a sustained amount of time with the principal over the course of the fieldwork.

While this research points to the benefits of professional learning for a principal who participates in a case study with biographical interviews, it is unrealistic to assume that all principals can participate in such studies, particularly due to the time commitment and emotional energy involved. Principals can be offered other professional learning opportunities, where they discuss and reflect on prior life experiences, and consider how these experiences connect to the moral elements of their practice. Opportunities for principals to engage in focused reflection and discussion could be provided at district meetings. Principals could be invited to talk about how they believe pivotal events in their lives inform their approach to ethical situations in their work. Disclosure of personal events requires trust between colleagues, but trust could be developed over time, during a series of discussions. Allowing for consistent reflection and discussion means that board officials, when developing agendas for meetings, have to set aside time for principals to consider how their own lives inform the moral aspects of their leadership. This could be a challenge in the face of competing priorities, however it is a challenge worth taking, if it assists principals in their efforts to lead ethically and cultivate ethicality.
When I ask Christine how she thinks her awareness of the ethical aspects of her role has accrued and developed during her career as an administrator, she responds,

Well I think that with every day, as you get older and you go to work, and you interact with people, that you grow and learn. If it’s something that you think about, of how you can sort of broaden your knowledge and decision-making based on consideration of others, I think it just naturally grows and develops. [It is] not that you’re always making the right decision but you’re always trying to, and I think that certainly every decision that I make, and every person that I work with over time helps, helps you figure that out, because of all the conversations and the interactions and everything else that you’ve had over time, it all sort of helps determine who you are now [emphasis in original]. (interview 8)

The preceding discussion has outlined the discoveries and implications that emerge from consideration of the secondary research question. The implications outlined suggest ways that this study can inform ethical leadership as gleaned through the vivid portrayal of one principal. I now invite the reader to explore the implications of this study for further academic inquiry.

7.2 The Essential and Enduring Role of the Ethical Principal

The essential and enduring role of the ethical principal is one who relies on and is sustained through relationships. The notion of a principal as one who manages alone in an office is changing as the role becomes increasingly complex. Scholars have noted that as the principal’s role becomes more demanding, there is a growing expectation that principals discuss complex issues with each other (Donlevy & Walker, 2011; Fullan, 2003; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002). It might be reasonable to assume that this would include discussion of ethical issues that arise in the course of their daily work. Literature has addressed the need for a common moral language in education that is grounded in ethics and philosophy to facilitate such discussion (Campbell, 2008; Nash, 2002; Sockett & LePage, 2002; Strike, 1995). The main participant in this study was shown to be actively reaching out to colleagues and mentors as she grappled with ethical issues. At various times, she reflected that this networking helped her navigate ethical situations. These findings support the need for collegial discussion of ethical issues in daily practice.

The portrait of Christine as a leader is multidimensional, comprising moments when she feels successful and moments when she feels challenged in her efforts to foster a moral tone or
climate. The ethical substance of her leadership is revealed in the way that she expresses hope and conveys a sense of optimism, particularly when faced with obstacles. Her steadfast commitment to confront obstacles, and her willingness to be vulnerable and make mistakes, reveal her as a human being who is striving to be ethical. Sergiovanni (2001b) highlights the process of becoming an ethical leader and states, “Leadership is, after all, a struggle – a quest to do the right thing” (p. ix). Christine’s imperfections make her more accessible to those aspiring to be principals, and who look to her for guidance in how to conceptualize their role. Future research, conducted in schools, and focusing on the daily work of principals, may help to inform an understanding that ethical leadership is not only essential, but also attainable.

Current knowledge on the ethical principal reveals that the role is complex, and involves dealing with ethical situations and making moral judgments (Beckner, 2004; Cranston et al., 2006, 2014; Dempster & Berry, 2003; Duignan, 2006; Frick, 2009; Gross, 2014; Langlois & Lapointe, 2007, 2010; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011; Wagner & Simpson, 2009). The principal’s role demands an understanding of, and ability to communicate, the moral aspects of their work. My study shows that a principal is confronted with a range of issues on a daily basis that are often morally ambiguous, and require an awareness of the ethical elements involved. My research investigated the awareness the principal has of the moral aspects of her work as revealed in her words and actions. Her ability to communicate why she believes certain elements of her work carry moral weight, and how she engages in ethical practices, reveal her awareness of herself as a moral agent. My study corroborates Campbell’s (2003a, 2008b) work on ethical knowledge, that argues that teachers demonstrate varying levels of awareness of their role as moral agents, as expressed through their ethical knowledge. Campbell (2008b) explains that teachers’ awareness of their moral agency is fostered when they acquire the ability to articulate how moral values and ethical principles are either manifested or undermined by their intentions, decisions, and by their words and actions (Campbell, 2008b, pp. 603-604).

Although Campbell’s (2003a, 2008b) research is primarily concerned with teacher practice, it is related to my study on a principal’s work, and supports what we currently know about the ethical principal. As my study reveals, the ethical principal is a moral agent who significantly influences the tone or climate in the school. The principal is engaged in almost every aspect of school life, including spontaneous daily interactions, scheduled meetings, school-wide events, as well as contentious situations that require ethical sensitivity and moral awareness. Campbell’s (2003a,
work reveals that the ethical teacher is a moral agent who fosters a classroom climate that embodies ethical virtues. My study extends Campbell’s research by showing that the ethical principal is a moral agent who cultivates a school climate where virtues such as care, respect, trust and fairness are prioritized. My study adds to Campbell’s (2003a, 2008b) research by revealing how the principal believes she can guide teachers in navigating the moral components of their practice. Through interviews with teachers and observations of their interactions with the principal, it was revealed that the principal can have a moral influence on the way teachers perceive their work. In this way, the essential role of the ethical principal, as one who works with the teacher to build an ethical climate within the school community, is made visible.

Existing knowledge indicates that the ethical principal can have a moral influence on the school community by leading others toward incorporating ideas and viewpoints that have a moral objective (Goodman & Lesnick, 2009; Rebore, 2014; Zubay & Soltis, 2005). This study reinforces our understanding that an ethical principal is a role model who imparts to others the importance of expressing the virtues when interacting with others. It enriches our knowledge of how a principal exercises a moral influence in her daily exchanges that gradually affect the ethical climate within the school community. This study illuminates the integral association between a principal’s practice and a teacher’s practice by revealing how the moral dimensions of teaching are influenced by the moral decisions and actions of the principal.

Current knowledge indicates that the ethical principal can have a moral influence on the school, by directing stakeholders in the school community toward adopting concepts and viewpoints that align with a moral objective (Branson & Gross, 2014; Campbell, 2003a; Crowson, 1989; Greenfield, 1995; Hart & Bredeson, 1996; Haynes, 2002; Hostetler, 1986, 1997; Noddings, 2003; Place, 2011; Rebore, 2014; Sergiovanni, 2007; Starratt, 2004, 2011, 2012). The results of my study confirm that the principal has a moral influence on the school, and can guide the ethical conduct of stakeholders, by being a role model and by communicating her expectations of how people treat one another. Moreover, I discovered that the principal is aware of her moral influence on the school, as evidenced in the way that she could articulate the moral intentions behind her actions. My findings expand upon discoveries made by Jackson et al. (1993) in The Moral Life of Schools Project. They determined that there are two kinds of moral influence that communicate moral teachings to students, comprised of moral instruction and moral practice. Jackson et al. (1993) discovered that moral instruction, defined as elements of school life that
were observable and showed intentional efforts to encourage moral behaviour, were almost absent in the classroom. They concluded that teachers need to be aware of their authority as moral agents. While they found moral instruction to be absent in classrooms, contrary to their findings, I found a principal who seemed to be actively engaged in moral instruction. While teachers in the Jackson et al. (1993) study did not seem to be aware of their moral influence, I found that the principal in my study was aware of her moral influence in the school community.

Although *The Moral Life of Schools Project* was focused on teachers, it resonates with my study, as I investigated the stated intentions and deliberate actions of the principal in cultivating a moral climate in the school. Contrary to Jackson et al. (1993) I discovered that the principal was often aware of her influence as a moral agent. This awareness could be seen in her ability to articulate reasons for ethical decisions, and to explain how she was attempting to cultivate ethicality by deliberately guiding the moral conduct of students, teachers, support staff and parents. My findings suggest that there is a need for more research on how principals can encourage teachers to be deliberate and thoughtful about the moral elements of their work. Future research might also explore ways that principals can model moral instruction for teachers and students in the school community. The essential role of the principal is realized in their relationship with teachers, and in their combined efforts to build an ethical school.

Jackson and his fellow researchers also discovered that moral practice, instilled through rules, procedures, and the placement of furniture, was apparent in the atmosphere of classrooms. Similar to their study, I found evidence of moral practice in the principal’s office. Items placed on her walls and displayed on her shelves, such as student artwork and photos, conveyed an affection for children, and a large variety of picture books, suggested that she prioritized children in her practice. Other items were explicitly moral, such as wall hangings and posters, containing phrases such as “Be Fearless”, “Have an Open Mind” and “We Belong”. Together, these items, as well as the way they were prominently displayed, create an atmosphere that was comfortable and welcoming, and invited one to linger, unannounced and unafraid. Jackson et al. (1993) concluded that teachers should reflect on the moral influence of their actions, and the mood or feeling they create in their classrooms, even in the way they position their furniture. Similarly, I discovered that when I asked the principal why she had a freestanding table with chairs, she could articulate that it allowed her to engage in face-to-face discussion, an action that creates an atmosphere of care and respect. My study echoes the findings by Jackson et al. (1993) that the
physical environment holds moral significance, which may also be important for the school leader.

Possibilities for further research on ethical leadership are proposed in the next section with suggestions for potential avenues for further investigation.

7.3 Looking Forward: Guideposts for the Future

This study has revealed that some aspects of moral and ethical school leadership remain ambiguous and uncertain. In this sense, I offer conclusive recommendations for additional academic research. Further research may uncover what is still not understood about the ethical principal, and provide clarity on areas of this complex and elusive role that would benefit from further study and consideration. The moral essence of the principal’s work and its inextricable connection to the ethical teacher and the ethical school has been studied and reviewed in scholarly literature for some time. Stengel and Tom (2006) remark,

> There is a renewed, substantial, and quite varied interest in educational matters from a moral perspective. Still, the moral contours of schooling remain largely invisible to those navigating its pathways on a daily basis as teachers, students, administrators, parents, policymakers, and researchers; those contours are neither named nor recognized as moral. (Stengel & Tom, 2006, p. 23)

My research is meant to build on the interest that has developed about the moral aspects of education, particularly as it pertains to the principal’s practice. More specifically, this study seeks to continue the dialogue on the moral dimensions of a principal’s work, and to illuminate the challenges and contradictions inherent in the role. The results of this study contrast with Stengel and Tom (2006) in that the principal and the people interacting with her were able to articulate the moral aspects of schooling. They could recognize the moral significance of events, and when asked to elaborate, could generally name or describe the virtues that were expressed in their interactions with the principal. The moral elements of daily situations, as well as the moral dimensions of the principal’s work were, for the most part, visible and relevant to the participants.
There is a need for further academic research on moral and ethical school leadership. Research could be conducted in several elementary schools or several secondary schools, serving as a way to contrast and compare how different principals conceptualize and deal with the moral aspects of their work. The scope of my study with one investigator and five months of field work at one site did not allow for such a comparison. Research could be also conducted in one secondary school and participants could be observed and interviewed in a similar fashion to this study. Research could also be carried out in both elementary and secondary schools. The purpose could be to investigate how elementary and secondary principals are similar and how they are different in how they conceptualize and deal with the ethical components of their work. Such a study might spark discussion between principals in both the elementary and the secondary panels, allowing them to share and reflect on ethical situations in their practice.

When I ask Christine what supports she has had to assist her with difficult or perplexing ethical situations, she explains that she relies on her superintendent and various principal colleagues. She discloses that for the first year of her principalship, she sought the daily advice of William, who was the principal she worked with when she was a vice principal. It cannot be assumed that all principals can avail themselves of the consistent guidance of a mentor as Christine did. Future studies might begin a discussion about the need and the value of having supports in place for principals struggling with the moral ambiguities of their work. According to Cranston et al. (2006) there is room for more research. They remark, “What most of the literature has been silent on, however, is the identification of any really effective support mechanisms for principals in resolving ethical dilemmas” (p. 115). Principals struggling to resolve ethical quandaries may find it helpful to know how to access supports by reading about what other principals have done in similar circumstances. Research conducted in the field on what, if any, supports are available to principals, might help to sustain them in their efforts to align their words, actions and decisions with a moral vision and to build an ethical school community.

In the final interview, I ask Christine: “How has your involvement in my research study informed your professional learning? Were there any particular insights you gained?” She replies,

I am very happy that it gave me the opportunity to really look at how I am as a leader and as an educator and as a person. I think that we are often so busy that we don't very often get an
opportunity to really think about what we do every day and how we interact with others so it's a gift really to be able to do that, really it is, because I think every principal has a goal. Every principal has a vision of how they would like to be, but once we get here we’re hitting the ground running every day. Even in the night time we’re like, “Oh God I should've done this, I should have done that.” It’s not the same as thinking about, talking about what we do, what we say, what we think, our interactions, and I’ve had to do that every day, which is really amazing. (interview 9)

Christine is speaking about the importance of deep and sustained reflection that she believes was afforded to her as the main participant in this study. The opportunity to deeply reflect, in her view, helped her develop a better understanding of herself in a professional and personal sense. Christine believes that being able to reflect on her words, actions, thoughts and interactions allowed her to gain a level of self-awareness that would otherwise be hard to obtain due to the fast-paced nature of her work. While it is possible that Christine’s comments reveal the effects of being involved in a research study for a prolonged period of time, a limitation known as prolonged engagement (Cohen et al., 2007; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006), her statements draw attention to the possible benefits of on-going or sustained reflection for principals. Sustained reflection may allow principals to develop greater awareness of how they conceptualize their practice in ethical terms, and how their prior professional and life experiences influence the way they deal with ethical situations. This awareness may enable principals to more confidently approach ethical situations, particularly those that are highly ambiguous, and make decisions that are informed by careful consideration of ethical virtues and moral values. Literature supports the need for principals to reflect on their life experiences, and to use their wisdom and knowledge to inform the ethical challenges and decisions they confront daily (Duignan, 2006; Havard, 2014; Heslep, 1997; Rebore, 2014; Sergiovanni, 2001b). More research and discussion on how reflection can serve as a tool of support for principals may serve as a way to extend the discoveries made in this study and the insights gleaned in the literature to date.

Christine explains that she has noticed a change in the “environment” of the school which has become “just a little gentler” since the study began. She believes that staff members are “noticing” and “paying attention” to colleagues who “go out of their way” for others. She states, “I think it's inevitable human nature [to think] ‘How am I my making decisions? Am I [emphasis in original] making decisions in an ethical way, a moral way? How am I treating people?’”
Christine’s observations indicate that one of the effects of conducting research in the school was that it cultivated ethicality in the interactions between staff members. She is suggesting that the research study encouraged staff members to reflect on their decisions and actions, and in this sense, raised their moral awareness. Future case study research that examines how reflection and discussion of ethical beliefs and practices in the school community can over time change the school environment would be instructive for scholars and practitioners who are continuing to explore ethical school leadership and the process of cultivating ethicality.

The ethics of teaching is relevant to this study, and the connection between the ethics of teaching and the ethics of the principalship is significant. My study uncovered the principal’s prior professional experiences when she was learning to be a teacher, and considered how these experiences shape the moral components of her daily administration. The principal in this study spoke about her experiences in the faculty of education, particularly with respect to what she learned about the ethics of teaching in her practicums. She draws connections between how she learned to approach ethical situations as a teacher candidate, and how she later approached ethical situations in her teaching practice. The principal speaks about how she still applies the learning she gained as a teacher candidate when faced with complex situations in her principal practice. With an understanding that principals come to their position after having taught for many years, future research that focuses on what guidance teachers can be offered in confronting and dealing with ethical issues in the classroom and in the school, would prove beneficial. Such guidance could help teachers gain an awareness of and the ability to articulate and deal with ethical issues. Teachers who then become principals could draw on this professional learning to assist them in their practice.

My study entailed observations of interactions between the principal and the teachers where teachers sought advice for how to program according to the needs of their students, particularly students with specific learning and behavioural challenges. The principal’s knowledge of special education, together with her familiarity with many of the students, provided much needed guidance to teachers who were sometimes overwhelmed by the demands of the classroom. Future research could explore the importance of the principal’s role in helping teachers build caring and supportive relationships with their students, so that their students can thrive in their learning. Interviews and informal discussions with the principal revealed not only her awareness of being a role model, but also her efforts to have teachers appreciate the influence that their
words and actions have on their students. The principal modelled responses to students in distress. Her words and actions were observed by teachers, and may have had some influence on how they responded to students in similar situations. Future studies could examine how principals can help teachers to become more aware of the moral influence that their words and actions have on students, and how their interactions with students can over time affect the moral tone or climate in the school.

My study considered the role of dialogue, and its significance in the principal’s practice. Dialogue appeared to be central in the principal’s interactions with students, teachers, parents and community members. Teachers in my study spoke about the importance of dialoging with colleagues, and with the principal on ethical matters. They also spoke about the significance of dialoguing with the principal and with colleagues in an open forum, such as in a staff meeting, and how they thought this practice affected the moral tone or climate of the school. The principal also expressed a need to reach out to teachers and engage them in dialogue, particularly when that teacher might be struggling with an ethical issue, and might be feeling the weight or burden of dealing with it alone. Studies that focus on how principals and teachers can engage each other in discussions about ethical issues, in an effort to establish shared ownership of those issues, could glean interesting insights into how the principal and the teacher can work together to build an ethical school. Further qualitative studies might glean important discoveries about the ethical principal, the ethical teacher, and the ethical school, that can inform discussion among practitioners, academics and researchers alike. Further questions that might be considered as a part of these studies are as follows: *How can principals and teachers work together to cultivate a moral climate in the school? What can teachers do to influence a moral climate within the school community in the absence of strong ethical leadership? How can teachers who aspire to be principals cultivate ethical leadership qualities in their teaching years to prepare them to lead ethically? What role can school leaders play in helping teachers, who aspire to be principals, cultivate the ethical knowledge and moral awareness they need that will enable them to lead and sustain ethical schools?*

Principals, teachers, and researchers can make significant contributions to furthering our knowledge about the ethical dimensions of school leadership. Principals can participate in research studies that are conducted in schools. Their participation might help build connections between theoretical concepts and discoveries made in the field. Teachers also have an important
role to play by participating in research that investigates how the moral aspects of their work are connected to the principal’s work. Such research might help to establish crucial connections between literature on the ethical principal and literature on the ethical teacher. Lastly, researchers can make significant contributions by conducting studies with principals and teachers together in their schools. These studies, grounded in practice, may be helpful to practitioners who are trying to make connections between theory and practice. Guideposts for the future are offered by principals, teachers and researchers who inform our understanding of how to build and sustain ethical schools.

While studies have been conducted on the ethical teacher that provide empirical depth, generally, there have been few research studies investigating moral and ethical leadership and the principal’s practice. This work is one of only several in-depth case studies of a principal over many months. More studies are needed to corroborate or build upon the findings of this research. Studies such as mine that involve a sustained presence with the research subject over an extended period of time require a certain amount of ethical care and sensitivity on the part of the researcher. It is necessary to build a level of trust that enables the principal to be vulnerable, as she discusses the reasons for her actions and decisions on an almost daily basis. The principal must be willing to be observed in situations that are ambiguous, emotionally charged, and contain challenges that have not been previously confronted. A certain amount of trust is required from all participants, but particularly from the main participant. Trust allows the main participant to talk openly about her practice, and the ethical concerns that she carries with her, as she strives to lead ethically. Courage is necessary in order to be observed over an extended period of time, and to be asked why you say specific expressions and engage in certain actions. It also requires courage to be asked about your decisions, actions, and policies, and to reflect on them in an honest manner. Being willing to be open to reflection and scrutiny, even the scrutiny that comes from self-reflection, as you deliberate on your practice, is necessary in making the research experience rich and relevant to understanding the ethical principal.

7.4 A Final Thought from Christine

It has been noted throughout the thesis that Christine maintains her sense of humour, despite the challenges and stresses inherent in the role. There were many moments during the field work that
she lightened situations with laughter. I ask Christine why it is important for her to have a sense of humour. She explains,

If you take yourself and this job too seriously you're really going to get bogged down and I think that if you feel that way, it comes that way. If you lose the joy in it you miss out on so many opportunities for watching the kids and interacting with staff members and taking the time to go to their class . . . stop and look at the art along the way, go out in the yard, because you can definitely get caught up in all of the stress. (interview 8)

In a moment of reflection, Christine states,

I feel like everything is so amazing in my life. I have the best job in the world. . . . Every single day we all meet challenges. We have to make hard decisions. Sometimes they’re the wrong ones but in the end, you just think, “Okay. I’m making the best choices I can and I’m going to live with the consequences.” But I think overall when I look at my life I just think, “It’s really good,” and I just feel so privileged to be able to come to this job every day; I really do. (interview 4)
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Appendix A

To be distributed on OISE/University of Toronto letterhead

Information Letter and Consent Form for Other Participants

_______________________________, 2014

Dear ________________________________.

My name is Kelly Manning and I am a Ph.D. candidate studying in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). I am also a vice principal in the school board and I am currently on leave to complete my studies. I am presently conducting a research study entitled “Moral and Ethical Leadership: One Principal’s Beliefs and Practices” which is being supervised by a committee comprised of Dr. Elizabeth Campbell (thesis supervisor), Dr. Dennis Thiessen and Dr. Kathy Broad. Through the examination of a case study of one principal, this research will address the ways that one school leader deals with the moral and ethical issues and complexities of her practice. It will further consider the extent of her awareness of such issues as being moral and ethical in nature.

Using interview and observation methods, this study seeks to understand how the principal envisions her work, in an ethical sense, in relation to teachers, students, parents, school staff, school board staff and community members. In addition to interviews and observations, my research will incorporate document analysis. The information gathered in the interviews, observations and documents will be kept completely confidential and any limits to confidentiality (e.g. Duty to Report, Section 72 of the Child and Family Services Act) will be explained. Your name will never be released and where names are needed, pseudonyms will be used.

Documents used in my study and obtained with the principal’s permission may include, but are not limited to: curriculum guides, handbooks, minutes of meetings and memos. These documents may provide insight into the ethical aspects of situations that confront the principal in her daily work. Written permission to photocopy non-public documents will be obtained by
the person who owns the document before they are included in the final report of my study. In
the unlikely event that the document is copyrighted material, I will photocopy it for my
exclusive use for document analysis, but will not reproduce it in my written dissertation
without securing appropriate permission from the publisher.

Every possible precaution will be taken to protect your identity. You will be asked to
never disclose any aspects of interviews or meetings that you participate in as part of the study
with other participants or with anyone outside of the research and to not talk about the study
with colleagues or parents. These measures will help to ensure not only your privacy but the
principal’s privacy as well. There is some likelihood that the principal may come to understand
that you are participating in the study however all reasonable precautions will be taken to
protect your identity.

Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time,
decline to answer any question, and decline to participate in any part of the study, all without
negative consequences.

Field notes that contain your comments will not be shared with anyone except members
of my supervisory committee. If you do not want me to take field notes during a specific
meeting that you have with the principal, you have the right to make this request by speaking to
me privately just before the meeting. Alternatively, you can speak to me privately just after the
meeting, at which point I will destroy the part of my field notes that refer to your participation
for that meeting.

This study has gone through ethical review and has been approved by both the school
board and the University of Toronto. Your principal has also given me permission to conduct
research at your school. Compensation for your participation will be in the form of a small gift
card that can be used in the school as a token of my appreciation. If you agree to participate in
the study, the following procedures and expectations are involved:

- I would observe you interacting with the principal and I would take field notes based on my
  observation. The observation would not disrupt the regular flow of your professional activities.
- In situations that require sensitivity, I will seek your verbal consent to allow me to be present
during the discussion and to take notes.
- You would participate in one or two individual interviews of approximately 60-90 minutes each. The timing of the interviews would be negotiated with you.

- I would welcome access to documents (e.g. emails, memos, newsletters) that reflect your interactions with the principal in relation to the ethical components of her work.

Raw data will be kept in a safe and secure location and will be accessed only by myself and by members of my supervisory committee. Interviews will be tape-recorded and audiotapes will be transcribed as soon as possible following the interview. The audiotapes will be destroyed at the completion of the study. All other raw data from the study, including transcripts, field notes and documents will be destroyed following a maximum of five years after the completion of my doctoral degree. The information gathered in the study may be used in my doctoral dissertation and possibly in published works. A summary of the research results will be offered upon request.

Thank you very much for considering my request. I believe it is a very worthwhile research project that will hopefully provide you with a rich professional experience. Your participation in this study will help to contribute to the knowledge base of school leadership, teaching practice and practitioner/teacher education. Your participation will assist in deepening the understanding of the extent to which principals are aware of issues as being moral and ethical in nature and the extent to which they are prepared to deal with them. I am confident that this study will invite practitioners and scholars alike to continue the discourse of how school leaders conceive of their practice in moral and ethical terms.

Should you have any questions about your rights as a participant please contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273. You can also contact Dr. Elizabeth Campbell at ecampbell@oise.utoronto.ca or 416-978-0232. I can be reached at kelly.manning@tcdsb.org or 416-416-799-8486.

Informed Consent

I have read the above letter from Kelly Manning, and I understand the expectations of my involvement in the research, the risks, and benefits. I understand that interview data obtained on audiotape may be used in Kelly Manning’s doctoral dissertation and possibly in published
works. I understand that I have the right to withdraw my participation in the study at any time without explanation or negative consequence to myself.

☐ I agree to participate in the research

_________________________________
Name (Please Print)

_________________________________                          ___________________________
Signature                          Date

☐ I do NOT agree to participate in the research

_________________________________
Name (Please Print)

_________________________________                          ___________________________
Signature                          Date

I understand that information obtained on audiotape during interviews may be used in Kelly Manning’s doctoral dissertation and possibly in published works. I understand that the audiotapes will be transcribed as soon as possible following the interview and will be destroyed immediately at the completion of the study.

☐ I consent to being tape-recorded

_________________________________
Name (Please Print)
Appendix B

To be distributed on OISE/University of Toronto letterhead

Information Letter and Consent Form for Staff Members and Others who are Not Primary Participants

____________________________, 2014

Dear____________________________.

My name is Kelly Manning and I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). I am also a vice principal in the school board and I am currently on leave to complete my studies. I will be conducting a research study in your school entitled “Moral and Ethical Leadership: One Principal’s Beliefs and Practices” which is being supervised by a committee comprised of Dr. Elizabeth Campbell (thesis supervisor), Dr. Dennis Thiessen and Dr. Kathy Broad. I will be conducting the research three days per week for five consecutive months, beginning in October 2014. Through the examination of a case study of one principal, this research will address the ways that one school leader deals with the moral and ethical issues and complexities of her practice. It will further consider the extent of her awareness of such issues as being moral and ethical in nature.

The purpose of the study is to uncover how one elementary school principal conceptualizes her practice in ethical terms and to understand the kinds of situations she encounters that involve decisions and actions of an ethical nature. The study seeks to determine what formal and informal professional training and professional development opportunities the principal has received in dealing with these situations and their effectiveness. This research is not intended to evaluate the principal in any way but rather to contribute to an overall understanding of how to educate teachers and principals in ethical issues in education.

Your principal has kindly agreed to be the subject of this case study in the hope that it will advance understanding of how to better prepare teachers and principals to navigate ethical
issues in an educational environment. This study has gone through ethical review and has been approved by both the school board and the University of Toronto.

While I am observing the principal, there may be spontaneous moments when you interact with her such as in conversations in the hallways, in the classrooms, or in her office. I am seeking your written consent to observe these moments and to take field notes to record these interactions. Your consent would include an understanding that if there is a specific situation that you do not want me to observe, then you have the right to verbally indicate that to me at the moment of interaction and I will honor your request. I will not make judgments about you, as I am interested only in wider descriptions and interpretations of the principal’s daily responsibilities and practices.

You will be asked to not disclose to each other what happened during these spontaneous interactions and to refrain from talking about the study with each other and with anyone outside of the research. These procedures are in place to protect everyone’s privacy, including the principal’s privacy.

The information gathered in the observations will be kept completely confidential and any limits to confidentiality (e.g. Duty to Report, Section 72 of the Child and Family Services Act) will be explained. Your name will never be released and where names are needed, pseudonyms will be used.

Should you have any questions about your rights as a participant please contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273. You can also contact Dr. Elizabeth Campbell at ecampbell@oise.utoronto.ca or 416-978-0232. I can be reached at kelly.manning@tdsb.org or 416-416-799-8486.

Thank you. I look forward to conducting this research study in your school.
Informed Consent

I have read the above letter from Kelly Manning. I understand that I may be observed during spontaneous interactions with the principal and that field notes may be taken to record such interactions. I also understand that I have the right to verbally request that I do not want to be observed or to have field notes taken about a specific situation at the moment of the interaction and that my request will be honored.

☐ I agree to be observed during spontaneous interactions with the principal and to have field notes taken to record such interactions. I understand that I have the right to verbally request that I do not want to be observed or to have field notes taken about a specific situation at the moment of interaction and that my request will be honored.

_________________________________
Name (Please Print)

_________________________________                          ___________________________
Signature                          Date

☐ I do NOT agree to be observed during spontaneous interactions with the principal and to have field notes taken to record such interactions.

_________________________________
Name (Please Print)

_________________________________                          ___________________________
Signature                          Date
Appendix C

PROTOCOL REFERENCE # 30538

September 15, 2014

Dr. Elizabeth Campbell
DEPT OF CURRICULUM, TEACHING & LEARNING
OISE/UT

Ms. Kelly Manning
DEPT OF CURRICULUM, TEACHING & LEARNING
OISE/UT

Dear Dr. Campbell and Ms. Kelly Manning,

Re: Your research protocol entitled, “One principal's moral and ethical orientation to practice”

ETHICS APPROVAL

Original Approval Date: September 15, 2014
Expiry Date: September 14, 2015
Continuing Review Level: 1

We are writing to advise you that the Social Sciences, Humanities, and Education Research Ethics Board (REB) has granted approval to the above-named research protocol under the REB’s delegated review process. Your protocol has been approved for a period of one year and ongoing research under this protocol must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events in the research should be reported to the Office of Research Ethics as soon as possible.

Please ensure that you submit an Annual Renewal Form or a Study Completion Report 15 to 30 days prior to the expiry date of your current ethics approval. Note that annual renewals for studies cannot be accepted more than 30 days prior to the date of expiry.

If your research is funded by a third party, please contact the assigned Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research.

Yours sincerely,

Dean Sharpe

Sarah Wakefield, Ph.D.
REB Chair

REB Manager

OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS
McMurrich Building, 12 Queen's Park Crescent West, 2nd Floor, Toronto, ON M5S 1S8 Canada
Tel: +1 416 946-3273 • Fax: +1 416 946-5763 • ethics.review@utoronto.ca • http://www.research.utoronto.ca/for-researchers-administrators/ethics/
Appendix D

To be distributed on OISE/University of Toronto letterhead

Information Letter and Consent Form for Main Participant

October 20, 2014
Dear Christine:

I am presently conducting a research study entitled Moral and Ethical Leadership: One Principal’s Beliefs and Practices which is being supervised by a committee comprised of Dr. Elizabeth Campbell (thesis supervisor), Dr. Dennis Thiessen and Dr. Kathy Broad. Through the examination of a case study of one principal, this research will address the ways that you deal with the moral and ethical issues and complexities of your daily practice. It will further consider the extent of your awareness of such issues as being moral and ethical in nature.

Using interview and observation methods, this study seeks to understand how you envision your work, in an ethical sense, in relation to teachers, students, parents, school staff, school board staff and community members. In addition to interviews and observations, my research will incorporate document analysis. The information gathered in the interviews, observations and documents will be kept completely confidential and any limits to confidentiality (e.g. Duty to Report, Section 72 of the Child and Family Services Act) will be explained. Your name will never be released and where names are needed, pseudonyms will be used.

Documents used in my study and obtained with permission may include, but are not limited to: curriculum guides, handbooks, minutes of meetings and memos. These documents may provide insight into the ethical aspects of situations that confront you in your daily work. Permission to photocopy non-public documents will be obtained with the written permission of the person who owns the document before they are included in the final report of my study. In
the unlikely event that the document is copyrighted material, I will photocopy it for my exclusive use for document analysis, but will not reproduce it in my written dissertation without securing appropriate permission from the publisher.

The purpose of the study is to uncover how you conceptualize your professional practice in ethical terms and to understand the kinds of situations you encounter that may involve decisions and actions of an ethical nature. The study seeks to determine what formal and informal professional training and professional development opportunities principals have received in dealing with these situations and their level of effectiveness. This research is not intended to evaluate your practice in any way but rather to contribute to an overall understanding of how to educate teachers and principals in ethical issues in education. The intention of this study is to advance understanding of how to better prepare teachers and principals to navigate ethical issues in an educational environment.

While every possible precaution will be taken to protect your identity, it is highly likely that colleagues within your school, the school board and other interested parties may be able to uncover your identity and the identity of the school. Participants will be asked to not disclose aspects of their interviews or meetings with each other or with anyone outside of the research and to not talk about the study with their colleagues. These precautions will help to ensure not only your privacy but also the privacy of the school. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time, decline to answer any question, and decline to participate in any part of the study, all without negative consequences.

This study has gone through ethical review and has been approved by both the school board and the University of Toronto. Other participants will be made aware that you have given me permission to conduct research at your school. Compensation for your participation will be in the form of a small gift for your professional use in the school and a small cash donation to the
school to be used at your discretion. With your permission, I would also like to offer the staff food and refreshments from time to time, as an expression of my appreciation. I would also be happy to assist with minor office tasks as needed, such as placing mail in staff mailboxes and delivering supplies to classrooms. If you agree to participate in the study, the following procedures and expectations are involved:

- I would observe you three full days a week in your daily interactions with teachers, parents, school and board staff and community members and I would take field notes based on my observation. I will attend most meetings with you during those three days. The observations will not disrupt the regular flow of your professional activities. In situations that require sensitivity, I would seek your verbal consent to allow me to be present during the discussion and to take notes.

- You would participate in a series of interviews of approximately 60-90 minutes each. The timing of the interviews would be negotiated with you.

- I would welcome access to documents (e.g. emails, memos, newsletters) that reflect your interactions with others in relation to the ethical components of your work.

Raw data will be kept in a safe and secure location and will be accessed only by myself and by members of my supervisory committee. Interviews will be tape-recorded and audiotapes will be transcribed as soon as possible following the interview. The audiotapes will be destroyed at the completion of the study. All other raw data from the study, including transcripts, field notes and documents will be destroyed following a maximum of five years after the completion of my doctoral degree. The information gathered in the study may be used in my doctoral dissertation and possibly in published works. A summary of the research results will be offered upon request.

Thank you very much for considering my request. I believe it is a very worthwhile research project that will hopefully provide you with a rich professional experience. Your participation in
this study will help to contribute to the knowledge base of school leadership, teaching practice and practitioner/teacher education. Your participation will assist in deepening the understanding of the extent to which principals are aware of issues as being moral and ethical in nature and the extent to which they are prepared to deal with them. I am confident that this study will invite practitioners and scholars alike to continue the discourse of how school leaders conceive of their practice in moral and ethical terms.

Should you have any questions about your rights as a participant please contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273. You can also contact Dr. Elizabeth Campbell at ecampbell@oise.utoronto.ca, or 416-978-0232. I can be reached at kelly.manning@tcdsb.org or 416-416-799-8486.

Informed Consent

I have read the above letter from Kelly Manning, and I understand the expectations of my involvement in the research, the risks, and benefits. I understand that interview data obtained on audiotape may be used in Kelly Manning’s doctoral dissertation and possibly in published works. I understand that I have the right to withdraw my participation in the study at any time without explanation or negative consequence to myself.

☐ I agree to participate in the research

______________________________
Name (Please Print)

______________________________  _____________________________
☐ I do NOT agree to participate in the research

______________________________
Name (Please Print)

______________________________ ____________________________
Signature Date

I understand that information obtained on audiotape during interviews may be used in Kelly Manning’s doctoral dissertation and possibly in published works. I understand that the audiotapes will be transcribed as soon as possible following the interview and will be destroyed at the completion of the study.

☐ I consent to being tape-recorded

______________________________
Name (Please Print)

______________________________ _________________________________
Signature Date

☐ I do NOT consent to being tape-recorded

______________________________
Name (Please Print)
Appendix E

To be distributed on OISE/University of Toronto letterhead

Letter to Parent/Guardian

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

I would like to let you know about a project between St Abby School and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). Kelly Manning, a candidate for a Doctoral Degree in Education, will be working with me in the completion of her doctoral thesis.

Kelly’s research study, entitled *Moral and Ethical Leadership: One Principal’s Beliefs and Practices*, will address the ways that a school leader deals with the moral and ethical issues and complexities of her daily practice; it will further consider the extent of the principal’s awareness of such issues as being moral and ethical in nature.

Kelly’s research study is concerned with a principal’s practice and I will be the main focus of the study. Over the duration of approximately five consecutive months for three whole days per week, Kelly will spend time with me, observing my interactions with staff, students, parents and community members. She is in the school to observe me therefore her work is not with the children in the school. Her study will not affect classes or disrupt, in any way, the children’s academic learning or the regular programs and activities in the school. Kelly may, from time to time, be available to act as a volunteer to assist with various small tasks and duties in the school as needed.

All of the research is carried out under the auspices of the University of Toronto’s Office of Research Ethics. Confidentiality and privacy will be sustained for the school, students, staff, parents and community members.

Kelly will be introduced to the children as a researcher from the University of Toronto who is seeking to better understand the moral and ethical complexities of a principal’s practice. She is not in the school to observe the children but rather to observe me in my daily work.

Thank you for your support of this important research study. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Christine Bray

Principal
Appendix F

Correspondence Chart of Potential Other Participants

Staff Members (Pseudonyms)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Potential Participant</th>
<th>Role and Grade</th>
<th>Email Sent to Potential Participant Yes/No/Date</th>
<th>Email Response from Potential Participant Date</th>
<th>Meeting Date &amp; Time</th>
<th>Consent Form Signed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>Teacher Gr. 5</td>
<td>Yes/Nov #</td>
<td>Yes/Verbal/ Nov #</td>
<td>Tues Nov # 11:30</td>
<td>Yes/Granted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Name, First Name</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>Teacher Gr. 8</td>
<td>Yes/Nov #</td>
<td>Yes/Nov #</td>
<td>Tues Nov # 3:15</td>
<td>Yes/Granted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Name, First Name</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>Teacher Gr. 3</td>
<td>Yes/Nov #</td>
<td>Yes/Nov #</td>
<td>Mon Nov # 10:15</td>
<td>Yes/Granted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Name, First Name</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>Educational Assistant (EA)</td>
<td>Yes/Nov #</td>
<td>Yes/Nov #</td>
<td>Wed Nov # 3:00</td>
<td>Yes/Granted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Name, First Name</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>Early Childhood Educator (ECE)</td>
<td>Yes/Nov #</td>
<td>Yes/Nov #</td>
<td>Wed Nov # 1:40</td>
<td>Yes/Granted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Name, First Name</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Community Members & Parents (Pseudonyms)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Potential Participant</th>
<th>Phone # /email address</th>
<th>Role/Grade of Child/Teacher</th>
<th>Email/Phone call to Potential Participant Yes/No Date</th>
<th>Email/Phone Response from Potential Participant Date</th>
<th>Meeting Scheduled Date &amp; Time</th>
<th>Consent Form Signed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>Parent 555-5555</td>
<td>Parent of Child /Gr. #/Teacher A</td>
<td>Met on Nov # (expressed interest &amp; permission to contact again)</td>
<td>Phoned on Nov # Plan to meet on Nov # to sign consent form</td>
<td>Nov # @ 3:00</td>
<td>Yes/Granted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Name, First Name</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>Community Member 444-4444</td>
<td>School Bus Driver</td>
<td>Yes - Phoned on Nov #</td>
<td>Phone - Plan to meet on Nov #</td>
<td>Nov # @ 2:00</td>
<td>Yes/Granted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Name, First Name</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Appendix G

Observation Guide

Focus of the observation is on the principal.

- Use this guide during formal meetings and spontaneous interactions between the principal and the following: teachers, students, parents, board staff, school staff and community members.
- Use this guide during planned special events and programs such as: assemblies, concerts, fundraising events, and school masses.
- Take descriptive running field notes to offer a rich account of the principal’s daily work while concentrating on specific situations that involve moral or ethical elements.
- Take field notes that describe the characteristics of the physical environment including objects that are of artistic, historical, religious, and personal significance.
- This guide will be dynamic and evolving to address the content of participant interviews (e.g. if the principal explains how she would navigate an ethical dilemma, the observation will focus on words, actions, and outcomes that support her claim).

1. Describe the topic/stated purpose of the meeting – what is the meeting about and how is it related to the principal’s work?

2. What resource(s) does the principal access (e.g. board policies, curriculum documents, school code of conduct or school newsletters) to provide her with direction in dealing with ethical issues?

3. Consider how the principal navigates ethical situations (e.g. does she gather information from people involved or does she seek assistance from her peers and her mentors, such as the superintendent)?

4. What language does the principal use during formal and informal interactions with others? For example, does she use words such as caring, compassion, fairness, integrity and honesty?
5. Does the principal make explicit connections to the moral and ethical elements in situations and if so how does she draw these connections?

6. Does the principal make evident her understanding of right/wrong when confronted with an ethical dilemma? If so, how does she make it evident?

7. How does her understanding of right/wrong appear to influence her decisions and actions?

8. What is the involvement of teachers, students, parents, school staff (secretaries, custodians), school board staff (e.g. superintendents, special education personnel) and community members (e.g. staff at local church, daycare staff) in ethical issues that arise in the school? What input, if any, do they have in resolving these issues?

9. Does the principal make clear her intentions in situations that are morally ambiguous? If so, how does she do this? What challenges, if any, does she have in translating her intentions into actions?

10. What does the principal say and do that reveals her understanding of the ethical components of her work in relation to the following: teacher, student, parent, school staff (e.g. secretaries), school board staff (e.g. superintendents), and community members (local church)? Are her words and actions direct or indirect? Are they official or unofficial?

11. Does the principal rely on any training, formal or informal, to assist her with ethical issues? How is this made evident?

12. Does the principal rely on any professional development opportunities, formal or informal, to assist her with ethical issues? How is this made evident?

13. What wider personal experiences, if any, does the principal talk about when she is confronted with an ethical situation? How does she appear to draw on these experiences in resolving an ethical situation?
Appendix H

Interview Guide Principal

- Semistructured interviews with open-ended questions for maximum flexibility.
- Interviews will be guided by situations observed in the school so the content of each interview may be quite different.
- Therefore, additional interview protocols will be created during fieldwork as needed.
- Nevertheless, the main protocol contains foundational questions about how the principal deals with the moral and ethical issues and complexities in her practice and the extent of her awareness of these issues as being moral and ethical in nature.
- The participant will be asked to discuss her own perspectives on broad areas and to offer specific examples from her own experiences to reveal these perspectives.
- Documents such as curriculum guides, newsletters and memos will be gathered and used as a source of discussion during the interview:

1. If you were to offer a definition of morals and ethics, what would it be?

2. If you were to offer a definition of a moral/ethical principal, what would it be?

3. What dimensions of your work hold moral/ethical relevance? Explain.

4. What challenges in your work make it difficult to align your decisions with your definition of a moral/ethical principal?

5. How do you envision your practice, in an ethical sense, in relation to the following: teachers, students, parents, school staff (e.g. secretaries), board staff (e.g. superintendents), and community members (e.g. daycare staff)?

6. As a principal in a Catholic elementary school, how do you view your role in a moral/ethical sense?
7. How do you think your view would be different if you were a principal in a school without a religious mandate?

8. Describe an experience that you have had as an administrator (principal or vice-principal) where you had to make a moral/ethical choice. What was the most challenging aspect of the experience? Why?

9. Did you feel satisfied with the outcome of this experience? Why/Why not?

10. Describe an experience that you have had as a principal or vice-principal where you had to make a moral/ethical choice. What was the most challenging aspect of the experience? Why?

11. Did you feel satisfied with the outcome of this experience? Why/Why not?

12. Who were your mentors when you were a vice-principal? A teacher? Have they influenced the way you understand and navigate ethical situations in your practice? Explain.

13. Who are your mentors now? Do they influence the way you understand and navigate ethical situations in your practice? Explain.

14. What formal professional development opportunities, if any, have you experienced in your role as an administrator, that have assisted you in navigating the moral complexities of your practice? Consider the following: a) inservices b) conferences c) meetings d) other

15. How helpful have these formal professional development opportunities been in assisting you to deal with the ethical complexities of your practice? Explain.

16. What informal professional development opportunities, if any, have you experienced in your role as an administrator, that have assisted you in navigating the moral complexities of your practice? Consider the following: a) informal discussions with your colleagues b) informal mentoring c) other

17. How helpful have these informal professional development opportunities been in assisting you to deal with the ethical complexities of your practice? Explain.
18. What kind of support or assistance have your colleagues offered to you in working through a moral/ethical situation? Was it helpful? Explain.

19. What kind of support or assistance has your superintendent offered to you in working through a moral/ethical situation? Was it helpful? Explain.

20. What kind of support or assistance has your professional association offered you in working through a moral/ethical situation? Was it helpful? Explain.
Appendix I

Interview Guide Other Participants

- Semistructured interviews with open-ended questions for maximum flexibility.
- Interviews will be guided by situations observed in the school so the content of each interview may be quite different for each participant who will be asked to comment on the situation.
- Therefore, additional interview protocols will be created during fieldwork as needed.
- Nevertheless, the main protocol contains foundational questions about how the principal deals with the moral and ethical issues and complexities in her practice and the extent of her awareness of these issues as being moral and ethical in nature.
- Participants will be asked to discuss their own perspectives on broad areas and to offer specific examples from their own experiences to reveal these perspectives.
- Documents such as curriculum guides, newsletters and memos will be gathered and used as a source of discussion during the interview where applicable.

1. How many years have you been working in this school?
2. How many years have you been working with the principal?
3. Describe your role in the school community.
4. What dimensions of your role connect to the principal’s work? Explain.
5. If you were to offer a definition of morals and ethics, what would it be?
6. If you were to offer a definition of a moral/ethical principal, what would it be?
7. Would your definition of a moral/ethical principal be the same if you were working in a school without a religious mandate (e.g. public school)? If yes, why? If no, why not?
8. In your view what are the principal’s roles and responsibilities in a moral/ethical sense in relation to your work in the school? Explain.
9. If you were to list three to five characteristics that describe the principal, what would they be? How do you know that she has these characteristics?

10. Describe a situation that involved you, where the principal had to make an ethical decision. What did you observe about the principal in the process of making the decision? (Did the principal appear to have any ethical dilemma(s) as a result of the situation and the decision she had to make?)

11. What action(s), if any, did you or the principal take as a result of this decision? Did you feel that the incident was resolved? Explain.

12. How would you compare the principal’s approach to her work in a moral/ethical sense with the approach taken by other principals you have worked with? Explain.

13. Is there anything else you would like to say? THANK YOU!
## Appendix J

Participant / Role Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>Superintendent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry</td>
<td>Vice Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brook</td>
<td>Vice Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miranda</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheena</td>
<td>Kindergarten Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorothy</td>
<td>Grade One Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courtney</td>
<td>Grade Two Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>Grade Three Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levy</td>
<td>Grade Four Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dakota</td>
<td>Grade Five Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Grade Six Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerard</td>
<td>Grade Seven Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunter</td>
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<td>Frances</td>
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<td>French Teacher</td>
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<td>Quinn</td>
<td>Physical Education Teacher</td>
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<td>Guidance Teacher</td>
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<td>Child &amp; Youth Worker (CYW)</td>
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<td>Olivia</td>
<td>Early Childhood Educator (ECE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>Educational Assistant (EA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>Educational Assistant (EA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charlie</td>
<td>Custodian</td>
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<td>Ms. Pine</td>
<td>Lunchtime Supervisor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Father Peter</td>
<td>Priest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skyler</td>
<td>Bus driver</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs. Rock</td>
<td>Parent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs. Tune</td>
<td>Parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Maple</td>
<td>Parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tatum</td>
<td>Administrator (Colleague)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logan</td>
<td>Board Resource Teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix K

List of Most Prevalent Codes

Nodes

- Support
- Compassion
- Accountability
- Awareness
- Care
- Respect
- BEST INTERESTS of the child
- Decision-Making
- Fairness
- Honesty
- Relationships
- Catholicity
- Equity
- Trust
- Empathy
- Dignity
- Ethical School
- Positive & Optimistic
- Communication
- Courage
- Diligence