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## The Moral Reasoning And Moral Decision Making Of Urban High-poverty Elementary School Principals In A Large Urban Southeastern School District

Robert Strenth  
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THE MORAL REASONING AND MORAL DECISION MAKING OF URBAN HIGH-  
POVERTY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN A LARGE URBAN  
SOUTHEASTERN SCHOOL DISTRICT

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the Degree of Doctor of Education  
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## ABSTRACT

The focus of this research was to identify the moral reasoning and moral judgment of elementary school principals who serve in high-poverty schools. The study was undertaken at the request of the client public school district who was attempting to identify characteristics of current elementary principals serving in high-poverty schools. Two research questions guided this study concerning the moral operational level of the principals. The theoretical framework of the study was based on the work of Lawrence Kohlberg and his stages of moral development. Participating principals were administered the Defining Issues Test-2 (DIT-2), a pencil-paper questionnaire that presented five moral dilemmas and a series of statements asking for the participant to rank solutions to the dilemmas.

The results indicated that the majority of participants operated from lower levels of moral development, reasoning, and judgment. Participants' scores were matched with their schools' performance grades. There was not an indication that high moral scores and high school performance were linked. This study confirmed the results of an early study conducted by Vitton and Wasonga (2009) and encourages a deeper examination of the results of accountability and principal decision making.

To those who sacrificed the most, my wife, Leslie, and my children, Caroline and Preston. This could not have been accomplished without your support, understanding, and love. I am very grateful to you all and look forward to resuming our normal lives. I

love you all.

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### Background of Study

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century urban principal must meet the needs of employees, parents, students, district personnel, state and federal educational policy makers, and remain steadfast against forces that seek to undermine their schools including poverty, crime, and resource inequality. Compounding these challenges has been the educational reform efforts of the past ten years that have created morally complex issues which increased the number of ethically problematic situations for school leaders (Sun, 2011). These challenges have led to increased concerns about the moral core of public education and impact these reform efforts will have on society (Dempster, Freakley, & Parry, 2001).

Principals are held responsible if their schools fail to meet achievement goals and face demotion or loss of employment (West, Peck, & Reitzug, 2010). Pressure to meet ever increasing accountability standards has led schools, districts, and states to manipulate or tout improved achievement data that does not withstand scrutiny (Ravitch, 2010). Large urban school districts that were once lauded for their achievement have seen their reputations sullied by accusations of cheating and test score inflation that exposed culturally embedded practices of moral ambiguity and deception.

The challenges of today require principals to be moral role models who can solve ethical dilemmas, meet student achievement requirements, and promote social justice (Quick & Normore, 2004). Ethical concerns have shown the impact that values have on the practices and decisions of educational leaders (Lazaridou, 2007).

Principals are the moral center of their schools (Frick & Gutierrez, 2008) and their actions and decisions have heightened importance because they impact children and their futures (Vitton & Wasonga, 2009). Principals are the key player in a school's effectiveness, improvement, operation and learning environment (Finnigan & Stewart, 2009). Leithwood and Jantzi (1999), as cited in Vanderhaar, Munoz, and Rodsky (2007), identify principals as essential forces and account for 20% of student achievement. Johnston, Walker, and Levine (2010), citing Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005), state that the principal's efforts, coupled with effective teaching, comprise 60% of a school's efforts related to student achievement. Principals also have direct impact beyond just academic indicators, but also exercise significant influence on a school's climate and culture, particularly in regards to social justice and equality of opportunity for students (McKenzie, et al., 2007).

Spillane and Hunt (2010) detailed the time principals take doing the functions of their jobs and found that decision making comprised nearly 100% of the day, with school management consuming nearly 70% of their day, leaving only 20% to spend on instructional and curriculum decisions. By nature, the role of the principal is to lead, and while there are efforts to share decision making with others the principal is still held ultimately accountable for the school and therefore must make nearly all decisions exclusively (Leech, Fulton, & Ray, 2008).

The increasing student achievement demands of school reform have exposed the gap between schools located in suburban, middle to upper socio-economic neighborhoods and those located in urban, lower socio-economic ones. The sanctions placed on schools

who fail to meet required levels of student achievement have compounded the challenges faced at urban schools. Students and communities in urban locations must deal with the effects of poverty, increased rates of crime, violence, and other challenges that adversely impact the achievement levels of schools including facilities that are often lacking in the amenities offered to their suburban counterparts.

To overcome these challenges, principals who lead urban schools must be able to effectively identify problems, allocate resources and interventions, and continuously monitor progress and forecast potential problems. Yet the very challenges which require these types of principals also lead to instability in the ranks of urban principals as leaders voluntarily seek to leave or are replaced due to failing to meet student achievement requirements.

A 2012 technical report sponsored by the RAND Corporation found that over one-fifth of new principals leave within two years, and rates are even higher for principals who lead schools that fail to meet Annual Yearly Progress requirement of No Child Left Behind education reform act (Burkhauser, et al. 2012). Tekleselassie and Villareal III (2011), citing Gates et al. (2006), noted that urban principals are more likely to change schools than rural or suburban principals.

Principal success is also dependent upon high level district administrators selecting a candidate whose qualifications and educational philosophy are the right fit for a school (Mascall & Leithwood, 2010). The high rate of urban principal turnover and shuffles between schools has created what Gajda and Militelo (2008) refer to as the revolving door of school principalship.

### Statement of the Problem

The study was conducted in a large public school district located in the Southeastern United State in a county that is designated as an urban area (US Census Bureau, 2011). The county is located within an urban cluster based on guidelines published by the US Department of Commerce's Census Bureau (2011). The school district where the study was conducted is classified by the United States Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences' National Center for Educational Statistics (2009), using its urban centric system, as being within urbanized areas.

The Center of Urban Schools at State University of New York, Oswego identifies one of the key characteristics of an urban school as a high poverty rate as measured by the free and reduced lunch rate (Russo, 2004) . In 2012, the school district where the study was conducted had 104 schools that were identified as high poverty schools, an increase from 88 schools in 2011. High poverty schools typically have lower student achievement scores when compared with their higher socio-economic counterparts. Stability rates for principals at high poverty schools in the district are lower than their higher socio-economic counterparts (Wallenstein, 2012).

There is a lack of sustainability in the elementary school principal position in the district the study was conducted. A review of the 2011-2012 School Improvement Plans for the districts' 117 traditional elementary schools revealed that 75% of their principals had been at the school for five years or less and that 42% had been at the school two years or less. Of the 62 high poverty schools that meet the research criteria to be identified as a traditional elementary school, 79% have principals who have been at the

school five years or less, 56% have principals that have been at the school three years or less, and 42% have principals who have been at the school two years or less. When examining the 19 elementary schools that had a principal with less than one year experience, 47% were identified as high poverty (Orange County Public Schools, 2012).

Despite the district being an urban school district located within an urban center, with a preponderance of elementary schools that meet the definition of an urban school, and evidence that there is a significant amount of turnover in urban elementary school principal positions within the district, there is no specific selection process or criteria for selecting principals to lead these schools. Urban elementary school principals in the district's high poverty schools share similar levels of education, experience, and success in previous positions, yet there is not shared success or sustainability in the position. The district serving as the client of the researcher requested a method to identify characteristics that principals who were sustained in the position and whose schools demonstrated success. The inability to effectively pick candidates with greater potential for sustainability and success in vacant urban high poverty elementary principal positions for urban elementary schools contributes to the continuing instability in these positions.

### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the moral reasoning and moral decision making of urban high poverty elementary school principals who had remained at their schools for a minimum of three years. It was determined by the researcher, and agreed upon by the client district, to examine the moral schema and moral reasoning of

principals to identify internal, unseen characteristics to determine if there were shared levels of moral reasoning and moral judgment among these principals and if so, did their schools achieve at the same level.

The findings were shared with the client district to assist them in identifying and screening potential candidates to lead urban high poverty elementary schools who would have improved chances of sustainability and success.

### Significance of Study

There are numerous studies on the types of decisions principals make (Wildy, Forster, Loudon, & Wallace, 2004, Begley, 2006; Nelson, de la Colina, & Boone, 2008; Frick, 2009; Donaldson, Cobb, & Mayer, 2010) and the factors which influence a principals' decision (Begley & Johansson, 2008; Miller, Fagley, & Casella, 2008; Frick, 2011; Sun, 2011). Yet, research is limited on the influences that impact how principals make decisions. St. Germain and Quinn (2005) state "little research has been done" on principals' problem solving abilities (p. 76). Brenninkmeyer and Spillane (2008) acknowledge that "very little is known about the way principals think about and solve problems" and that the "empirical evidence is thin" on the subject (p. 436). Despite the impact, both short and long term, that the decisions a principal makes has on a school, its students, staff, and community, there has been little attention paid to how leaders think about their decisions (Duke & Salmonowicz, 2010).

## Definition of Terms

Defining Issues Test (DIT) - The DIT is a pencil and paper test that presents the subject with six scenarios based on moral dilemmas which ask them to evaluate the factors that they based their course of action for solving the dilemmas (Rest, 1994).

Defining Issues Test-2 (DIT-2) - Updated DIT with moral dilemmas that are culturally relevant for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

High Achieving School - School earning a grade of “A” by the state department of education of the state the study was conducted.

Instructional Leadership - Information or training related to research-based strategies for improving teacher practice and performance as it relates to student achievement.

Moral Judgment - “Psychological construct that characterizes the process by which people determine that one course of action in a particular situation is morally right and another course of action is wrong” (Rest, Thoma, & Edwards, 1997, p.5).

Moral Judgment Interview - Instrument developed by Lawrence Kohlberg to assess the moral development based on responses to solving moral dilemmas. Lengthy interview process with responses scored based on interviewer’s interpretation.

Moral Reasoning - The use of reasoning to decide what is morally right.

Moral Schemas - Schemas of schemas that concern the abstract concepts of the moral basis for society.

Planning and Goal Setting - Information or training related to strategic change strategies related to school improvement.



Schema -“General knowledge structure, residing in long-term memory that is invoked (or “activated” by current stimulus configurations that resemble previous stimuli” (Bartlett as quoted in Rest, et al., 1999, p. 136).

Stages of Moral Development - Six stages of moral judgment that progress from complete compliance to avoid punishment (Level I) to a decision based on the universal equity, justice, and respect.

Traditional Elementary School - A public elementary school that serves students in kindergarten through grade 5.

Urban High Poverty Elementary School - A public elementary school within an urban area serving kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade students that receives funding from the US Department of Education based on a free and/or reduced lunch percentage of 75 or higher.

### Delimitations

The delimitations for this study have been jointly created and agreed upon based on input from the client school district and the researcher. The study will be delimited to selected urban high poverty elementary schools principals within the district the study was conducted.

### Limitations

The study is limited by the following:

1. Uses principals from one large urban public school district in the Southeastern United States and therefore the findings may not be relevant to other school districts.
2. The study is limited to using elementary school principals who serve at urban high poverty elementary schools and therefore the findings may not have applications to principals at the middle and high school level or at schools with high socio-economic status.

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was based on the work of Lawrence Kohlberg and his Theory of Moral Development. A student of developmental psychologist Jean Piaget, Kohlberg expanded upon Piaget's idea of moral judgment. Piaget researched how moral thinking and judgment develop in children and believed that once it was understood how children develop their moral sense of right and wrong this would assist in creating better adults (Piaget, 1932). The two stage theory Piaget developed stated that children under the age of 11 viewed rules as absolute, sacred, and unchangeable, and used consequences as the foundation for their moral judgments, while children over 11 viewed rules as malleable and for the social good and based their moral judgments on the intent of the action (Crain, 1985).

Kohlberg reasoned that children's intellectual development became more pronounced between the ages of 11, where Piaget's study ended, and the age of 16, and if intellectual development continued so to must moral development (Crain, 1985). Kohlberg initially began working with boys aged 10, 13, and 16, but later expanded his sample of children to include females and children of younger ages. Children were presented with social situations which contained moral conundrums, and Kohlberg sought not only the children's solution to the situation, but also their justification for their solutions. The children's responses were analyzed and placed within three levels and six stages of moral development, with each level containing two stages.

Beginning with *Level One-Preconventional*, the individual upholds the rules and responds to the terms "good" and "bad" but only in regards to their impact on them in terms of rewards or punishments. *Stage One-Punishment and Obedience Orientation*. Decisions are based on the consequences or punishments of the actions by the authority holders. Punishment is to be avoided and authority is unquestioned. *Stage Two-Instrumental Relativist Orientation*. The action taken is directed by the individual's needs with some consideration for the needs of others. The additional consideration of others is not altruistic, but instead on mutual benefit and punishment is to be avoided. At *Level Two-Conventional*, consequences are no longer the overriding motivation, but meeting the expectations of family, group, or nation. *Stage Three-Interpersonal Concordance Orientation*. Pleasing the group with appropriate positive behavior secures the individual's continued membership within the group. Morality is no longer based on right and wrong, but based on internal values of positive thinking and development of

empathy and emotion. *Stage Four-Law and Order Orientation*. The individual maintains membership within the group by doing one's duty to protect and serve the group by following laws and rules, and respecting authority. The group is to be protected by preserving social order and decisions are no longer based on individual needs, but rather the needs of the many. Lastly, *Level Three-Postconventional, Autonomous, or Principled Level* is the final level and at this level moral decisions are made and values are developed that have merit without the need of benefiting the group. *Stage Five-Social-Contract Legalistic Orientation*. As a member of the group, the individual has the obligation to follow the agreed upon laws, but the laws can be amended when the group agrees that change is morally right. *Stage Six-Universal Ethical Principal Orientation*. Values the individual over the group when the group is unjust and/or immoral to the individual or minority. This stage is abstract and moves beyond written laws or social norms. All members of the group are entitled to humane and dignified treatment with the assurance of justice, equality, and human rights based on universal principles which exceed the rights of the group (Kohlberg, 1980).

This study sought to identify the moral development of urban high poverty elementary school principals within the client district's district. The researcher reasoned that principals who lead high performing urban high poverty elementary schools operate within Stage Five and/or Stage Six of Kohlberg's Six Stages of Moral Development because those stages value moral decisions which enhance and promote a better society. The researcher reasoned that principals who lead high performing urban high poverty

elementary schools would share similar moral values related to the education of children, the manner in which staff and community are treated, and the purpose of education.

### Research Questions

The study was directed by the following research questions:

1. Within what stages of moral development do the urban elementary school principals of a large urban school district in the Southeast United States operate?
2. What moral reasoning processes do the urban elementary school principals of a large urban school district in the Southeast United States use to make moral-based decisions?

### Methodology

This study's analysis was based on the theory of James Rest and the use of his *Defining Issues Test* (DIT). Rest, Navrvaez, Bebeau, and Thoma. (1999b) identified his theory as Neo-Kohlbergian, and while acknowledging the shortcomings of Kohlberg's theory, Rest did believe Kohlberg's core theory was still relevant and meaningful to researchers to build upon. The DIT was developed as an offshoot of Kohlberg's Moral Stages Theory and as an alternative to Kohlberg's *Moral Judging Interview* (MJI). Critics of the MJI raised concerns over its length and complicated interview procedures

that produced results based on interviewer interpretation, and potential bias, rather than quantifiable scores (Rest, 1979, Rest, Navrvaez, Bebeau, and Thoma 1999a).

The DIT is a pencil and paper test that presents the subject with six scenarios based on moral dilemmas which ask them to evaluate the factors that they based their course of action for solving the dilemmas (Rest, 1994). Scenarios, including the first one based on the MJJ, include the following moral dilemmas:

1. Should Heinz steal medicine to save his dying wife if he cannot obtain it any other way?
2. Should students occupy a university office building to force administration to end an unpopular program on campus?
3. Should Mrs. Jones turn in Mr. Thompson, an escaped prisoner, even though he has led a good life?
4. Should a high school principal stop a controversial article from being printed in school newspaper?
5. Should a doctor grant the request of a dying patient to give her a fatal overdose of medication to end her suffering?
6. A garage manager needs another mechanic but the only applicant is of a minority race and the owner is concerned that his customers will go somewhere else if the applicant is hired. When the applicant inquires about the position, the owner tells him the job is no longer available.

Rest (1979) disputed Kohlberg's belief that a person only moved up sequentially from one stage of moral reasoning to another and was incapable of skipping stages or

going backwards. Instead, Rest argued that people operate within moral schemas and that these moral schemas were fluid and dependent on the individual's life experiences (Rest, et al., 1999b). The DIT measures a subject's moral schemas and reasoning process used to determine the morally correct solution. Bartlett (1932) as quoted in Rest, et al. (1999b) defined schema as knowledge that is found in long-term memory which is triggered by a current stimulus that is similar to a previously experienced stimulus. When the subject reads the scenarios and uses the inventory related to the scenarios, the moral schema within the subject directs the responses. The moral schema is not a conscious awareness, but a hidden force that directs the moral responses of the subject. According to Rest, et al. (1999b) the DIT subjects rate an item highly if it has importance to them and if it is perceived as being more important than other options available and that the moral schemas correspond to direct action choices within the moral dilemmas.

The DIT produces results which align with Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development and respondents fall within *Stages 2-6*. *STAGE23* score reveals items the subject responded to that correspond to *Stage 2* and *Stage 3* with a range of 0-95. The *STAGE 4* score represents items from *Stage 4* with a range of 0-95. The DIT's most commonly used score is the Principled Score (*P-score*), which rates the responses to items based on *Stage 5* and *Stage 6* and ranges from 0-95. The higher the *P-score* the higher the respondent's moral judgment (Rest, 1994).

According to the Center for the Study of Ethical Development (2012) the DIT provides additional information about the subject's moral reasoning. If the subject's moral reasoning resides in one schema, The *CONSTRAN* score identifies it as

“consolidated”, but if the moral reasoning is fluid then it is “traditional”. If no primary schema is present, the subject is considered to be in “developmental transition”. *Type Indicator* places the subject’s moral reasoning in one of seven types as the subject moves from consolidated to traditional schemas.

- Type 1: Predominant in Personal Interests and consolidated
- Type 2: Predominant in Personal Interests but transitional
- Type 3: Predominant in Maintaining Norms but transitional, Personal Interests is secondary
- Type 4: Predominant in Maintaining Norms and consolidated
- Type 5: Predominant in Maintaining Norms but transitional, Post-conventional is secondary
- Type 6: Predominant in Post-conventional but transitional
- Type 7: Predominant in Post-conventional and consolidated

The *UTILIZER* score matches the subject’s action choices with items they determined as important and looks for consistency between the two.

Rest et al. (1999) defined the moral judgment construct validity of the DIT based on six points:

1. Differentiation of age and educational groups.
2. Show longitudinal gains.
3. Show gains based on interventions to improve moral reasoning.
4. Evidence of a hierarchy of moral development.
5. Predict moral behaviors.



## 6. Predict political choices.

The DIT has been validated in over 400 research articles and numerous studies and has Cronbach alpha reliability rating in the upper .70s to lower .80s in retests (Center of Ethical Development, 2012).

After 25 years of use, Rest revised the DIT. Named the DIT-2, the revisions included dilemmas that were shorter and consisted of situations more relevant to test takers, a developmental score (N2), and revised methodology for checking the reliability of participants. The DIT-2 correlated with the DIT ( $r = .79$ ) and validity was identified as being consistent with the original DIT (Cronbach's alpha = .90) (Rest, Narvaez, Thoma, & Bebeau, 1999).

### Population

The district where the study was conducted had 64 elementary schools designated as high poverty from 2009-2011. From these elementary schools, principals who served during the 2008-2009, 2009-2010, and 2010-2011 school will be screened to determine eligibility. From this screened population, 20 principals will be randomly sampled to be administered the DIT-2.

### Procedures

The researcher applied to the Institutional Review Board at the University of Central Florida and was granted approval to conduct this research. The researcher applied to the office of Accountability, Research, and Assessment for the district where

the study was conducted to administer the DIT-2 to the selected principals and was granted approval. The selected principals were notified via email by the researcher about the study and requested their participation in the study. The selected principals were mailed the DIT-2, an answer sheet, directions and post-paid return envelope addressed to the researcher. Participants who did not meet the completion deadline were contacted by the researcher to encourage their participation. Eleven additional eligible principals were invited to participate when 11 principals from the original group of selected principals chose not to participate. The researcher sent the completed answer sheets to the Center for the Study of Ethical Development at the University of Alabama to be scored.

## CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Introduction

The challenges of meeting the ever increasing demands of improving student achievement has led to principals to make ethically questionable practices, compromised integrity and that have created climates that makes many school leaders believe that cheating is necessary (Ravitch, 2012). The very nature of educating children requires school leaders to possess unique moral qualities and to operate within ethical frameworks when making decisions (Frick & Gutierrez, 2008).

The moral ambiguity brought on by accountability is additional challenge faced by urban principals and one that requires additional moral strength to overcome. The demand for increased student performance for college and workplace readiness, coupled with the unique needs of urban students places great weight on the decisions that urban principals make. The need to resist ethically challenging solutions to all the demands an urban principal faces requires a secure moral sense of right and wrong.

### Principal Decision Making

The school principal now must be an educational leader who is able to annually improve student achievement, effectively manage culturally diverse populations, build capacity in their staffs, and myriad of other tasks that consume the day (Provost & Wells 2010). Research shows that principals have an enormous impact on the achievement and climate of their schools (Nadeau & Leighton, 1996). The primary role of the principal is

to lead the educational efforts on their campus (Grissom & Loeb, 2011). School principals are highly influential and their effectiveness influences a school's performance (Friedman, Friedman, & Markow, 2008). Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) as cited in Vanderhaar, Munoz, and Rodsky (2007) identify principals as essential forces and account for 20% of student achievement. Johnston, Walker, and Levine (2010,) citing Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005), state that the principal's efforts, coupled with effective teaching, comprise 60 percent of a school's efforts related to student achievement.

The principal's importance is undisputed, but the complexities of the position make it difficult to accomplish all that is needed to successfully run a school. Spillane and Hunt (2010) detailed the time principals take doing the functions of their jobs and found that decision making comprised nearly 100% of the day, with school management consuming nearly 70% of their day; leaving only 20% to spend on instructional and curriculum decisions. By nature the role of the principal is to lead, and while there are efforts to share decision making with others (Leech & Fulton, 2007) the principal is still held ultimately accountable for the school and therefore must make nearly all decisions exclusively. There are numerous studies on the types of decisions principals make (Wildy, et al., 2004; Begley, 2006; Nelson, et al., 2008; Frick, 2009; Donaldson, Cobb, & Mayer, 2010) and the factors that influence a principals decision (Begley & Johnson, 2008; Miller, Fagley, & Casella, 2008; Frick, 2011; Sun, 2011).

Yet, research is limited on how principals make decisions. St. Germain and Quinn (2005) state "little research has been done" on principals' problem solving abilities

(p. 76). Brenninkmeyer and Spillane (2008) acknowledge that “very little is known about the way principals think about and solve problems” and that the “empirical evidence is thin” on the subject (p. 436). Despite the impact, both short and long term, that the decisions a principal makes has on a school, its students, staff, and community, there has been little attention paid to how leaders think about their decisions (Duke & Salmonowicz, 2010)

### Principals Use of Data

Organizational theorists provide principals insight into motivating and leading a staff, but in this current era of accountability it is also essential for a principal to understand data, how to use it with assessments, and be able to use it to make meaningful and purposeful change (Good & Jackson, 2007; Kerr, Marsh, Ikemoto, Darilek, & Barney, 2006). Over the past decade, changes in how schools are assessed have made the effective use of data by school leaders a key component for monitoring school improvement (Creighton, 2007). The need to meet the outcome requirements of federal, state, and district programs and to avoid the sanctions that are a consequence for failure, principals must use performance indicators to monitor and adjust instruction (Ogawa & Collum, 2000).

Nowhere is the pressure of the principalship more pronounced than in meeting the requirements of student performance. Test scores and other student performance indicators have become the primary means of determining a schools success (Scribner, et al., 2011). Shen et al. (2010) found that principals use of student performance data

almost exclusively to make instructional decisions. The principal is the critical link in the use of student performance data to drive instruction at the classroom level (Levin & Datnow, 2012). For teachers to effectively use student performance data in the classroom the principal must ensure they are properly trained (Newton & Viczko, 2010).

Principals must balance the needs of mandated student growth goals with care for their staff to avoid burnout and a sense of helplessness when teachers feel they are unable to perform to expectation (Pepper, 2010). Data based research for teacher collaboration (Ancess, Barnett, & Allen, 2007) and the use of instructional support personnel to support data based decision making (McCombs & Martorell, 2010) emphasize the inclusion of stakeholders in use of data; but as much as collaboration is encouraged ultimately it is the responsibility of the principal to assess performance of teachers (Creighton, 2007) and it is essential to correctly interpret the myriad of data for it and the evaluation process to be effective (Krathwohl, 2009).

Robinson and Timperley (2002) wrote that a principal's ability to effectively interpret data while assessing a teacher's performance is necessary to prescribe corrective action for deficiencies. Performance assessment of teachers is critical to keeping qualified personnel in the teaching profession and deselecting those who are unable to meet performance criteria; however, many principals struggle to authentically assess teachers despite claims that ineffective teachers significantly harm students (Hanushek, 2009). Of particular concern to critics is the use of Value Added Models (VAM) to assess teachers because of its refusal to acknowledge outside variables' impact on student learning (Ravitch, 2010). The exclusion of external factors such as poverty, parent

involvement, native language, disabilities, and numerous other factors that potentially influence a student's performance from VAA undermines its effectiveness as a valid research based evaluation method according to Ravitch (2010).

It is critical to understand the influence of external factors in research studies and the absence of acceptance of a relationship of external factors prevents the use of inferential statistical tests such as Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (Lomax, 2007). Knowledge of statistics and how data is used will only become more critical to principals in coming years as teachers encounter VAA and performance assessment components (Ravitch, 2010). There is a dichotomy between the performance based teacher assessments of NCLB, RttT and VAA and the appeal from reformers to assess teachers holistically (Ravitch 2010). The effective principal is able to find the balance between the competing philosophies and assess a teacher's complete performance by combining data with the other products of a classroom, love of learning, character development, and active citizenship (Creighton, 2007; Ravitch, 2010).

### Principals and Morality

The challenges faced by schools go beyond accountability and require moral and ethical leadership skills and courage to be demonstrated by the principal (Kidder & Born, 2002). Principals have direct impact beyond just academic indicators, but also exercise significant influence on a school's climate and culture (McKenzie, et al. 2007).

According to Quick and Normore (2004) principals must exhibit integrity and moral leadership by giving voice to stakeholders (teachers, students, parents, and community

members) and generating and maintaining relationships with them. Trust in the principal by the faculty and staff creates a sense of organizational justice which improves practice and morale (Hoy & Tarter, 2004). Frick and Gutierrez (2008) believe that principals must operate within six ethical frames:

1. Justice - The principal demonstrates principles of liberal democracies, individual liberty, and the common good.
2. Care - The principal has unconditional relationships and is concerned about the well-being of others.
3. Critique - The principal considers competing interests and focuses on interpersonal relationships to mediate and make fair decisions.
4. Community - The principal engages in ongoing dialogues and collaborations.
5. Profession - The principal makes ethical decisions that are in the best interest of children.
6. Virtue - The principal is truthful, sensitive, openness, responsible, and authentic.

Moral leadership is an essential characteristic for principals and can be developed through structured self-reflection that enhances moral consciousness (Branson, 2007). Principals who engage in self-reflective practice are more likely to make decisions that are morally purposeful and value centered (Lazaridou, 2007).



## Urban Principals

It has become common practice to characterize urban schools as failures and they have become targets for politicians, social commentators, the news media, and the entertainment industry (Flessa, 2009). Students who come from low-income families without a history of academic achievement and completion face enormous challenges to achieve in school (Solberg, Carlstrom, Howard, and Jones, 2007). Lee and Burkham (2002) as quoted in Flessa (2009) found that students from economically disadvantaged homes started kindergarten with significantly lower cognitive skills than those students from higher socio-economic families. These obstacles become even more pronounced for students when poverty is combined with minority status and an urban setting (Knesting & Waldron, 2006). Latino and black students who are in an urban environment and are in a lower social-economic-status often have less family support, fewer adults in their lives who have experienced academic success in school, and face economic and societal pressures that make succeeding in school difficult (Murray & Naranjo, 2008).

By the time a student reaches an urban high school, 40-60% of them are chronically disengaged from school and learning, thus increasing the chances of academic failure and improving the chances that the student will ultimately drop out of school before earning a high school diploma (Klem & Connell, 2004). Additional challenges have been encountered by students to meet the rigorous demands of No Child Left Behind and various state achievement standards that have restricted the focus of

learning in schools to only measurable outcomes on standardized assessments and ignore the social, psychological, and cognitive process of learning (Hallinan, 2008).

Sperandio (2009) states that urban schools have “complex political, socio-economic and pedagogical issues” principals must be equipped to understand (p.67). These issues include economic hardship, English language acquisition, lack of support for family concerns, and struggles with comprehension and fluency in reading and math; all of which lead to an increase risk of academic failure and exiting school prior to graduation. Student struggles related to race, gender, sexual orientation, and disabilities compound the challenges faced in urban schools to educate their students. Combined, all of these make equity through social justice a needed component to incorporate in the learning and social experiences of urban students (Sperandio, 2009). These challenges, according to Sperandio (2009) lead teachers to have a lack of “confidence or motivation to bring about changes in the school climate and student outcomes” (p.69).

Simmons, Grogan, Preis, Mathews, Smith-Anderson, Walls, and Jackson (2007), quoting statistics from the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), (2006) state that 51% of children in urban areas are living in poverty. Thirty-three percent of all African-American children are classified as poor by the NCCP as compared with 10% of white children (Simmons, et al., 2007). Poverty affects nearly 40% of all children living (Simmons, et al., 2007) and with the continuing economic struggles occurring in the US it can be expected for the rates of poverty to remain steady or even increase. Urban schools face persistent gaps in achievement due to conditions brought on by poverty and a new generation of urban school leaders must be prepared to aid teachers in eliminating

gaps and assist students in overcoming the problems associated with living in poverty (Simmons, et al., 2007).

Principals who lead urban, low-performing schools are faced with a myriad of obstacles to improve student performance. Sperandio (2009) states that urban schools have “complex political, socio-economic and pedagogical issues” principals must be equipped to understand (p.67). These issues include economic hardship, English language acquisition, lack of support for family concerns, and struggles with comprehension and fluency in reading and math; all of which lead to an increase risk of academic failure and exiting school prior to graduation. Student struggles related to race, gender, sexual orientation, and disabilities compound the challenges faced in urban schools to educate their students.

West, Peck, and Reitzug (2010) found that urban principals face sustained pressures not encountered by their suburban counterparts including extensive responsibilities, limited control, and lack of personal and professional time. In addition to the stressors related to running an urban school, federal and state mandates for continuous improvement in student achievement place additional pressures on urban principals lest they face professional sanctions, including loss of employment (Marks & Nance, 2007, Enomoto & Conley, 2008). Faced with improving student performance while dealing with the demands of older, often neglected campuses, and societal challenges, urban principals are “forced to diagnose and address problems under increased pressure” (Finnigan & Stewart, 2009).

These challenges lead to continuous turnover in administrative positions at urban schools and perpetuate a cycle of underperformance as principals rotate out after a year or two of service (Meyers & Murphy, 2007). The vacancies created by the rapid turnover in urban schools are often filled by either appointed principals who did not seek the position, or by inexperienced assistant principals looking for the opportunity to advance. A 2012 technical report sponsored by the RAND Corporation found that over 1/5 of new principals leave within two years and that rates are even higher for principals who lead schools who fail to meet Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) (Burkhauser, et al. 2012). Tekleselassie and Villareal III (2011) citing Gates et al. (2006) noted that urban principals are more likely to change schools than rural or suburban principals.

The challenges school effectiveness in high poverty urban neighborhoods is often overlooked or ignored, but there are successes at these schools. Tucker and Griddine (2010) researched African-American male students who attended urban low income schools and found that principals who established a caring culture that made these students feel as if someone cared about them improved their academic performance. The establishment of the student connectedness to their school is accomplished through the establishment of relationships by the student to their peers, and as this study highlights, an adult on school grounds (Knesting & Waldron, 2006). According to Hirschi, as described in Marcus and Sanders-Reio (2001), bonds between individuals are characterized by attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief in values espoused by an institution. Solberg, Howard, and Jones (2007), stated that at-risk youth, students identified with low academic self-efficacy, limited family support, and with frequent

exposure to violence, saw increases in academic self-efficacy, increased levels of achievement, and closer identification with their schools when they developed at least one close relationship with an adult on their school campus.

Duke and Salmonowicz (2010) spent a year following the progress of a principal assigned to a failing urban elementary school in a poor neighborhood. With limited time to produce results, the principal undertook to reconstitute the school's culture from one of acceptance and resignation of failure to one of optimism and a belief that all students can learn. The curriculum was revamped and additional interventions were put in place to support student learning. While not all of the principal's measures were accepted by the staff, the sense of direction and purpose of the principal convinced most staff members to support the changes. The principal conducted open dialogs, engaged the staff and carefully weighed the cost of decisions before making them. The results showed slide in student achievement beginning to abate at the end of the school year.

Ylimaki, Jacobson and Drysdale (2007) examined principals in low income in the United States, England, and Australia and their use of the four core practices that Leithwood and Reihl's (2005) had identified for school successes. The first core practice is *Setting Direction*. The principals redefined the focus of the school to teaching and learning and minimized disruptions by making the instructional time sacred. To make the school more inviting the principals instituted an open door policy for all stakeholders, improved school safety and the campuses underwent beautification programs. Parents praised the efforts of the principals and noted their deep sense of caring and empathy.

Teachers praised the principals' efforts for promoting learning, being positive with students, and for promoting diversity and understanding.

For the second core practice, *Developing People*, the principals became very creative with limited resources. One principal began teaching a daily math class to model effective teaching techniques with her staff. This act provided students with needed interventions and gave the principal credibility with her staff. The principal's classroom experience influenced the professional development opportunities she provided her teachers to improve their practice because she acknowledged her own limited pedagogical knowledge. Other principals were also honest with their staffs about their lack of knowledge on certain curriculum programs and subjects and sought professional development to increase their understanding. Some staffs did resist changes to their instructional programs but all staffs acknowledged that their principals' desire to help others and were grateful that their principals were willing to seek help when they didn't know something.

The third core practice, *Redesigning the Organization*, was undertaken by the principals after they had satisfied their safety concerns of their campuses. The principals established site based management teams composed of parents, teachers and staff to oversee curriculum, discipline, parent involvement, morale, and beautification. The instructional day was redesigned to allow grade levels to meet to plan instruction and assessments together. Schools in England and Australia reported higher teacher involvement in site based decisions due to differences in school accountability.

In final core practice, *Managing the Instructional Program*, the principals worked to ensure that challenges would not undermine the change efforts that were occurring. Teachers were provided with instructional support through supplemental materials, professional development, and support staff pushing into the classrooms. Principals became a visible presence in the classrooms by frequently conducting observations of the delivery of instruction and the checking in with students. Renewed effort was made to eliminate distractions by prohibiting classroom interruptions and by reducing time consuming tasks not related to the planning and delivery of instruction. Staffing decisions and teaching assignments were also reviewed and teachers who resistant to the changes occurring were encouraged to seek opportunities elsewhere and new hires were required to share the principals' vision for the school.

The challenges of the meeting accountability requirements, meeting the educational and emotional needs of students, and improving the practices of teachers in addition to the daily administrative requirements make the obligation of the modern principalship daunting. When coupled with complex needs of urban, low income children, the challenges urban principalship can appear to be insurmountable. The needs of urban schools require leaders who are strong in leadership and strong of heart. The critical importance of these school leaders makes the study of the moral schema and moral reasoning deserving of study.

## Morality and Moral Development

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2011) defines morality as a course of behavior that under rationale people would follow. Western thought is grounded in principles of morality coming from its Judeo-Christian heritage, although De Waal (2013) believes morality pre-dates the development of religion and is a product of human evolution. The Ten Commandments provided the individual adherent with a divinely written code of behavior to peacefully co-exist with mankind and a God that admonished selfish, deceitful behavior (Hazony, 2010). The Beatitudes found within Christ's Sermon on the Mount emphasized action towards others that subverted the self for the moral good of all, particularly those who were weak and outcast from the greater society (Talbert, 2008). The medieval Catholic Church used morality plays to indoctrinate the masses to resist sin upon penalty of eternal damnation and emphasized a morality based upon good deeds (Bokenkotter, 2004). Religious based morality was inherently self-centered because of the reward and penalty aspects. By following the moral dictates directly given or inspired by God, the follower either escaped God's wrath or his favor including rewards beyond the follower's human life.

Humanistic expressions of morality deemphasized dogmatic compliance and embraced it as being a true essence of humanity. In the *Protagoras* (380 B.C.E.) the Greek philosopher Plato examined the nature of good and why man acts both humanely and inhumanely. Self-reflection and knowledge improved one's ability to act right, while ignorance led to harm. Ignorance in itself however is not an excuse for poor actions towards ourselves and others, for we are our own masters to limiting our self-awareness



and knowledge. Plato believed that individuals should do right not for reward or consequence, but because it was the only action humans should take towards one another. An immoral act is one in which an individual motivation comes from fear of being punished, not because the action was deliberately harmful. Morality emerges from the core of the individual (Sachdeva, Singh, & Medin, 2011).

An outgrowth of Plato and those who followed him was the belief in reason and the philosophy of Rationalism. A component of this philosophy was the belief in Natural Law which found that man was by nature reasonable and motivated by self-preservation (Zinaich, 2006). The revolutions in America and France were deeply influenced by Natural Law theorists including James Locke. Reason was the primary manner in which morality was understood for Locke and reason was given to man by God, thus moral rules were a realization of man's highest potential and an obligation to God (Zinaich, 2006). German philosopher Immanuel Kant believed morality came from reason and was expressed through actions that were obligated under moral law (Schneewind, 2002).

### Moral Development and the Theories of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg

By the early Twentieth Century, the study of morality had moved from examining the rights and obligations of man in the universe to a more personal examination of the moral development and moral reasoning of humans. Swiss researcher Jean Piaget (1932) developed his theory of moral development while watching children at play and witnessing the importance of rules and their concepts of right and wrong. As children played games of marbles, Piaget noticed that the rules governing the game were passed

down from the older children to the younger ones. The younger children gained respect for the rules because of the training they received from the older children (Sachdeva, Singh, & Medin, 2011). While the older children understood that the rules were malleable based on the situation and needs of the game, the younger children accepted the rules without reservation or question.

Piaget (1932) divided children's moral understanding of rules into four stages that children progressed through based on age. In Stage One - Motor Rules, children under four years of age are unable to often comprehend the rules and objectives of game and therefore mirror play of other children or manipulate the object used in play. In Stage Two - Egocentric, children aged four to seven years have limited understanding of rules and rules change as the game progresses. Cooperation is and competition is not key components of game play. In Stage Three - Incipient Cooperation, children aged seven to eleven years group interactions becomes more pronounced and rules are more understood and closely followed. Cooperation and competition become learned behaviors and rules establish boundaries for accepted behaviors during gameplay. In Stage Four - Genuine Cooperation, children from the age of eleven years interpret the rules in a legalistic manner and differences are solved through interpretation of rules and when needed creating new rules. Cooperation and the good of all players are of utmost importance.

Just as children's perceptions of the rules are adjusted with age and change from blind acceptance to understanding, their moral development also undergoes a change. Piaget (1932) divided children's relationship to rules into two distinctive stages of moral development, heteronomous and autonomous. The two stage theory Piaget developed

stated that children under the age of 11 viewed rules as absolute, sacred, and unchangeable, and used consequences as the foundation for their moral judgments, while children over 11 viewed rules as malleable and for the social good and based their moral judgments on the intent of the action (Crain, 1985).

Piaget's moral development theory evolved from his study of children's understanding of rules because rules govern how children interact with one another, establish rights, and because the rules are handed down from child to child there is little adult influence. Younger children operate within the heteronomous morality stage. In this stage, children accept the rules at face value; rules are to be followed, therefore we will follow them. Rules are designed to protect the player from unfair acts of their competitors and manipulations of the game. This egocentric view of rules mirrors a child's world view at a young age when they are limited in their ability to empathize with the needs of others. Adherence to the rules is motivated by a fear of punishment and mirror's a child's relationship with the adult power holders in their lives. When the rules are violated justice in the form of penalties and sanctions is swift and sure (Piaget, 1932).

As children mature, their cognitive development no longer processes events based on action but rather on mental operations. Older children operate within the autonomous morality stage. The purpose of rules transform from being order keepers to ensuring cooperation and respect between those playing the game. Rules are no longer blindly accepted, but critically analyzed for the appropriateness to the moment, and when the rules are not appropriate or considered right they can be altered or even discarded. Fairness for all players and not protection become the primary function of the rules.

When a rule is violated the intentions of the violating player are considered and consequences are administered based on the reasons for the violation, not because it occurred (Piaget, 1932).

In addition to examining the role of game play in the moral development of children, Piaget also noted children's view of lying and identified three stages related to the act. Lying to children under the age of seven consisted of naughty words to the act of telling a lie is a moral fault. Between the ages of 7 and 10 years lies are untruths and can be both deliberate and accidental. By age 11 years, lying is a deliberate act of deceit including stealing and cheating. As a child's cognitive ability develops, the ability to differentiate between a tale of fantasy and a falsehood becomes more pronounced. The moral development of determining the appropriateness of lying is also influenced by a child's peers and family. The motivation to lie changes with cognitive development from punishment avoidance to social acceptance or defiance based on a child's experiences with their peers or family. While lies are initially accepted as inappropriate behavior in young children, age they mature children also begin to accept the need to tell a lie when their peers or family group deem it acceptable or necessary (Piaget, 1932).

The cognitive development of the brain and emotional growth due to maturity all contribute to the moral development of children, but life experiences are also a necessary component of moral development. Bartlett (1932) as quoted in Rest, et al. (1999b) defined schema as knowledge that is found in long-term memory which is triggered by a current stimulus that is similar to a previously experienced stimulus. Schemas are both mental and physical actions that influence a person's interpretation of their world. Life

experiences develop schemas within the child that will govern a child's actions throughout their life. Each experience leads to refining and developing new schemas. Assimilation occurs when new information is processed and incorporated into an established schema, although this is a subjective process due to pre-existing beliefs. New information can alter or change an existing schema and create new schemas in a process called accommodation. Children are able to progress through stages of cognitive development when they give equal measure to both assimilation and accommodation. Known as equilibration, in this process children balance their actions based on previous experiences and new information and develop new behaviors (Piaget, 1932).

A student of developmental psychologist Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, expanded upon Piaget's idea of moral judgment. Moral judgment is the "process by which people determine that one course of action in a particular situation is morally right and another course of action is wrong" (Rest, Edwards, & Thoma, 1997, p. 5). Kohlberg reasoned that moral judgment was a result of moral development (Gibbs, Basinger, Grime & Snarey, 2007). Like Piaget, Kohlberg (1984) theorized that a person progressed from making moral judgments based on self-interest to ones based on enhancing the good of society. Kohlberg sought to determine the strength of the within factors that influenced a person's moral judgment rather than external forces that could not be controlled (Carpendale & Krebs, 1992).

Kohlberg shared Piaget's constructivist methodology pertaining to the influences that situations had on the development of individuals (Mayhew, 2012). These situations led to new experiences, and from those experiences came the foundation for new moral

development (Mayhew, 2012). According to Kohlberg (1971) all individuals, regardless of age, were moral philosophers and that children have their own morality despite efforts by adults to instill their own morality in children. A person's moral development influenced their sense of moral judgment which then led to moral action (Kohlberg, 1971). Moral action was manifestation of human potential for virtuous and responsible deeds (Higgins-D'Alessandro & Cecero, 2003).

While Piaget looked at the relationships children had with one another and how moral development and moral judgment influenced their interaction with one another (micro-morality), Kohlberg addressed the interaction the individual had with society (macro-morality) (Rest, et al., 1999b). Like Piaget, Kohlberg would divide moral development into sequential stages that a child progressed through. Kohlberg also shared Piaget's idea that the stages were based on cognitive and emotional development that led the child from one stage and into the next stage. Kohlberg reasoned that children's intellectual development became more pronounced between the ages of 11, where Piaget's study ended, and the age of 16, and if intellectual development continued so to must moral development (Crain, 1985).

Kohlberg initially began working with boys aged 10, 13, and 16, but later expanded his sample of children to include females and children of younger ages. Children were presented with social situations which contained moral conundrums, and Kohlberg sought not only the children's solution to the situation, but also their justification for their solutions. The children's responses were analyzed and placed within three levels and six stages of moral development, with each level containing two

stages. The levels represented increasing complexity and development of a child's moral reasoning and their beliefs about justice (Kohlberg, 1981).

Beginning with *Level One - Preconventional*, the individual upholds the rules and responds to the terms "good" and "bad" but only in regards to their impact on them in terms of rewards or punishments. *Stage One - Punishment and Obedience Orientation*. Decisions are based on the consequences or punishments of the actions by the authority holders. Punishment is to be avoided and authority is unquestioned. *Stage Two - Instrumental Relativist Orientation*. The action taken is directed by the individual's needs with some consideration for the needs of others. The additional consideration of others is not altruistic, but instead on mutual benefit and punishment is to be avoided.

At *Level Two-Conventional*, consequences are no longer the overriding motivation, but meeting the expectations of family, group, or nation. *Stage Three - Interpersonal Concordance Orientation*. Pleasing the group with appropriate positive behavior secures the individual's continued membership within the group. Morality is no longer based on right and wrong, but based on internal values of positive thinking and development of empathy and emotion. *Stage Four - Law and Order Orientation*. The individual maintains membership within the group by doing one's duty to protect and serve the group by following laws and rules, and respecting authority. The group is to be protected by preserving social order and decisions are no longer based on individual needs, but rather the needs of the many.

*Level Three - Postconventional, Autonomous, or Principled Level* is the final level and at this level moral decisions are made and values are developed that have merit

without the need of benefiting the group. *Stage Five - Social-Contract Legalistic Orientation*, as a member of the group, the individual has the obligation to follow the agreed upon laws, but the laws can be amended when the group agrees that change is morally right. *Stage Six - Universal Ethical Principal Orientation*. Values the individual over the group when the group is unjust and/or immoral to the individual or minority. This stage is abstract and moves beyond written laws or social norms. All members of the group are entitled to humane and dignified treatment with the assurance of justice, equality, and human rights based on universal principles which exceed the rights of the group (Kohlberg, 1971).

The progression through the three levels and six stages transforms the individual's thinking from egocentric to universal. Progression is one stage at a time and it is not possible to skip or move back-and-forth between stages. Once an individual moves into a new stage, they remain there until they have morally developed and progress to the next stage.

To test his theories, Kohlberg developed the *Moral Judgment Interview* to measure the subject's moral reasoning. The structured interview was conducted by a trained interviewer who presented situations involving moral conflicts. For example, Heinz's wife is dying and a pharmacist has a drug that will save her life, however Heinz cannot afford the drug. Should Heinz steal the drug to save his wife's life? The subject is then asked a series of open ended questions to elicit their moral reasoning. The responses are judgments about what a person should do rather than what a person would do (Elm & Weber, 1994).



Kohlberg is recognized as an influential theorist in the study of moral development, but his work has generated criticism (Rest, 1979). Gilligan (1993) accused Kohlberg of gender bias due to his exclusion of women from his initial research, and that this exclusion has created a bias permeates throughout the six stage theory. She found further evidence of gender bias concerning how the sexes approach moral dilemmas. Men are concerned with justice, while women emphasize caring and moral development for males is based on individuality compared with connectedness for women. Beyond gender criticism, the MJI has raised concerns over its length and complicated interview procedures that produced results based on interviewer interpretation, and potential bias, rather than quantifiable scores (Rest, 1979; Rest, et al., 1999b).

#### James Rest and the Defining Issues Test

James Rest's theories on moral development were heavily influenced by the work of Kohlberg. Rest, et al. (1999b) identified his theory as Neo-Kohlbergian, and while acknowledging the shortcomings of Kohlberg's theory, Rest did believe Kohlberg's core theory was still relevant and meaningful to researchers to build upon. Rest disputed that a person only moved up sequentially from one stage of moral reasoning to another and was incapable of skipping stages or going backwards. Instead, Rest argued that people operate within moral schemas and that these moral schemas were fluid and dependent on the individual's life experiences (Rest, et al., 1999b).

Rest acknowledged the criticism of Kohlberg's Moral Judgment Interview and developed the Defining Issues Test (DIT) to measure moral reasoning without the bias

and length concerns of the MJI. The DIT is a pencil and paper test that presents the subject with six scenarios based on moral dilemmas which ask them to evaluate the factors that they based their course of action for solving the dilemmas (Rest, 1994).

Scenarios, including the first one based on the MJI, include the following moral dilemmas:

1. Should Heinz steal medicine to save his dying wife if he cannot obtain it any other way?
2. Should students occupy a university office building to force administration to end an unpopular program on campus?
3. Should Mrs. Jones turn in Mr. Thompson, an escaped prisoner, even though he has led a good life?
4. Should a high school principal stop a controversial article from being printed in school newspaper?
5. Should a doctor grant the request of a dying patient to give her a fatal overdose of medication to end her suffering?
6. A garage manager needs another mechanic but the only applicant is of a minority race and the owner is concerned that his customers will go somewhere else if the applicant is hired. When the applicant inquires about the position, the owner tells him the job is no longer available.

The DIT measures a subject's moral schemas and reasoning process used to determine the morally correct solution. When the subject reads the scenarios and uses the inventory related to the scenarios, the moral schema within the subject directs the

responses. The moral schema is a not a conscious awareness, but a hidden force that directs the moral responses of the subject. According to Rest (1999) the DIT subjects rate an item highly if it has importance to them and if it is perceived as being more important than other options available and that the moral schemas correspond to direct action choices within the moral dilemmas.

The DIT produces results which align with Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development and respondents fall within *Stages 2-6*. *STAGE 23* score reveals items the subject responded to that correspond to *Stage 2* and *Stage 3* with a range of 0-95. The *STAGE 4* score represents items from *Stage 4* with a range of 0-95. The DIT's most commonly used score is the Principled Score (*P-score*), which rates the responses to items based on *Stage 5* and *Stage 6* and ranges from 0-95. The higher the *P-score* the higher the respondent's moral judgment (Rest, 1994).

According to the Center for the Study of Ethical Development (2012) the DIT provides additional information about the subject's moral reasoning. If the subject's moral reasoning resides in one schema, The *CONSTRAN* score identifies it as "consolidated", but if the moral reasoning is fluid then it is "traditional". If no primary schema is present, the subject is considered to be in "developmental transition". *Type Indicator* places the subject's moral reasoning in one of seven types as the subject moves from consolidated to traditional schemas.

- Type 1: Predominant in Personal Interests and consolidated
- Type 2: Predominant in Personal Interests but transitional

- Type 3: Predominant in Maintaining Norms but transitional, Personal Interests is secondary
- Type 4: Predominant in Maintaining Norms and consolidated
- Type 5: Predominant in Maintaining Norms but transitional, Post-conventional is secondary
- Type 6: Predominant in Post-conventional but transitional
- Type 7: Predominant in Post-conventional and consolidated

The *UTILIZER* score matches the subject's action choices with items they determined as important and looks for consistency between the two.

Rest et al. (1999) defined the moral judgment construct validity of the DIT based on six points:

1. Differentiation of age and educational groups.
2. Show longitudinal gains.
3. Show gains based on interventions to improve moral reasoning.
4. Evidence of a hierarchy of moral development.
5. Predict moral behaviors.
6. Predict political choices.

The DIT has been validated in over 400 research articles and numerous studies and has Cronbach alpha reliability rating in the upper .70s to lower .80s in retests (Center of Ethical Development, 2012).

After 25 years of use, the DIT was revised in the late 1990s. New developments in scoring allowed for a developmental score to be calculated and enhanced reliability

checks were put in place. The biggest change was in the redesigned moral dilemmas. Changing social conditions made the moral dilemmas related to the Vietnam War, men wearing long hair, and use of now offensive racial names outdated (Rest, et al., 1999a). The revised DIT, known as the DIT-2, presents subjects with the following scenarios:

1. A man and his family are starving in India. The man has heard that in another village someone is hoarding food in the hopes of selling it at a profit. The starving man is thinking of stealing some food to feed himself and his family.
2. A reporter accidentally uncovers an arrest record for a political candidate. The arrest occurred many years ago and was for a minor offense. The candidate has done great works in the community, but could be lose the upcoming election if the story is published. The reporter is unsure whether to publish the story.
3. An elected member of the school board has been named chairman. Financial difficulties have forced the board to choose a high school for closure. The chairman won election on a pledge to hold open meetings for the public to voice their concerns. During the first open meeting threats of violence were made and board members are receiving threatening phone calls. The chairman is considering whether to hold another open meeting.
4. An elderly cancer patient is requesting increase in her pain medication due to her intense pain. The doctor has informed her that the increased medication could lead to her premature death. The patient accepts this because she wants

to end her pain even at the cost of her life. Should the doctor give her the requested pain medication?

5. The President of the United States has sent the military to a South American country due to instability. Students on a college campus are protesting the use of American force for what they consider dubious reasons and have caused disorder in the town. After the college president is demanding that the students stop protesting, the students took over the administration building and the campus is paralyzed. Should the students demonstrate in this manner?

The DIT and DIT-2 are used in fields such as accounting, business, and education to determine the moral judgment of working professionals and assist with professional development related to ethical and moral behavior (Shawver & Sennetti, 2008; Bailey, Scott, & Thoma, 2010). Despite widespread use, Rest and others have criticized of the DIT and DIT-2. Validity tests have shown correlations between high schema scores and cognitive ability (Rest, 1979). Education levels also influence DIT scores. High levels of formal education typically produce scores, with post-graduates scoring the highest and institutionalized delinquents scoring the lowest (Rest & Narvaez, 1994).

Vitton and Wasonga (2009) administered the DIT-2 to 60 elementary principals from the Midwest and found that age and education had no measurable impact on the respondents' *P-Score*. While previous studies indicated that education levels influence moral judgment scores, Vitton and Wasonga (2009) found that the principals who all had graduate degrees scored lower than predicted and that the most influential component on moral reasoning was political views. The author's questioned whether the lower than

expected scores were as a result of the pressures brought on principals due to accountability and used the scores to point out the need for principals to demonstrate vigilance in matters related to social justice and fairness for all children (Vitton & Wasonga, 2009).

Rest (1994) believed that there was more to moral development than just moral judgment development and that moral judgment was larger than six stages. The challenge was to identify the other parts of morality and determine their relationship to each other. Rest sought to explain what determines moral development not by dividing it into separate components but by asking the question, “What must we suppose happens psychologically in order for moral behavior to take place?” The answer for Rest was that moral behavior occurred when an individual operated within all of the parts of the theoretical Four Component Model. Moral failures occurred whenever there is an inability to meet the requirements of any of the components.

- Component I: Moral Sensitivity - The individual is aware that their actions and how they affect others. Different courses of action are evaluated based on how each action will affect others. Failure occurs when the individual is unaware that their actions affect others.
- Component II: Moral Judgment - After evaluating each action and the possible ramifications, an action is chosen that is more morally justifiable. Failure occurs when overly simplistic justifications are made for decisions.
- Component III: Moral Motivation - Moral values are placed above all other considerations, including personal, by the individual. Failure occur

when moral considerations are ignored in pursuit of personal or program goals.

- Component IV: Moral Character - The individual remains morally strong in spite of distractions, pressures, or threats. Failure occurs when the individual is weak-willed.

There are several factors that influence an individual's failure to act morally. A lack of knowledge due to limited experiences inhibits the development of the schemas necessary to make moral judgments. When an individual is guided by egocentric motivation they are unable or unwilling to consider the needs of others over their own. The inability to act in a moral manner inhibits individuals and society. Leaders who function at higher levels of moral reasoning are able to make ethical decisions and moral judgments that solve values conflicts and complex moral issues (Sun, 2011).

### Moral and Immoral Leadership

The last twenty years has seen significant growth in the leadership education industry as universities and self-anointed leadership experts have created programs designed to teach leadership theories, strategies and skills (Rhode, 2006). Yet even as more people are exposed to studies and seminars in leadership the instances of failed leadership continue to rise with devastating economic and societal consequences, i.e. Enron, Tyco, and HealthSouth Corp. (Kellerman, 2004). Examples of failed leadership in public education are becoming just as numerous as their counterparts in business, finance, and politics.



In 2011, a special investigative committee formed by the Governor of Georgia found evidence of systemic cheating on state standardized assessments occurring throughout the Atlanta Public School System since 2001. The report found that of 178 educators who had cheated, 38 were principals and that over two-thirds of APS schools were involved in misconduct (Office of the Governor, State of Georgia, 2011). Teachers reported that they worked in a climate of fear and were ordered by administrators to change test answers to boost the achievement scores of the urban district (Winerip, 2011). When questions were raised, principals and district administrators interfered with the investigation, made false statements and directed their teachers to do the same (Vogell, 2011).

During an investigation into cheating accusations at Washington D.C. Public Schools (DCPS), principals revealed that they were under extreme pressure by Chancellor Michelle Rhee to produce student gains of ten percent or more on standardized assessments or risk losing their jobs (Gillum & Bello, 2011). During her three year tenure, Rhee replaced over two-thirds of DCPS, including 46 principals in 2008 (Turque, 2012).

In Pennsylvania, 89 schools are under investigation for cheating after irregularities were discovered on state assessments (Graham & Woodall, 2011).

In New York City, a principal is under investigation for creating a reward system that gave teachers whose students scored high on state exams smaller classes and fewer students who were English language learners and teachers who failed to produce acceptable scores were given less desirable teaching assignments. The reward system

came to light during the ongoing investigation to the school's high erasure patterns on standardized tests and high scores (Morales, 2012).

In Brooklyn, New York a principal was recorded during a 40 minute tirade against her staff for their answers on a school survey saying their honesty threatened the school (Monahan, 2010).

In Seattle, Washington, a principal left his school after the district received numerous complaints from parents about his behavior with them, teachers, and students (Cafazzo, 2012).

In Osceola County, Florida an elementary school principal resigned after his arrest for distributing drugs and accusations that he was having drug parties at his school (Breen, 2012).

These examples highlight the morally ambiguous realm that many leaders find themselves operating from that leads to actions that are morally and ethically murky. While moral characteristics are valued among leaders, is morality a necessary component of leadership?

Leadership, according to Burns (2004), is a moral undertaking that requires leaders to have moral traits who can respond to the needs of those they lead. The ideal leader has a strong moral center whose traits include respect and dignity. Leadership's purpose is to meet human needs and reduce suffering through equality, justice, and opportunity. This moral laden leadership can transform human existence for the better and in turn create morally strong followers and future leaders that can continue the cycle.

Morality is the foundation for transformational leadership according to Bass and Steidlmeier (1999). Transformational leaders increase awareness of what is right and important and foster their followers' moral maturity and lead them to self-actualization and achievement. Leadership can provide leaders with a moral compass that guide leaders in making virtuous decisions and aid them in their moral development. The leader's moral development includes a spiritual component that assists the leader in understanding the meaning of human existence. This moral development imbeds in the leader characteristics of humbleness, loyalty, generosity, forgiveness, and helping others. Morality even has a place in transactional leadership, which focuses more on compliance, when the leader is truthful and fair.

Business ethicist Joanne Cuilla (2004) believes that there is a moral and ethical obligation of leaders to meet the needs of their followers and that failure to do so is unethical. The challenge faced by leaders is that ethical and moral based decisions often are in conflict with an organization's goal of profitability. Leadership's moral obligation goes beyond just improving the lives of followers, but in empowering them by sharing power and providing resources. Exclusivity of power in the leaders hand can lead to decision that lack moral and ethical principles and lead to actions which can benefit the organization but at a cost to the followers. This can be avoided through a shared leader-follower relationship that is consensual and provides limits to a leader acting without the consent of the followers.

Poor decisions and questionable leadership practices highlight the ethical and moral challenges leaders face in the day-to-day reality of leading organizations.

Kellerman (2004) believed that failed leadership should be classified as bad leadership that can be divided into two realms ineffective and unethical. Ineffective leadership fails to produce the desired change that the leader seeks or that those who have placed the leader in power have deemed necessary. When leadership becomes ineffective the leader often becomes unethical, failing to distinguish between right and wrong in an attempt to create the desired change. The realization of failed expectations triggers self-preservation instincts which can push the leader to make more ethically challenged decisions until success, even temporary, is achieved or their failure is complete and they are removed from their position. A consequence of this pattern of leadership has been to create an acceptance of bad leadership among followers. While leaders can be replaced and leadership practices can be changed, until we reduce the number of bad followers, ethically challenged leaders will continue to hold positions.

With so many challenges placed upon leaders and the gray area that leaders must often operate within there is a question whether morality has any role in leadership. Machiavelli (1532) theorized that a leader could be effective without need for morality. While encouraging future leaders to generate support among their followers, immoral acts such as deceit, cruelty, lying, and murder were acceptable means to acquire and maintain leadership. While *The Prince* has been noted for its absence of morality, even being banned by the Catholic Church for its opinions on the Church, Schliechert (2011) argues that Machiavelli does subtly address the problem of morality and the leader. The era in which Machiavelli wrote is noted for violence, intrigue, debauchery, and other acts of immorality and these were practiced not only by the civilian and military leaders but

also by the leading moral authority of the day, the Catholic Church. If the leader is surrounded by those who act immorally, then the leader must act without morality in order to succeed. Acting without morality is not meant to denote an immoral leader, but rather an immoral society and culture that must be governed.

The environment that the leader must work in can produce a climate that lacks morality if introduced by powers above the leader. The pressure to produce is a common theme in the leadership on immoral and unethical leadership practices. Bardes and Piccolo (2010) refer to these ethically challenged leaders as Destructive Leaders and believe that leadership failures occur due to the need to meet ever growing and often unobtainable organizational performance goals. Leaders often feel justified in making ethical and moral exceptions when faced with challenges that threaten their organization's success or very existence (Price, 2006). Former Undersecretary of Education Diane Ravitch (2010) believed the pressure to meet unrealistic student achievement goals led many school leaders to engage in questionable and unethical practices. The growing preoccupation with measurable effectiveness has led to a lack of morality in leadership and further decline in leadership characteristics and quality (Sendjaya, 2005).

If environment creates the moral environment the leader works within, then the need for morality in leadership is questionable. To Heifetz (2009), leadership was conceptualized by the followers' moral code, yet the word leader is a value free. Franklin Roosevelt, Abraham Lincoln, and Lech Walesa are as much leaders as Adolf Hitler, Pol Pot and Joseph Stalin. Because the term leadership has become so value laden based on

the culture of the leader, followers, and those who study leadership it should be abandoned and terms such as power and influence. By being value-free, and thus free of morality, deeper insight could be made into the actions of those in power, particularly when those actions are harmful.

To Rhode (2006), morality is an individualized concept with as many definitions as people and therefore there can be no single agreed upon definition, this coupled with other factors make the inclusion of morality as a leadership quality problematic. The pragmatic concerns that leaders face, profitability, increased performance, are more of a concern than the moral dimensions of leadership. Leadership literature reflects this trend with a decline in sections related to moral based leadership and favor of stylized examples that provide easily solved examples of problems that favor business.

According to Rost (1991) it is an accepted belief that leaders should have high moral standards. While in theory this is an admirable quality for leaders, defining high moral standards is impossible due to the varying life experiences that shape each individual's definition of morality and how that translates into high moral standards. The inability to agree upon a definition makes the inclusion of moral standards a dubious quality for leaders.

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

### Introduction

This chapter describes the methods and procedures used while conducting this research study. The chapter is divided into six areas: framework for the study, problem statement, the purpose of the study, the participants, data collection, research questions, and the analysis of data.

### Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was based on the work of Lawrence Kohlberg and his Theory of Moral Development. Kohlberg developed the *Moral Judging Interview* (MJI) to measure an individual's moral reasoning. The MJI presented the respondent with moral dilemmas they are asked to solve and provide justifications for their decisions. Based on the responses given to the dilemmas a person's level of moral reasoning was categorized into three levels Preconventional, Conventional, or Postconventional. Each level is comprised of two stages and increased moral development and reasoning was expressed in the individual's progression from Stage 1 to Stage 6.

### Statement of the Problem

The study was conducted in in a large public school district located in the Southeastern United State in a county that is designated as an urban area (US Census Bureau, 2011). The county is located within an urban cluster based on guidelines

published by the US Department of Commerce's Census Bureau (2011). The school district where the study was conducted is classified by the United States Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences' National Center for Educational Statistics (2009), using its urban centric system, as being within urbanized areas.

The Center of Urban Schools at State University of New York, Oswego identifies one of the key characteristics of an urban school as a high poverty rate as measured by the free and reduced lunch rate (Russo, 2004) . In 2012, the school district where the study was conducted had 104 schools that were identified as high poverty schools, an increase from 88 schools in 2011. High poverty schools typically have lower student achievement scores when compared with their higher socio-economic counterparts. Stability rates for principals at high poverty schools in the district are lower than their higher socio-economic counterparts.

There is a lack of sustainability in the elementary school principal position in the district the study was conducted. A review of the 2011-2012 School Improvement Plans for the districts' 117 traditional elementary schools revealed that 75% of their principals had been at the school for five years or less and that 42% had been at the school two years or less. Of the 62 high poverty schools that meet the research criteria to be identified as a traditional elementary school, 79% have principals who have been at the school five years or less, 56% have principals that have been at the school three years or less, and 42% have principals who have been at the school two years or less. When examining the 19 elementary schools that had a principal with less than one year experience, 47% were identified as high poverty (OCPS, 2012).



Despite the district being an urban school district located within an urban center, with a preponderance of elementary schools that meet the definition of an urban school, and evidence that there is a significant amount of turnover in urban elementary school principal positions within the district, there is no instrument in use or developed to help identify and select candidates who share moral characteristics of effective urban elementary principals to lead urban elementary schools. The inability to effectively pick candidates with greater potential to be a good fit for vacant elementary principal positions for urban elementary schools contributes to the continuing instability in these positions.

#### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the moral reasoning and moral decision making of principals who lead urban high poverty elementary school and determine if a difference exists between with moral schema and moral reasoning of principals whose schools are high achieving and those who are low achieving. The findings will be shared with the client district to assist them in identifying and screening potential candidates to lead urban high poverty elementary schools who will be a good fit and improve sustainability in the principal position at urban elementary schools within the district.

#### Population

The district where the study was conducted had 64 elementary schools receiving Title I funding from 2009-2011. From these elementary schools, principals who served during the 2008-2009, 2009-2010, and 2010-2011 school will be screened to determine

eligibility. From this screened population, 20 principals will be randomly sampled to be administered the DIT-2.

### Research Questions

The study was directed by the following research questions:

1. Within what stages of moral development do the urban elementary school principals of a large urban school district in the Southeast United States operate?
2. What moral reasoning processes do the urban elementary school principals of a large urban school district in the Southeast United States use to make moral-based decisions?

### Procedures

The researcher applied to the Institutional Review Board at the University of Central Florida and was granted approval to conduct this research. The researcher contacted the district where the study was conducted to request a list of all urban high poverty elementary schools for the school years 2008-2009, 2009-2010, and 2010-2012. The list of 64 elementary schools was reviewed and high poverty schools located in rural areas or those schools that were not traditional elementary schools were removed from consideration reducing the number of eligible schools to 49. School Improvement Plans were then reviewed for each of the remaining schools to determine which of those schools had the same principal for all three school years. The number of eligible schools was reduced to 29 schools and from that pool, 20 were randomly selected. The researcher

applied to the district's office of Accountability, Research, and Assessment to administer the DIT-2 to the selected principals and was granted approval. Eligible principals were invited by the researcher to participate in the study. The selected principals were mailed the DIT-2, an answer sheet, directions and post-paid return envelope addressed to the researcher. The researcher sent the completed answer sheets to the Center for the Study of Ethical Development at the University of Alabama to be scored.

### Instrumentation

This study's analysis is based on the theory of James Rest and the use of his *Defining Issues Test* (DIT). The DIT was developed as an offshoot of Kohlberg's Moral Stages Theory and as an alternative to Kohlberg's *Moral Judging Interview* (MJI). The DIT measures a subject's moral schemas and reasoning process used to determine the morally correct solution. When the subject reads the scenarios and uses the inventory related to the scenarios, the moral schema within the subject directs the responses. The moral schema is not a conscious awareness, but a hidden force that directs the moral responses of the subject. According to Rest, et al. (1999a) the DIT subjects rate an item highly if it has importance to them and if it is perceived as being more important than other options available and that the moral schemas correspond to direct action choices within the moral dilemmas.

The DIT produces results which align with Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development and respondents fall within *Stages 2-6*. *STAGE 23* score reveals items the subject responded to that correspond to *Stage 2* and *Stage 3* with a range of 0-95. The

*STAGE 4* score represents items from *Stage 4* with a range of 0-95. The DIT's most commonly used score is the Principled Score (*P*-score), which rates the responses to items based on *Stage 5* and *Stage 6* and ranges from 0-95. The higher the *P*-score the higher the respondent's moral judgment (Rest, 1994).

After 25 years of use, Rest revised the DIT. Named the DIT-2, the revisions included dilemmas that were shorter and consisted of situations more relevant to test takers, a developmental score (N2), and revised methodology for checking the reliability of participants. The DIT-2 correlated with the DIT ( $r = .79$ ) and validity was identified as being consistent with the original DIT (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .90$ ) (Rest, Narvaez, Thoma, & Bebeau, 1999). The N2 score combines the Postconventional (higher stage) prioritized items and the level that Personal Interest (lower stage) items are rated lower than Postconventional items. The P-Score and the N2 score nearly mirror each other ( $r = .83$ ) (Rest, Thoma, Navaez, & Bebeau, 1997).

### Data Analysis

The study's analysis focused on the Moral Judgment Developmental indices, the Developmental Profile and Phase indices, and Experimental indices scores provided by the DIT-2.

The Personal Interest Schema Score correlates to Stage 2 (direct advantage to the individual) and Stage 3 (maintaining approval of the group). The Maintaining Norms Schema Score correlates to Stage 4 (maintaining formal roles and structures). The Postconventional Schema Score correlates to Stage 5 (safeguarding rights) and Stage 6

(universal good). The P Score is a summation of all the scores related to Stages 5 and 6 and correlates to the individual's Postconventional moral thinking. The N2 Score is comprised of two parts, the priority given to Postconventional items and the degree which Personal Interest Items receive lower ratings than those of Postconventional items. The scores from the two parts are combined with the P Score to the rating data and weighted by three.

The Type Indicator identifies an individual's moral cognition characteristics and consists of seven levels correspond to a person's moral growth and schema preference. The U Score identifies consistency between items identified as most important and the actions chosen for the moral dilemmas. The higher the U Score the more consistent a respondent is with ideal and actions.

The Number of "Can't Decide Choices" provides a score for the level of decisiveness of the respondent by identifying the number of times no action choice was given to a dilemma. The Humanitarian/Liberalism score matches the number of times a person chooses responses that match the highest scoring groups (professionals in the political sciences and philosophy). The Religious Orthodoxy Proxy Measure rates and ranks responses related to the dilemma pertaining to treating a dying woman.

## CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS OF DATA

### Introduction

This study was conducted to identify the moral reasoning and moral decision making of urban high poverty elementary school principals in the district in which the study took place and determine if a difference exists between with moral schema and moral reasoning of principals whose schools are high achieving and those who are low achieving based on the school grade the school received from the state Department of Education. The moral reasoning and moral decision making of principals who participated in this study were measured through the administration of the *Defining Issues Test-2*. The school grades were retrieved from the state Department of Education based on the results of the state's assessment. The analysis of the data from both sources is presented in this chapter. The chapter is divided into five sections: (a) Population Description; (b) Participants, Non-Participants, and Exclusions; (c) Analysis of the Research Questions; (d) Participants Individual Results with School Performance; and, (d) Summary.

### Population Description

The district where the study was conducted had 64 elementary schools designated as high poverty from 2009-2011. From these elementary schools, principals who served during the 2008-2009, 2009-2010, and 2010-2011 school were screened to determine eligibility. From this screened population, 20 principals were randomly sampled to be administered the DIT-2.

### Participants, Non-Participants, and Exclusions

Twenty principals received invitations to participate in the study and 9 returned their completed DIT-2. Attempts to increase participation were unsuccessful through follow-up communications with the eligible principals. The DIT-2 was scored by the Office for the Study of Ethical Development at the University of Alabama. The scorer purged one respondent. No specific reason was provided for purging the response, but it is common for “many studies to lose up to 15% of their sample due to inconsistencies between ratings and rankings, for endorsement of too many “Meaningless” items, for leaving too much data out, for not discriminating among items” (Bebeau & Thoma, p. 2). The researcher excluded two participants because of false information related to highest level of education earned by the participants. An additional score was purged when it was revealed to the researcher that the DIT-2 was not completed by the eligible principal, but by their replacement. After the purges were completed, there were 5 principals whose results and school performances were used in this study.

### Analysis of the Research Questions

#### *Research Question 1*

Within what stages of moral development do the urban elementary school principals of a large urban school district in the Southeast United States operate? The DIT-2 provides a number of scores to assist in answering this question. The Postconventional Score (P-Score) rates the responses given to the dilemmas in the DIT-2 based on Stages 5 and 6 of Kohlberg’s Stages of Moral Development. The range of

scores is from 0-95, with higher scores indicating the respondent operates at greater level of moral development. Table 1 shows the P-Score ranges for the participating principals.

Table 1

*DIT-2 P-Scores for Participating Principals (N=5)*

Participant Number	P-Score
10002	8.00
10013	16.00
10015	20.00
10019	34.00
10008	50.00

The small number of participants significantly increased the concern that the data could be skewed by outliers. A test was run by the researcher on the P-Scores and outliers were identified. Table 2 shows the comparison of P-Scores' means and standard deviation with and without the outliers.

Table 2

*DIT-2 P-Score Means and Standard Deviations*

P-Scores	<i>N</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>
Principals			
P-Score with outliers	5	25.60	16.57
P-Score without outliers	3	23.33	9.45



The operational level of the principals with Kohlberg’s Moral Stages 2 and 3 were measured with the Personal Interest Schema score. Stage 2 and 3 individuals are concerned with personal advantage, maintaining friendships and approval (Bebeau & Thoma, 2003). This score indicates the principals’ self-interest considerations when responding to the dilemmas. The scores can range from 0-95 with higher scores indicating a self-preservation, self-interest, and direct advantage to the respondent. The mean Personal Interest Score of the principals (n = 5) was 30.8 (*sd* = 17.52). With outliers removed the mean Personal Interest Score of the principals (n = 4) was 35.5 (*sd* = 16.19). Table 3 shows the participants Personal Interest Schema Scores.

Table 3

*DIT-2 Personal Interest Schema Scores for Participants (N=5)*

Participant Number	Personal Interest Schema Score	P-Score
10008	12.00	50.00
10013	20.00	16.00
10019	24.00	34.00
10015	44.00	20.00
10002	54.00	8.00

The researcher ran a test on the Personal Interest Schema scores and two outliers were identified. Table 4 shows the comparisons of means for the Personal Interest Schema scores with and without the outlier

Table 4

*DIT-2 Personal Interest Schema Score Means and Standard Deviations*

P-Scores	<i>N</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>
Principals			
PIS Score with outliers	5	30.80	17.52
PIS Score without outliers	3	29.33	12.85

The N2 score combines the Postconventional (higher stage) prioritized items and the level that Personal Interest (lower stage) items are rated lower than Postconventional items. Table 5 shows the comparisons of the P-Score, the Personal Interest Schema scores, and the N2 score.

Table 5

*DIT-2 N2 Scores for Participants (N=5)*

Participant Number	Personal Interest Schema Score	P-Score	N2 Score
10015	24.00	34.00	4.52
10002	54.00	8.00	8.63
10013	20.00	16.00	17.08
10019	24.00	34.00	38.87
10008	12.00	50.00	53.41

The Maintaining Norms Schema Score identifies a person’s operational level within Kohlberg’s Stage 4 and indicates the person’s beliefs in maintaining social norms,

existing roles and organizational structure. The scores range from 0-95. Table 6 shows the scores for Maintaining Norms Schema.

Table 6

*DIT-2 Maintaining Norms Schema Scores for Participants (N=5)*

Participant Number	Maintaining Norms Schema Score	P-Score
10015	18.00	20.00
10008	32.00	50.00
10002	34.00	8.00
10019	42.00	34.00
10013	50.00	16.00

An outlier was identified when testing the scores for Maintaining Norms Schema.

Table 7 shows the mean and standard deviation for the scores with and without the outlier.

Table 7

*DIT-2 Maintaining Norms Schema Score Means and Standard Deviations*

P-Scores	<i>N</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>
Principals			
PIS Score with outliers	5	35.20	11.96
PIS Score without outliers	4	39.50	8.22

## *Research Question 2*

What moral reasoning processes do the urban elementary school principals of a large urban school district in the Southeast United States use to make moral-based decisions?

The DIT-2 provides insight into a respondent's moral reasoning by indicating schema they operate within and assigning a "Type" number from 1-7. This score provides a thorough indicator of a person's moral cognition character. The Types are defined below:

- Type 1: Predominant in Personal Interests and consolidated
- Type 2: Predominant in Personal Interests but transitional
- Type 3: Predominant in Maintaining Norms but transitional, Personal Interests is secondary
- Type 4: Predominant in Maintaining Norms and consolidated
- Type 5: Predominant in Maintaining Norms but transitional, Post-conventional is secondary
- Type 6: Predominant in Post-conventional but transitional
- Type 7: Predominant in Post-conventional and consolidated

(Bebeau & Thoma, 2003).).

Table 8 shows the participants "Types" and their P-Scores based on their answers to the DIT-2.

Table 8

*DIT-2 “Type” and P-Scores for Participants (N=5)*

Participant Number	Type Indicator	P-Score
10015	1	20.00
10002	2	8.00
10013	3	16.00
10019	4	34.00
10008	7	50.00

Participants Individual Results with School Performance

Participants’ school grades as assigned by the state Department of Education were compared with their P-Scores and Type Indicator to examine whether these scores matched school performance. Table 9 shows the participants’ P-Scores, Type Indicators, and School Grades for the years 2009-2011.

Table 9

*DIT-2 P-Scores, Type Indicators, Personal Interest Score and School Grades for Participants (N=5)*

Participant Number	P-Score	Type Indicator	Personal Interest Score	Grade by Year
10013	16.00	3	20.00	2009-A 2010-A 2011-A
10015	20.00	1	44.00	2009-B 2010-B 2011-A
10002	8.00	2	54.00	2009-C 2010-C 2011-A
10019	34.00	4	24.00	2009-A 2010-B 2011-C
10008	50.00	7	12.00	2009-B 2010-B 2011-C

Reluctance to Participate

This study was met with resistance by a number of eligible participants. The researcher communicated with many of the eligible participants who were unwilling to

participate in the study. Table 10 details the explanations offered by those unwilling to participate.

Table 10

*Eligible Participants Comments Regarding Reluctance to Participate (N=5)*

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*Could you please share why you do not want to participate in this study.*

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Eligible Participant A

Why do you want this information? Who is going to see it? Who downtown will be reading this? I am leery of doing something like this. (Refused to participate)

Eligible Participant B

I am not comfortable doing this. Thank you for understanding. *Researcher asked why?* This seems very personal. I could look bad. (Refused to participate)

Eligible Participant C

I have enough to do already. I do not have time to do this. *Researcher explained that the DIT-2 would take less than 30 minutes and the results would help the district.* No. I am sure there are other principals who can help you. (Refused to participate)

Eligible Participant D

*Via Email-*I am not eligible to participate. I have not been at my school for 3 years. *Researcher responded that the principal's eligibility was based on service at their previous school.* I am not interested. Good luck. (Refused to Participate)

Eligible Participant E

Who is this for? How do I know it's not going to come back on me? *Researcher explained the study's confidentiality.* (Refused to participate)

*Relayed to the researcher by another principals*

I don't think anyone is going to do it. They don't want anyone seeing their answers. They're nervous about this. I spoke to them (the eligible principals) but I don't think they are going to do it. I will be shocked if you get any from us (Learning Community). There was no interest. The principal's don't trust the results won't be used against them.



### Summary

This study used scores from the DIT-2 to determine the moral development and moral reasoning of the participating principals. Means and standard deviations were run on all scores except the Type Indicator score which was not applicable. Tests were run to determine outliers on scores with means and standard deviations. The school grades for the years 2009, 2010, and 2011 were examined to see if higher moral development and moral reasoning scores would result in high school grades.

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the moral reasoning and moral decision making of urban elementary school principals and was done as a client based research study conducted on behalf of a large urban school district located in the Southeastern United States. The client district's purpose in requesting the study was to determine characteristics of their elementary principals to assist the client in selecting future candidates for elementary principal positions who have a greater chance of success and longevity in the position.

The client district's current elementary principals all meet minimum state and district qualifications regarding education and experience to meet licensing and employment requirements. Since the client district's principals had similar levels of education, experience, and success in previously positions, it was decided to identify a characteristic that could provide unique information on each principal, but also determine if there was a range of measurement that principals would fall within.

The researcher submitted to the client a request to administer the Defining Issues Test-2 to selected elementary principals to determine their moral judgment and moral reasoning. The researcher wanted to identify the levels of moral reasoning and moral judgment the principals had and to determine if the principals' scores would fall within a range. Furthermore, the researcher proposed to compare the results of the DIT-2 with the school grades earned during a three year period to see if those who had scores indicating

higher levels of moral reasoning and judgment led schools that were identified by the Florida Department of Education as High Achieving by earning a grade of A or B by the state Department of Education.

This study was guided by two research questions:

1. Within what stages of moral development do the urban elementary school principals of a large urban school district in the Southeast United States operate?
2. What moral reasoning processes do the urban elementary school principals of a large urban school district in the Southeast United States use to make moral-based decisions?

## Discussion

### *Research Question 1*

Research question one identified the level of moral development that the principals operated within by assigning a P-Score based on responses to the dilemmas posed in the DIT-2. The scores of the principals were compared with norming scores for different groups for the original DIT. Although the DIT and DIT-2 are separate tests, a study conducted by Rest, et al. (1999a) found a strong correlation between the scores of the DIT and DIT-2 ( $r = .79$ ). Table 10 shows the mean scores for norming groups on the DIT and Table 11 shows the P-Scores for the participating principals.

Table 11

*DIT-1 Scores for Different Groups*

P-Score	Group
65.2	Moral Philosophy Students
59.8	Liberal Protestant Seminarians
52.2	Law Students
50.2	Medical Students
49.2	Practicing Physicians
47.6	Dental Students
46.3	Staff Nurses
42.8	Graduate Students in Business
42.3	College Students in General
41.6	Navy Enlisted Men
40.0	Adults in General
31.8	Senior High School Students
23.5	Prison Inmates
21.9	Junior High School Students
18.9	Institutionalized Delinquents

(Rest, 1994)

Table 12

*DIT-2 P Scores for Participants (N=5)*

Participant Number	P-Score
10002	8.00
10013	16.00
10015	20.00
10019	34.00
10008	50.00

The P-Scores for the principals revealed scores lower than expected based on comparisons with the DIT-1 group scores found in Table I. The results revealed that the all of the principals, except for one, operated in the moral development range from below institutionalized delinquents to just above senior high school students. A mean P-score of 25.6 was close to prison inmates (23.5) and below senior high school students (31.8). These results indicated that the 80% of the respondents operate within Stage 1 and 2 of Kohlberg's Moral Development. The results showed that two principals had lower moral development than institutionalized delinquents did and one was below adults in general. Only one principal had a P-Score in the upper range of moral development.

The DIT-1 showed higher moral reasoning, as measured by the P-Score, for professions whose foundations were the moral obligation of good for the all rather than the individual and based on higher levels of education (Rest, 1994). The Center for the Study of Ethical Development (2003) found that scores for the DIT-2 were comparable with the DIT-1, but there was some divergence with scores from respondents with higher education. Table 12 shows P-Scores from the DIT-2 based on educational level.

Table 13

*DIT-2 P Scores for Different Education Levels*

P Score	Educational Level
15.78	Grades 7-9
33.13	Grades 10-12
32.19	Voc/Tech
31.06	Jr. College
32.32	Freshman
32.62	Sophomore
34.45	Junior
37.84	Senior
41.06	M.S. Degree
44.87	Professional Degree
50.69	Ph.D./Ed.D.

(Bebeau & Thoma, 2003)

As principals in Florida, all of the participants were required to hold at least a master's degree. Three of the participants identified their highest level of education as a master's degree with one of the three selecting the choice of Professional Degree (Masters of Education). The remaining participant selected Doctoral Degree (Ph. D. or Ed. D.). All degree levels identified by the participants were verified for accuracy by examining each participant's school improvement plan for the years of the study. The P-Scores for the participants revealed scores lower than expected based when compared with average DIT-2 scores by education level. Table 13 shows the participants P-Scores with their identified level of education.

Table 14

*DIT-2 P Scores for Participants with their Identified Level of Education (N=5)*

Participant Number	Level of Education	P-Score
10002	M. S. Degree	8.00
10013	Ph. D. /Ed.D.	16.00
10013	M.S. Degree	34.00
10015	M. S. Degree	44.00
10008	Professional Degree	50.00

Results of the DIT-2 found that the participants 10008 and 10015 were the only participants who scored at or above the expected levels. All remaining participants scored statistically below expected levels.

These results confirmed Vitton and Wasonga's (2009) findings in their study of elementary school principals in the Midwestern United States. The principals in their study had a mean score of 38.9, scoring above high school seniors and below enlisted sailors in the U.S. Navy. While higher than the means of the principals in this study, the results showed that the elementary principals scored well below the expectations. It should be noted that the Vitton and Wasonga (2009) had 60 participants in their study, compared with 5 in the current study which could account for the difference of the two studies.

The Personal Interest Schema scores represented the level of personal interest that was used when ranking responses to the moral dilemmas. The higher the score from 0-95, the more grounded the respondent is in Stage 2 and 3 when making moral decisions. The two outliers (10002 and 10008) were the only scores that reasonably matched

expectations. Principal 10002 had the lowest P-Score of the principals with a score of 8 and the highest Personal Interest Schema score of 54.00, while principal 10008 had the highest P-Score of the principals with a score of 50.00 and the lowest Personal Interest Schema score of 12.00. The remaining three principals had Personal Interest Schema scores lower than expected based on their low P-Scores. These results indicate that the non-outlier principals are not as focused on self-consideration when making moral judgments despite their P-Scores indicating lower moral development. The conundrum is why the Personal Interest Scores do not match up with P-Scores for these three principals. A possible explanation can be found in the reviewing the Maintaining Norms Schema scores.

The Maintaining Norms Schema scores indicated the principals' consideration of the society when making their moral decisions. The mean for this score was 35.20 ( $sd = 11.96$ ). The mean increased with the removal of the outlier to 39.50 ( $sd = 8.22$ ). The scores show that while the P-Scores are low for the group, the scores for the Personal Interest Schema and Maintaining Norms Schema do not match up with the P-Scores in most cases. This would suggest that some of the principals are transitioning through Stage 2/3 into Stage 4. The transitional and consolidated status of the principals is identified in the answer to the second research question.

The N2 scores were consistent with the P-Scores for the participants with the exception of 10015 who had a P-Score of 20.00 but a Personal Interest Score of 44.00. Participant 10015 had a N2 score of 4.52 indicating lower operational level of moral development than the P-Score indicated.



### *Research Question 2*

Research question two classified the level of moral reasoning that the principals operated within by assigning a Type indicator that identified the schema they operate within based on responses to the dilemmas posed in the DIT-2. Ranging from Level 1 to Level 7, the types correspond to Kohlberg's Moral Development Stages and indicate whether a respondent is consolidated or transitioning to the next moral development level. Three of the principals (10002, 10013, and 10015) had type indicators below Type 4. These indicators matched the lowest P-Scores and confirmed they exhibit low moral development and low moral reasoning. Principal 10019 had the second highest P-Score (34.00) and the second highest type indicator score (4). Principal 10008 was identified as a Type 7 confirming their P-Score of 50. Further examinations of the type scores identified two principals (10002 and 10013) were transitional and two principals (10008 and 10015) were consolidated. Principal 100015 was also identified as consolidated, but since they were a Type 7 there is no movement possible.

The transitional status of two principals and the Type 7 score for another provides evidence for why the means for the Personal Indicator Schema and Maintaining Norm Schema scores do not completely correlate with means for the P-Scores. Of the four principals who scored below expectation on the P-Score, two of them are transitional and therefore their responses to the moral dilemmas indicate a dichotomy of results.

### Analysis of Participants' Individual Results with School Performance

The school accountability program in the state in which the study occurred identifies a school performance at the elementary level based on student performance in Grades 3, 4, and 5 on its state assessment given in the spring each year. Assessments are given in reading and mathematics to all three grades while writing is administered in 4<sup>th</sup> and science to 5<sup>th</sup> graders. Students are scored from Level I (lowest) to Level V (highest) in all assessments except writing whose highest score is Level VI. Each year the minimum scores to achieve Level II-V increase and periodically the state increases all minimum cut scores. Students in Grade 3 who score a Level I on the reading are retained as required by state law. Students can be promoted based on good cause exemptions or successfully completing summer school requirements. School performance is calculated based on the following criteria:

1. Number of students scoring at each performance level for each assessment,
2. Number of students in Grades 4 and 5 who have shown growth from their previous year's scores in reading and/or math on the current year's assessments,
3. Number of students in Grades 4 and 5 who have shown declines in their previous year's scores in reading and/or math on the current year's assessments,

4. The gains or declines in previous year's scores in reading and math for students in Grades 4 and 5 who have been identified as a school's Lowest 25% on the current year's assessments, and
5. All the above for students who were retained in Grade 3 due to scoring a Level I on the reading assessment the previous year.

(Florida Department of Education, 2012).

Based on the criteria, the state awards each elementary school a grade from A to F. Schools that earn an A are entitled to receive recognition funds. Schools that have declining student achievement are monitored by the local school district and state. Schools that receive a grade of F are subject to state and school district oversight and other sanctions including removal of the principal and teachers. In 2012 the state began to annually determine and publish school rankings of all of its public elementary schools based on each school's performance on the state assessments. Each school district in the state also receives a grade from A-F based on the performance of all the schools within the school district. There are a number of factors that are considered when the state determines the school grade. Overall student performance on the assessments in reading, mathematics, writing (Grade 4 only), and science (Grade 5 only) is factored, but high performance is not enough to be determined a high performing school with a grade of A. Student growth on the reading and mathematics assessments are also included for students in 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade and for retained students in 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Schools who have high achievement scores can be penalized a full grade if their students fail to demonstrate a year's worth of growth (Florida Department of Education, 2012).

The school district that the study took place in vigorously monitors' student performance data throughout the year at the district, school, and classroom levels. Principals have been reassigned, demoted, and removed from their positions due to declining and/or poor student performance on the state assessment.

The schools led by the principals in the study earned grades in the A-C range during the 2009-2011 school years. One school earned As each year, two schools had increases in grades, and two schools had declines in grades. Principals' P-Scores were compared with their school grades to determine if principals with higher P-Scores would have schools with grades of A or B.

Principal 10008 had the highest P-Score (50.00), the lowest Personal Interest Schema Score (12.00), and was identified as a Type 7. All of these scores indicate a person who operates with high moral judgment and reasoning. Principal 10008's school grades reflect declining student achievement with grades of B in 2009 and 2010 and a grade of C for 2011. Despite having the highest moral scores, Principal 10008 had the lowest achieving school of the principals of the study.

Principal 10019 had the second highest P-Score (34.00), the third lowest Personal Interest Score (24.00), and was identified as a Type 4. Despite higher scores than three other principals, Principal 10019's school had declines in student achievement with grades of A in 2009, B in 2010, and C in 2011.

Principal 10015 had the third lowest P-Score (20.00) of the group, the second highest Personal Interest Score (44.00) and the lowest Type Indicator (1). Principal 10002 had the lowest P-Score (8.00), the highest Personal Interest Score (54.00), and the

second lowest Type Indicator (2). Both of these principals had scores that indicate low moral reasoning and judgment, deeper concerns for personal interest and self-preservation, and the low moral cognition character. Yet, both of these principals' schools had increases in student achievement with 10015's school earning B's in 2009 and 2010 and an A in 2011 and 10002's school earning C's in 2009 and 2010 and an A in 2011.

Principal 10013 had the third lowest P-Score (20.00), the second lowest Personal Interest Score (20.00), and was identified as a Type 3. The P-Score would indicate a person who operates with low moral judgment and reasoning; however the low Personal Interest Score reflects a higher concern for the greater good and has transitional moral cognition character moving from a Stage 3 into Stage 4. Principal 10013's school had the highest achievement of all the principals earning a grade of A for all three years.

### Discussion

The results of the study raise questions related to the notion that high achieving urban elementary schools are led by principals who operate with high moral judgment and reasoning. Despite an abundance of literature calling for principals to be morally and ethically grounded, the results indicated that all but one principal had lower levels of moral judgment and reasoning as measured by the DIT-2.

There are several factors that should be examined to identify possible causes to the findings in this study. The participant size of this study was very small. Regrettably only nine principals out of 31 principals who were contacted participated. Repeated

efforts were made with the 11 principals out of the original 20 selected to seek their participation. After a period of time an additional 11 eligible principals were asked to participate; none responded. The nine responses were reduced to five, due to one being eliminated by the scorer and three being eliminated by the researcher. The researcher encountered numerous examples of this fear when speaking with eligible principals about their participation in this study. Principals repeatedly asked who would see the results, would the results be traced back to them, and why were their schools' performance data going to be used. More than one expressed concern that the results of the study could hurt their career and they worried about extra scrutiny of themselves and their schools.

Principals have demonstrated success in their teaching careers, pre-principalship leadership positions, and academically by earning at least one graduate degree. Obtaining a principalship is a culminating event for many educators obtained after years of work. Having undue attention brought upon them was unsettling for many of the principals with whom the researcher communicated to. For many though, the thought of losing their position and the possible loss of their career at middle to late working age may have created a climate of fear and uncertainty.

This climate would appear to be the result of forces exerted by the school district and state as a result of the accountability requirements. The district the study was conducted in where the sustainability of principals in high-poverty elementary schools was problematic; with 79% of the principals at these schools having served five years or less (Orange County Public Schools, 2012). The state where the study occurred has been praised by proponents of educator accountability for continuously increasing student

performance expectations and removing educators who fail to meet these goals (Heritage Foundation, 2013, Students First, 2013). Principals who work in the state where the study was conducted are aware that their continuation as principals is predicated on their school's performance on the state's assessment. They have witnessed their colleagues transferred, demoted, and terminated based on their school's performance. The principals in this study all work in urban, high-poverty elementary schools where the challenge to improve student performance is compounded by poverty, crime, language acquisition, family concerns, and a myriad of other societal issues (Knesting & Waldron, 2006, and Solberg, Carlstrom, Howard, and Jones, 2007). The threat of dismissal, overcoming the tremendous obstacles that their students face, and meeting the expectations for student performance creates a climate where decisions that may not reflect the highest moral judgment and reasoning, but are necessary for the principal and school to survive. It seems reasonable to conclude that the pressures exerted by the high level of accountability has made the principals reluctant to participate and more importantly have created a system that requires success at any cost to ensure continuation as a principal.

The deeper issue is the role of morality in school leadership in the age of accountability. Machiavelli (1532) examined society and questioned how could a leader be moral when they were surrounded by an immoral population? Kellerman (2004) confirmed Machiavelli's premise by stating that unethical leadership will continue to occur as long as bad followers exist. Followers become bad when they are willing to accept leaders who engage in unethical and immoral acts when the results of the leader appear to produce desired results (Kellerman, 2004).

The moral and ethical beliefs that leaders possess are eroded when faced with the constant pressure to meet performance expectations (Sendava, 2005). It is this seemingly relentless push to perform and produce better results that lead leaders to make immoral decisions (Bardes & Picollo, 2010). Business and financial scandals and accusations of cheating in school districts across the country seem to confirm the theory that leaders must make decisions to protect their organizations and themselves even if they are unethical, immoral, and illegal (Price, 2006).

The leader's reaction to outside forces impacts their leadership decisions, but so does their leadership style. Hersey and Blanchard (2007) identified 4 leadership styles and 4 corresponding maturity levels that successful leaders operated within based on the situation and the maturity of their followers. Failure occurs within organizations when the leader is unable to match their leadership styles with the needs and abilities of their followers. The effective leader moves between styles and maturity levels as the needs of the task and followers change. This movement mirrors Rest's (1979) theory of the transitory nature of movement within moral development stages as the individual's schema is activated based on the situations and players. The leader's life experiences would create the moral reasoning and moral judgment schemas that could influence the evolution of the leader's leadership style and influence the ability of the leader to deftly move within the leadership and maturity styles to increase effectiveness. The relationship between a principal's moral reasoning and moral judgment levels with their leadership styles and maturity levels could impact a school's performance. Further research should be conducted to determine if there is a relationship between the leader's



moral reasoning and moral judgment and their leadership style and what impact does the relationship have on a school's performance.

### Conclusion

The results of this study, and the Vitton and Wasonga (2009) that this study confirmed, would point to a need in ongoing preparation of current and future principals in moral and ethical behavior. However, it is the conclusion of this researcher that there already exists an abundance of research on the importance of ethical and moral leadership in education, just as there is business, finance, and politics. Additional workshops and college coursework is not going to correct this problem in education any more than it is in any of segment of our society.

Unlike many other professions, people enter the teaching profession based on humanistic ideals of service to children and their community (Tarman, 2012). In contrast, students who studied business did so in large numbers because of the potential to earn significant incomes (Walstrom, Schambach, Jones, & Crampton, 2008). The introductions of business principles into education have caused a seismic shift in the profession. Student learning is no longer valued for intangible qualities, but only for what can be measured. Just as businesses make production goals, schools now make goals based on increases in measurable student achievement. Businesses celebrate profits in sales and investment, and educators now celebrate student performance data. Data has become the currency of education and just as in profits, the higher the data, the greater the cause for celebration. Failure to meet production goals is just as costly as failure to

meet student performance goals. Business and education are both results oriented; penalizing those that fail to produce with sanctions that include financial penalties, loss of employment, and ultimately closure.

The introduction of the scientifically measured business model of success into education has made children unwitting victims with this method of accountability. The pressure to produce has turned whole districts, schools, and classrooms from entities designed to instill learning into institutions where many are willing to succeed at any cost. Students are exposed to the pressure to produce and repeatedly reminded of the consequences of failing to meet state mandated expectations. These actions themselves lack moral efficacy and can only lead to morally and ethically challenged behaviors by those required to conduct such immoral practices.

One has to wonder what impact these educational policies will have on the generation of children who have been taught that the only valuable learning is that which can be tested and quantified, that all must meet one standard of success, and who have been witness to the actions of principals and teachers who must ensure that learning goals are met by any means necessary.

#### Recommendations for Further Research

This study focused on the moral reasoning and moral decision making of high-poverty elementary school principals in an urban district. This study could be replicated with secondary school principals and with different socio-economic levels to see if the results mirror this study.

Many of the most important decisions principals make are related to student achievement accountability. With the stakes so high for students, principals, schools, and districts, the impact that accountability has on principal decision making should be examined.

Principals do not operate independently, but rather are a part of a larger organization, the local school district, which in itself is a part of a much larger organization, the state. Organizational culture has significant impact on a leader's decision making and rationalization for actions taken (Owens & Valesky, 2007). The cultures that principals work within are ripe for further exploration, particularly in light of the ever growing accusations of accountability irregularities. How does a district influence a principal's ethical and moral decisions?

Principals' perception of the level of support and empathy provided by their district related to accountability is another area that should be explored. Leaders who work for organizations they consider negative develop cynical attitudes towards the organization that can impede the organization's efforts, including those which could lead to the reform of the organization (Davis & Gardner, 2004). What are principals' moral and ethical perceptions of their school districts and district leadership and what influence do those opinions have on the moral and ethical decisions principals make?

When organizations develop compliance-driven cultures moral muteness develops that silences questions and criticism related to actions which are morally and ethically questionable (Verhezen, 2010). Allegations have been raised across the nation of school district sanctioned practices to manipulate student achievement data and punitive action

taken against those who refused to participate. What perceptions do principals have about their ability to shape their district's culture concerning student accountability?

Duchon and Drake (2009) theorized that organizations which act unethically and lack a moral identity often do so unintentionally and without awareness due to organizational narcissism. These organizations indoctrinate members with their culture and behavioral standards and develop rules, procedures, and policies that allow it to respond to uncertainties and threats. When faced with realities that are distressing, denial and acceptable justifications are employed by the organization. While proclaiming to be ethical, narcissistic organizations' ego-defense prevents substantial self-reflection that could lead to change. Further research should be conducted on district actions in response to student accountability, particularly when the accountability results are unfavorable, and the effect these actions have on principals.

APPENDIX A  
DISSERTATION PROPOSAL APPROVAL

University of Central Florida

College of Education

**DISSERTATION PROPOSAL APPROVAL**

Permission to Continue with Dissertation

Date 07/11/2012

Name Robert Strenth

PID: [REDACTED] College of Education Code 0827D

Program Major Educational Leadership Code 827 Degree 829

Working Title of Dissertation An Analysis of the Moral Schema and Moral Reasoning of Effective Urban Elementary Principals in a Large Urban Florida School District

This student is hereby certified as having met all requirements to continue dissertation research.

Date admitted to Candidacy \_\_\_\_\_

[Signature]  
Committee Member Signature

Committee Member Signature  
[Signature]  
Committee Member Signature

Committee Member Signature (Outside-COE)  
[Signature]  
Dissertation Advisor Signature

Filed in Graduate Admissions Office and Doctoral Studies Office

[Signature] Date 7-11-12  
Doctoral Program Coordinator Signature

APPENDIX B  
SCHOOL DISTRICT RESEARCH APPROVAL

Submit this form and a copy of your proposal to: **Orange County Public Schools**  
 Accountability, Research, and Assessment

**RESEARCH REQUEST FORM**

RECEIVED SEP 07 2012

Your research proposal should include:

- Project Title
- Purpose and Research Problem
- Instruments
- Procedures and Proposed Data Analysis

Requester's Name Robert Strenth Date 9/6/2012

E-mail rstrenth@knights.ucf.edu Phone [REDACTED]

Address [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]  
 Street City, State Zip

Institutional Affiliation University of Central Florida

Project Director or Advisor Barbara Murray Phone 407-823-1473

Degree Sought: (check one)  Associate  Doctorate  Bachelor's  Not Applicable  Master's  Specialist

Project Title: The Moral Schema and Moral Reasoning of Title I Urban Elementary Principals in a Large Urban Florida School District

ESTIMATED INVOLVEMENT			
PERSONNEL/CENTERS	NUMBER	AMOUNT OF TIME (DAYS, HOURS, ETC.)	SPECIFY SCHOOLS BY NAME AND NUMBER OF TEACHERS, ADMINISTRATORS, ETC.
Students	N/A	N/A	N/A
Teachers	N/A	N/A	N/A
Administrators	20	30 minutes	[REDACTED] MS [REDACTED] ES [REDACTED] ES [REDACTED] ES [REDACTED] ES [REDACTED] ES Lake [REDACTED] ES [REDACTED] ES [REDACTED] a ES [REDACTED] y ES [REDACTED] ES [REDACTED] ES [REDACTED] ES [REDACTED] [REDACTED] ES [REDACTED] k ES [REDACTED] [REDACTED] ES [REDACTED] s ES [REDACTED] [REDACTED] ES [REDACTED] ES
Schools/Centers	N/A	N/A	N/A
Others (specify)	N/A	N/A	N/A

Specify possible benefits to students/school system: I am conducting a client based research on behalf of [REDACTED]. The district is seeking a method to identify characteristics of effective Title I urban elementary principals to assist the district in selecting candidates to lead urban schools who will have a greater chance of success and sustainability.

**ASSURANCE**

Using the proposed procedures and instrument, I hereby agree to conduct research in accordance with the policies of the Orange County Public Schools. Deviations from the approved procedures shall be cleared through the Senior Director of Accountability, Research, and Assessment. Reports and materials shall be supplied as specified.

Requester's Signature [Signature]

Approval Granted:  Yes  No Date: 9/21/12

Signature of the Senior Director for Accountability, Research, and Assessment [Signature]



APPENDIX C  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
 Office of Research & Commercialization  
 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
 Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
 Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

**Approval of Exempt Human Research**

**From: UCF Institutional Review Board #1  
 FWA0000351, IRB00001138**

**To: Robert S. Strenth**

**Date: October 10, 2012**

Dear Researcher:

On 10/10/2012, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination  
 Project Title: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MORAL SCHEMA AND MORAL REASONING OF TITLE I URBAN ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS IN A LARGE URBAN FLORIDA SCHOOL DISTRICT  
 Investigator: Robert S. Strenth  
 IRB Number: SBE-12-08687  
 Funding Agency:  
 Grant Title:  
 Research ID: N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 10/10/2012 01:57:47 PM EDT

IRB Coordinator

APPENDIX D  
DEFINING ISSUES TEST-2

# DIT-2

Defining Issues Test

Version 3.1

*University of Minnesota*

Copyright, James Rest & Darcia Narvaez

*University of Alabama*

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Center for the Study of Ethical Development

## Instructions

This questionnaire is concerned with how you define the issues in a social problem. Several stories about social problems will be described. After each story, there will be a list of questions. The questions that follow each story represent different issues that might be raised by the problem. In other words, the questions / issues raise different ways of judging what is important in making a decision about the social problem. You will be asked to rate and rank the questions in terms of how important each one seems to you.

This questionnaire is in two parts: one part contains the **INSTRUCTIONS** (this part) and the stories presenting the social problems; the other part contains the questions (issues) and the **ANSWER SHEET** on which to write your responses.

Here is an example of the task:

### Presidential Election

Imagine that you are about to vote for a candidate for the Presidency of the United States. Imagine that before you vote, you are given several questions, and asked which issue is the most important to you in making up your mind about which candidate to vote for. In this example, 5 items are given. On a rating scale of 1 to 5 (1=Great, 2=Much, 3=Some, 4=Little, 5=No) please rate the importance of the item (issue) by filling in with a pencil one of the bubbles on the answer sheet by each item.

Assume that you thought that item #1 (below) was of great importance, item #2 had some importance, item #3 had no importance, item #4 had much importance, and item #5 had much importance. Then you would fill in the bubbles on the answer sheet as shown below.

---

GREAT MUCH SOME LITTLE NO	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Rate the following 12 issues in terms of importance (1-5)</b></p> <p>1. Financially are you personally better off now than you were four years ago?</p> <p>2. Does one candidate have a superior moral character?</p> <p>3. Which candidate stands the tallest?</p> <p>4. Which candidate would make the best world leader?</p> <p>5. Which candidate has the best ideas for our country's internal problems, like crime and health care?</p>
---------------------------------------	---

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Further, the questionnaire will ask you to rank the questions in terms of importance. In the space below, the numbers 1 through 12, represent the item number. From top to bottom, you are asked to fill in the bubble that represents the item in first importance (of those given you to choose from), then second most important, third most important, and fourth most important. Please indicate your top four choices. You might fill out this part, as follows:

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**Rank which issue is the most important (item number).**

Most important item     1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  11  12    Third most important     1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  11  12

Second most important     1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  11  12    Fourth most important     1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  11  12

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Note that some of the items may seem irrelevant to you (as in item #3) or not make sense to you—in that case, **rate** the item as “No” importance and do not **rank** the item. Note that in the stories that follow, there will be 12 items for each story, not five. Please make sure to consider all 12 items (questions) that are printed after each story.

In addition you will be asked to state your preference for what action to take in the story. After the story, you will be asked to indicate the action you favor on a three-point scale (1 = strongly favor some action, 2 = can't decide, 3 = strongly oppose that action).

In short, read the story from this booklet, and then fill out your answers on the answer sheet. Please use a #2 pencil. If you change your mind about a response, erase the pencil mark cleanly and enter your new response.

*[Notice the second part of this questionnaire, the Answer Sheet. The Identification Number at the top of the answer sheet may already be filled in when you receive your materials. If not, you will receive instructions about how to fill in the number. If you have questions about the procedure, please ask now.]*

*Please turn now to the Answer Sheet.]*

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### **Famine— (Story #1)**

The small village in northern India has experienced shortages of food before, but this year's famine is worse than ever. Some families are even trying to feed themselves by making soup from tree bark. Mustaq Singh's family is near starvation. He has heard that a rich man in his village has supplies of food stored away and is hoarding food while its price goes higher so that he can sell the food later at a huge profit. Mustaq is desperate and thinks about stealing some food from the rich man's warehouse. The small amount of food that he needs for his family probably wouldn't even be missed.

*[If at any time you would like to reread a story or the instructions, feel free to do so. Now turn to the Answer Sheet, go to the 12 issues and rate and rank them in terms of how important each issue seems to you.]*

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### **Reporter— (Story #2)**

Molly Dayton has been a news reporter for the *Gazette* newspaper for over a decade. Almost by accident, she learned that one of the candidates for Lieutenant Governor for her state, Grover Thompson, had been arrested for shop-lifting 20 years earlier. Reporter Dayton found out that early in his life, Candidate Thompson had undergone a confused period and done things he later regretted, actions which would be very out-of-character now. His shop-lifting had been a minor offense and charges had been dropped by the department store. Thompson has not only straightened himself out since then, but built a distinguished record in helping many people and in leading constructive community projects. Now, Reporter Dayton regards Thompson as the best candidate in the field and likely to go on to important leadership positions in the state. Reporter Dayton wonders whether or not she should write the story about Thompson's earlier troubles because in the upcoming close and heated election, she fears that such a news story could wreck Thompson's chance to win.

*[Now turn to the Answer Sheet, go to the 12 issues for this story, rate and rank them in terms of how important each issue seems to you.]*

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### **School Board— (Story #3)**

Mr. Grant has been elected to the School Board District 190 and was chosen to be Chairman. The district is bitterly divided over the closing of one of the high schools. One of the high schools has to be closed for financial reasons, but there is no agreement over which school to close. During his election to the school board, Mr. Grant had proposed a series of "Open Meetings" in which members of the community could voice their opinions. He hoped that dialogue would make the community realize the necessity of closing one high school. Also he hoped that through open discussion, the difficulty of the decision would be appreciated, and that the community would ultimately support the school board decision. The first Open Meeting was a disaster. Passionate speeches dominated the microphones and threatened violence. The meeting barely closed without fist-fights. Later in the week, school board members received threatening phone calls. Mr. Grant wonders if he ought to call off the next Open Meeting.

*[Now turn to the Answer Sheet, go to the 12 issues for this story, rate and rank them in terms of how important each issue seems to you.]*

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### **Cancer— (Story #4)**

Mrs. Bennett is 62 years old, and in the last phases of colon cancer. She is in terrible pain and asks the doctor to give her more pain-killer medicine. The doctor has given her the maximum safe dose already and is reluctant to increase the dosage because it would probably hasten her death. In a clear and rational mental state, Mrs. Bennett says that she realizes this; but she wants to end her suffering even if it means ending her life. Should the doctor give her an increased dosage?

*[Now turn to the Answer Sheet, go to the 12 issues for this story, rate and rank them in terms of how important each issue seems to you.]*

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### **Demonstration — (Story #5)**

Political and economic instability in a South American country prompted the President of the United States to send troops to "police" the area. Students at many campuses in the U.S.A. have protested that the United States is using its military might for economic advantage. There is widespread suspicion that big oil multinational companies are pressuring the President to safeguard a cheap oil supply even if it means loss of life. Students at one campus took to the streets, in demonstrations, tying up traffic and stopping regular business in the town. The president of the university demanded that the students stop their illegal demonstrations. Students then took over the college's administration building, completely paralyzing the college. Are the students right to demonstrate in these ways?

*[Now turn to the Answer Sheet, go to the 12 issues for this story, rate and rank them in terms of how important each issue seems to you.]*





**Demonstration -- (Story #5)**

*Do you favor the action of demonstrating in this way?*

- ① Should continue demonstrating in these ways    ② Can't decide    ③ Should not continue demonstrating in these ways

GREAT  
MUCH  
SOME  
LITTLE  
NO

**Rate the following 12 issues in terms of importance (1-5)**

- |           |   |
|-----------|---|
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | 1. Do the students have any right to take over property that doesn't belong to them?                  |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | 2. Do the students realize that they might be arrested and fined, and even expelled from school?      |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | 3. Are the students serious about their cause or are they doing it just for fun?                      |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | 4. If the university president is soft on students this time, will it lead to more disorder?          |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | 5. Will the public blame all students for the actions of a few student demonstrators?                 |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | 6. Are the authorities to blame by giving in to the greed of the multinational oil companies?         |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | 7. Why should a few people like Presidents and business leaders have more power than ordinary people? |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | 8. Does this student demonstration bring about more or less good in the long run to all people?       |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | 9. Can the students justify their civil disobedience?   |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | 10. Shouldn't the authorities be respected by students?   |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | 11. Is taking over a building consistent with principles of justice?                                  |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | 12. Isn't it everyone's duty to obey the law, whether one likes it or not?                            |

*Rank which issue is the most important (item number).*

Most important item    ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑧ ⑨ ⑩ ⑪ ⑫

Second most important    ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑧ ⑨ ⑩ ⑪ ⑫

Third most important    ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑧ ⑨ ⑩ ⑪ ⑫

Fourth most important    ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑧ ⑨ ⑩ ⑪ ⑫

**Please provide the following information about yourself:**

1. Age in years:

0	0
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5
6	6
7	7
8	8
9	9

2. Sex (mark one):     Male     Female

3. Level of Education (mark highest level of formal education attained, if you are currently working at that level [e.g., Freshman in college] or if you have completed that level [e.g., if you finished your Freshman year but have gone on no further].)

- Grade 1 to 6
- Grade 7, 8, 9
- Grade 10, 11, 12
- Vocational/technical school (without a bachelor's degree) (e.g., Auto mechanic, beauty school, real estate, secretary, 2-year nursing program).
- Junior college (e.g., 2-year college, community college, Associate Arts degree)
- Freshman in college in bachelor degree program.
- Sophomore in college in bachelor degree program.
- Junior in college in bachelor degree program.
- Senior in college in bachelor degree program.
- Professional degree (Practitioner degree beyond bachelor's degree) (e.g., M.D., M.B.A., Bachelor of Divinity, D.D.S. in Dentistry, J.D. in law, Masters of Arts in teaching, Masters of Education [in teaching], Doctor of Psychology, Nursing degree along with 4-year Bachelor's degree)
- Masters degree (in academic graduate school)
- Doctoral degree (in academic graduate school, e.g., Ph.D. or Ed.D.)
- Other Formal Education. (Please describe: \_\_\_\_\_)

4. In terms of your political views, how would you characterize yourself (mark one)?

- Very Liberal
- Somewhat Liberal
- Neither Liberal nor Conservative
- Somewhat Conservative
- Very Conservative

5. Are you a citizen of the U.S.A.?

- Yes     No

6. Is English your primary language?

- Yes     No

**Thank You.**

PLEASE DO NOT WRITE IN THIS AREA

APPENDIX E  
COMMUNICATION WITH PARTICIPANTS

Participant's Name \_\_\_\_\_

My name is Robert Strenth and I am a doctoral student at the University of Central Florida's College of Education's Executive Ed.D. Program. I am conducting research on Title I principals for my dissertation in collaboration with [REDACTED] County Public Schools.

You have been invited to participate in this research because you served as a principal at an [REDACTED] Title I urban elementary school between the years 2008-2011.

Your participation in the research study will assist [REDACTED] in identifying future candidates to lead Title I urban elementary schools.

In the next few days you will receive by mail an envelope containing a consent agreement, the Defining Issues Test-2 (DIT-2), directions for taking the test, and a self-addressed, stamped envelope to return the completed test.

The DIT-2 presents six scenarios that ask the respondent to select answers based on how they would solve the dilemma. There is no right or wrong answer. The test will take no more than 20 minutes to answer.

All information pertaining to your test material and answer sheet will be coded with a number known only to the researcher. No identifiable information will be used in the research, the dissertation or the executive summary prepared for [REDACTED].

If you have any questions concerning [REDACTED] participation in this study you may contact the following:

[REDACTED] at [REDACTED].net

[REDACTED] at [REDACTED].net

If you have any questions concerning the research study please contact the researcher.

Robert Strenth at [REDACTED].edu or 4 [REDACTED]

Thank you for your valued participation in this important study for [REDACTED].

Robert Strenth



AN ANALYSIS OF THE MORAL SCHEMA AND MORAL REASONING OF  
TITLE I URBAN ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS IN A LARGE URBAN FLORIDA  
SCHOOL DISTRICT

**Informed Consent**

Principal Investigator(s): Robert Strenth, Ed. S.

Faculty Supervisor: Barbara A. Murray, Ph. D.

Investigational Site(s): Selected [REDACTED] County Public Schools Title I  
Elementary Schools

**Introduction:** Researchers at the University of Central Florida (UCF) study many topics. To do this we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study. You are being invited to take part in a research study which will include about 20 [REDACTED] County Public Schools principals. You have been asked to take part in this research study because you served as the principal of an [REDACTED] Title I urban elementary schools between 2009-2011. You must be 18 years of age or older to be included in the research study.

The person doing this research is Robert Strenth, a doctoral student in the Executive Ed.D. Program in Educational Leadership at UCF. Because the researcher is a doctoral student he is being guided by Dr. Barbara A. Murray, a UCF faculty supervisor in the College of Education at UCF.

**What you should know about a research study:**

Someone will explain this research study to you.

A research study is something you volunteer for.

Whether or not you take part is up to you.

You should take part in this study only because you want to.

You can choose not to take part in the research study.

You can agree to take part now and later change your mind.

Whatever you decide it will not be held against you.

Feel free to ask all the questions you want before you decide.

**Purpose of the research study:** The purpose of this study is to identify the moral schema and moral reasoning of effective urban [REDACTED] County Public Schools elementary school principals. The findings will be used to assist the district in identifying and screening potential candidates to lead urban [REDACTED] County Public Schools elementary schools who will be a good fit and improve sustainability in the principal position at urban elementary schools within the district.

**What you will be asked to do in the study:** You will be asked to take the Defining Issues Test-2. The DIT-2 is a pencil and paper test that presents the subject with six scenarios based on moral dilemmas which ask them to evaluate the factors that they based their course of action for solving the dilemmas. You will bubble in your responses to the scenarios. I have included a self-addressed stamped envelope for you to return the researcher. The completed test and the signed consent agreement should be mailed to:

Robert Strenth  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Your coded answer sheet will be sent to the University of Alabama's Center for Study of Ethical Development to be scored. You do not have to answer every question or complete every task. You will not lose any benefits if you skip questions or tasks.

**Location:** You may take the DIT-2 at the location of your choosing.

**Time required:** We expect that you will be in this research study for 20-30 minutes.

**Risks:** There are no reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts involved in taking part in this study.

**Benefits:** There are no expected benefits to you for taking part in this study.

**Compensation or payment:**

There is no direct compensation for taking part in this study.

**Confidentiality:**

The identity of the participants will only be known to the researcher. All participants will be assigned a number and will be referred to at all times by that number. You have been assigned an identifying number so I can track who has completed and returned their answer sheet.

School names will not be used and only pertinent data (free and reduced lunch numbers and school grade) will be used. The names of the participants and their assigned numbers will be kept in a locked payroll box that will be kept in a locked file cabinet. Only the researcher will have the keys. The keys to the payroll box and file cabinet will be kept in separate locations. Once the study is completed and the dissertation accepted the names of the participants and their assigned numbers will be shredded and burned in accordance with the approved timeframes of the University of Central Florida's Institutional Review Board. We will limit your personal data collected in this study to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete secrecy.

**Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem:** If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, talk to Robert Strenth, Graduate Student, Executive Ed.D. in Educational Leadership, College of Education at (407) [REDACTED] or by email at [rstrenth@knights.ucf.edu](mailto:rstrenth@knights.ucf.edu). You may also contact Dr. Barbara A. Murray, Faculty Supervisor, College of Education at (407) [REDACTED] or by email at [barbara.murray@ucf.edu](mailto:barbara.murray@ucf.edu).

**IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint:** Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901. You may also talk to them for any of the following:

Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.

You cannot reach the research team.

You want to talk to someone besides the research team.

You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Please return your completed DIT-2 in the self-addressed stamped envelope to the researcher by December 1, 2012.

By returning your completed DIT-2 test to the researcher you are agreeing to participate in the research study.

Thank you,

Robert Strenth  
Researcher

December 5, 2012

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Several weeks ago you were sent by mail an invitation to participate in a doctoral research study concerning principals who served in Title I urban elementary schools with Orange County Public Schools. The invitation included the Defining Issues Test-2 and a self-addressed stamped envelope to return the completed answer sheet.

The requested return date for your DIT-2 answer sheet was December 1, 2012. As of today I have not received your answer sheet. If you have not had a chance to place your completed answer sheet in the self-addressed stamped envelope that was provided, I ask that you please take a moment and place it in the mail.

I know that you are very busy with personal and professional commitments and I appreciate your time to complete the DIT-2 and return it to me.

Your responses will be of great benefit to the research being conducted and assist with the collaboration between the researcher and ██████████ County Public Schools.

If you need another self-addressed envelope, or if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [rstrenth@knights.ucf.edu](mailto:rstrenth@knights.ucf.edu) or 407-██████████.

Thank you for your assistance and participation in this study.

Robert Strenth  
Researcher

APPENDIX F  
ANNOUNCEMENT OF ORAL DEFENSE



The Moral Reasoning and Moral Decision Making of Urban High-Poverty Elementary School Principals in a Large Urban School District

College of Education's Dean's Conference Room #305  
May 30, 2013 at 12:00-1:00PM

Announcing the Final Examination of Robert Sean Strenth for the degree of Doctor of Education

The focus of this research was to identify the moral reasoning and moral judgment of elementary school principals who serve in high-poverty schools. The study was undertaken at the request of the client public school district who was attempting to identify characteristics of current elementary principals serving in high-poverty schools.

Two research questions guided this study concerning the moral operational level of the principals. The theoretical framework of the study was based on the work of Lawrence Kohlberg and his stages of moral development. Participating principals were administered the Defining Issues Test-2 (DIT-2), a pencil-paper questionnaire that presented five moral dilemmas and a series of statements asking for the participant to rank solutions to the dilemmas.

The results indicated that the majority of participants operated from lower levels of moral development, reasoning, and judgment. Participants' scores were matched with their schools' performance grades. There was not an indication that high moral scores and high school performance were linked.

This study confirmed the results of an early study conducted by Vitton and Wasonga (2009) and encourages a deeper examination of the results of accountability and principal decision making.

Committee in Charge

Dr. B. Murray  
Dr. K. Murray  
Dr. R. Taylor  
Dr. G. Hayes

Outline of Studies

Major: Educational Leadership Executive Ed.D.  
Educational Career  
B.A., 1996, University of Florida  
M.Ed., 1996, University of Florida  
Ed.S. 2002, University of Florida

Approved by Dr. Barbara Murray, Committee Chair  
The public is welcome to attend.

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