

Programs in educational leadership ought to include processes to develop the moral imagination, as well as courses which offer the theoretical and practical underpinnings of educational leadership. Without the development and use of the moral imagination, future educational leaders lack a vital resource in sorting out their personal and institutional moral experience.

Educational Leadership and the Development of the Moral Imagination

by Robert Craig

This article will include four parts: (1) A description of the functioning and use of the moral imagination; (2) this will be followed by a "Story" written by an aspiring educational leader; (3) the "Story" will be reflected on using the model of the functioning of the moral imagination; (4) and, finally, I will make suggestions and recommendations on incorporating this process in programs of educational leadership.

The Moral Imagination

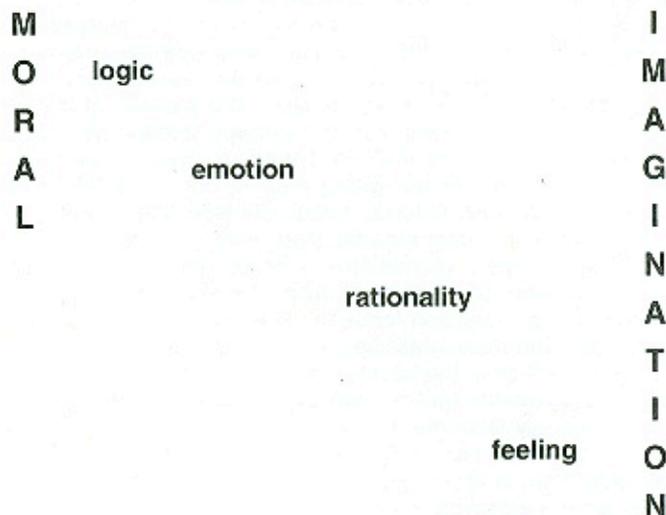
Kohlberg (1981) has argued that moral growth is dependent on cognitive development. The supplying of "good reasons," then, becomes the sine qua non of numerous theories and practices of moral development (Lewis, 1990). In fact, Kohlberg (1981) goes as far as to assert that "... the presence of strong emotion in no way reduces the cognitive component of moral judgment" (p. 44). If this were the case, human feelings and imagination would have no place in moral decision making.

In my experience, highly rational and logical models of administrative decision making have been popular in recent history. I, for one, do not want to discount logic and reason. The alternative, being illogical and unreasonable, is unacceptable. What I want to demonstrate, though, is that the moral imagination (which is one aspect of human imagination and is a specialized aspect as its content is moral and ethical) complements logic and rationality (Craig, 1992) I want to argue that moral decision making, which ought to be one aspect of administrative decisions, is a holistic process which includes the use of reason, affectivity, and imagination. A diagram follows.

Evaluation

The moral imagination, then, consists of three specific, yet interrelated, functions (Ricoeur, 1977). The first function is the ability to imaginatively reconstruct events, situations, individu-

Diagram 1



als, circumstances, and so on within a moral dilemma. The second is the ability, partly rational and partly imaginal, to "discover" a moral principle(s) imbedded within the moral dilemma. This is the exact opposite of a purely deductive, logical approach by which the moral principle(s) is "put into" a "fitted into" the moral dilemma from above, as it were (Jacobs, 1989). A deductive approach leaves little room for the moral imagination; and it tends to become mechanistic, legalistic, and static (Craig, 1991).

According to Ricoeur (1977), the third function of the moral imagination, partly affective, rational, and imaginal, is the making of the moral decision. Ricoeur (1974) notes that moral decision making requires a "playfulness" by which individuals free themselves to be able to entertain various *symbolic* meanings as they *interact with* the moral dilemma. This "entertaining" requires an "energy" (psychic and affective) by which the symbolic meaning leads to moral commitment. The moral commitment, usually, leads to moral action.

I will, then, share a "Story" written by an aspiring educational leader. The "Story" is a midterm assignment in one of the graduate classes I teach. An introduction to Ricoeur's thought is presented, so the students probably are influenced by Ricoeur's theory of the moral imagination in writing the midterm assignment. In what follows, the names and some of the other specifics have been changed to respect confidentiality.

Gary's Story

I am an assistant principal of a large, rather affluent suburban middle school. I was very alarmed by the staff evaluations of myself last year, as those who reported to me indicated they viewed my decision making as very conservative. In fact, many claimed I would rather be indecisive than "rock the boat." Although deep down inside I was conscious of the way the teachers viewed my decision making, the extent of their criticism shocked and hurt me.

I thought it might be beneficial (in light of what we have been discussing in class regarding the moral imagination) to begin to imaginatively recollect scenarios in which my indecisiveness was evident. This way I could get a better handle of their criticism. Perhaps I could put a more precise name on the indecisiveness, own it and heal some of my hurt. Perhaps, also, this could be a vehicle for changing, for being more decisive.

One incident, which at the time seemed trivial, came to mind. The school has a contract with a soft drink vendor so that the school gets one-half of the profit from the machines. I imaginatively recollected various "power blocks" within the school, especially the math and reading departments, lobbying for the money. I likewise relived my feelings of inadequacy in

Robert Craig, Professor, University of Houston

making a decision. I thought that the reasons given by both groups regarding the money were good reasons.

Being unable to act, I formed a committee of teachers to make the decision. I consciously tried to include teachers from the math and reading departments, as well as teachers from other departments. I fully realize and felt my sense of inadequacy and indecisiveness. Yet, I felt outrage at the unjust accusations teachers were making. I tried my best to delegate authority, perhaps for the wrong reason; but I was following sound administrative practice. Imaginatively reflecting on this one episode made me realize the teachers were correct in their criticism regarding my (sometimes) indecisiveness. But, it was unjust for them to generalize from the few incidents they related on the evaluation forms to my entire range of administrative decision making abilities. I don't need to be more decisive (and I will be in the future). Yet, the teachers need to have "real" assessments (not to mention knowledge of what I do) and not merely label me. I now can share with them the varieties of decisions I am called upon to make, which (hopefully) will allow them to appreciate the times when I am decisive, the times when delegation is important, and the times when I am indecisive. Then they would be better informed about what I do and this should lead to a better understanding as well as cooperation in the decision making process, when applicable.

Reflection

It is obvious that it helped the assistant principal to imaginatively reconstruct the experience of the proper allocation of the money from the soft drink machine. His association of the "power blocks," and his recognition of the adequacy of the two departments' reasons for deserving the money brought rationality to the imaginative experience. The above imaginative reconstructions of experience, among others, are at the heart of the initial functioning of the moral imagination (Ricoeur, 1977).

Then, as he imaginatively recollects the events, situations, groups involved, etc., he begins to "feel" and to "think" further about his inability to make decisions. He recollects the negative reaction of the teachers to the appointment of a committee to make the decision, as many teachers felt it was his decision to make. He mentions the idea of "unfairness" several times; and realizes that the teachers felt he was not delegating authority appropriately. Rather many teachers felt he was delegating authority because of his indecisiveness. This is Ricoeur's (1977) second function of the moral imagination.

Finally, the symbol of unfairness led him to realize more thoroughly his (sometimes) incompetence in making administrative decisions. In other words, there was some truth to the teachers' evaluation. But, he was also able to realize that the teachers' criticism was unfair when used as a generalization of his administrative style.

Thus, he decided to communicate better with the teachers regarding the large amount of decisions he needs to make during his day-to-day responsibility as an assistant principal. This, he thinks, would help the teachers appreciate the fact that not all delegation is an indication of indecisiveness. But, perhaps more importantly, he would now be able to be honest about his areas of indecisiveness, and take steps to improve his decision making ability. Thus, he will grow as an assistant principal and as a future educational leader. This phase relates to Ricoeur's (1977) third function of the moral imagination.

Thus, through the three-fold functioning of the moral imagination the assistant principal was led from the imaginative reconstruction of experiences of indecisiveness (only one was mentioned) to the decision to be honest about his areas of weakness and to do something about them. Yet, his imaginative reconstruction of the experience began to take on, as it were, a moral perspective, as the symbol of unfairness (a moral concern and principle) stimulated him to further action, namely, meeting with those who report to him.

This is a more holistic manner of making moral decisions, as reason, affect, and imagination means "more complete." But, in being "more complete" the decision is also "more appropriate," as it includes a greater involvement in decision making.

Suggestions and Recommendations

(1) Ethics refers to the way we live our personal and institutional lives, how we interact with others, the way(s) we are involved in institutional settings, and our manner of making decisions. This is clear from reflecting on Gary's "Story." The diversity of ethical values, among others, educational leaders and teachers bring to their school interactions can be a source of strength, especially if they are open to dialogue and the sharing of feelings. This recommendation sounds simplistic, but it is difficult to carry out successfully. Thus, this ethical diversity can be liberating or inhibiting, depending on what educational leaders and teachers, among others, decide to do about and with it.

(2) At present, programs of educational leadership seem to emphasize various models of institutional understanding, interaction, and decision making. What I am arguing is that the development and functioning of the moral imagination offers educational leaders important insights into the moral framework inherent in institutional decision making. The moral imagination uses such vehicles as the imaginative association of experience, stories, metaphors, symbols, and so on.

The moral imagination supplies resources which complement reason and logic, as well as enhance the institutional rationality found in most models of institutional decision making. Thus, programs in educational leadership ought to include processes to develop the moral imagination, as well as courses which offer the theoretical and practical underpinnings of educational leadership. Without the development and use of the moral imagination, future educational leaders lack a vital resource in sorting out their personal and institutional moral experience. The more the moral imagination is developed and is encouraged to interface with personal and institutional moral experience, the richer and better the future educational leader's approach to moral matters will be.

(3) Since the functioning of the moral imagination leads to a heightened awareness of others' value and ethical priorities (Hall, 1986), this awareness ought to increase the quality of discussion at staff meetings regarding ethical issues and conflicts within the school. Individual teachers might disagree with administrative decisions, but at least they would know why (in a moral sense) such decisions were made.

(4) Finally, my experience with future educational leaders' development and use of the moral imagination convinces me that more needs to be done interrelating student's ethical priorities and commitments with leadership preparation (Craig and Norris, 1991). It would be interesting, for instance, to interrelate aspiring educational leaders' modes of decision making and leadership characteristics with their ethical priorities and commitments. The development and use of the moral imagination in programs of leadership preparation is one way to accomplish this. As previously noted, this would give leadership preparation programs a more holistic component.

References

- Craig, R. (1990). Ethics and educational leadership. *Texas Study of Secondary Education Research Journal*, 46, 20-24.
- Craig, R. (1991). Ethics and public school administration: A portrait. *The High School Journal*, 75, 17-22.
- Craig, R. (1992). A portrait and profile of an administrative team: Values and ethical frameworks. *The Saskatchewan Educational Administrator*, 25, 10-19.
- Craig, R., & Norris, C. (1991). Values perception and future educational leaders. *Journal of School Leadership*, 1, 222-234.

Hall, B. (1986). *The Genesis Effect: Personal and Organizational Transformations*. New York: Paulist Press.

Jacobs, J. (1989). *Virtue & Self-Knowledge*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

Kohlberg, L. (1981). *The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice*. New York: Harper & Row.

Lewis, H. (1990). *A Question of Values: Six Ways We Make the Personal Choices That Shape Our Lives*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Norris, C., & Craig, R. (1992). Charismatic leadership: Revisited. *Journal of Research for School Executives*, 2, 23-29.

Ricoeur, P. (1974). *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Ricoeur, P. (1977). *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies in the Creation of Meaning in Language*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.