

CHARACTER EDUCATION INITIATIVES AND PREPARATION FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Over the past 25 years, substantive scholarly literature has been published that focuses on ethical decision-making by school administrators. In addition, learning activities integrated in principal preparation programs (PPPs) that relate to professional ethics and character education provides aspiring school administrators with functional tools and strategies to address challenging workplace issues, including matters that relate to inequity, racism and oppression. This literature review provides a current understanding of K-12 character education and ethics as it relates to school administrator professional preparation and practice. Using well-defined criteria, 31 peer-reviewed research articles published during the past 25 years were included in this review. After a thorough comparative analysis was completed, four overarching themes emerged that relate concepts of ethics and school leadership: (a) principal preparation program practices that focus on professional ethics, (b) implementation of character education interventions in schools, (c) non-commensurate school administrator attention to student achievement, and (d) school administrator attitudes on ethics and the development of character.

Keywords: educational leadership, character education, professional ethics, principal preparation program

How does one become a "good" person? Can this be taught? Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* proposes that a foundation of ethics is needed for a person to become good (Aristotle & Sachs, 2002). Further teachings promote the idea that becoming good is connected to the development of character, which comes from the Greek verb "charassein", meaning to sharpen or engrave (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 2011). Therefore, the human character is "etched" into one's being by the choices a person makes. Character education programs in K-12 schools promote the idea that a virtuous, "good" life is a worthy educational endeavor and there is value in instilling aspects of character into a student's well-rounded education (Benninga & Berkowitz, 2006; Bezzina, 2012; Davidson et al., 2007; Hoedel, 2018;; Holtzapple, 2011; Kim, 2018). The University of Birmingham's Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues (2017) states that, "the ultimate aim of character education is not only to make individuals better persons but to create the social and institutional conditions within which all human beings can flourish" (p. 7). School administrators face challenges that require an understanding of their own character as well as those they serve (Cherkowski, 2012; Minthrop, 2012). Developing an ethical "grounding" will ensure that today's school leaders will be able to adequately address challenges present in their schools that relate to, among other issues, inequity, racism, and oppression, today and in the future. Principal Preparation Programs (PPPs) prepare future school administrators to adjust to the ever-changing social construction of modern-day society, many times presented as moral dilemmas (Willis, 2011). Therefore, this literature review aspires to provide a current understanding of concepts related to character education research and human flourishing (Jubilee Centre Framework, 2017), in relation to K-12 education and connecting these concepts to the professional preparation and practices of school administrators. The following questions will be addressed in this literature review:

1. What does the literature say about character education initiatives related to K-12 school administration?
2. What does the literature say about how principal preparation programs (PPPs) support the concepts of character education?

This effort was undertaken by researchers affiliated with The Center for Education Leadership (CEL) at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK). The CEL aims to prepare aspiring educational leaders to positively influence educational outcomes by supporting the many stakeholders in today's schools. As a PPP, the CEL provides educational opportunities for school leaders (i.e., administrators) in its Leadership Academy, including coursework and practicum experiences that satisfy the necessary requirements toward an educational specialist degree and a state license in school administration. In addition, the CEL has been awarded grant funding by the Kern Family Foundation to research and develop ways to integrate character education more substantively within the CEL's mission, as well as within the Leadership Academy coursework and on-site professional preparation activities. Important to this work is to define the degree that K-12 school leaders acquire the decision-making skills and values needed to lead their institutions with character and integrity. The support provided by this grant will assist the CEL in more fully understanding the degree that the nurturing of ethical decision-making among its aspiring school

leaders translates into positive character development and human flourishing for the students and the families in the schools they lead.

Review of Literature

Educational administrative decision-making requires more than the mechanical application of existing rules and regulations (Hoy et al., 2006). School leader duties consist of complex decisions and thoughtful processes instead of merely possessing and carrying out specific technical skills to ensure effective and efficient organizational operations management (Sergiovanni, 2009). Current research on effective leadership and management practices has focused on the importance of value, moral, and ethical bases for educational leadership decision-making (Frick, 2009). Twenty-first century K-12 principals are expected to make ethical decisions in response to various dynamic situations throughout the school year. Minthrop (2012) states that "leadership that furthers integrity presumably creates a sense of normative and programmatic coherence in conjunction with toleration of dissent" (p. 702). Understanding the relationship between moral reasoning, values, character education, and their relationship to leaders' ethical decisions and students' well-being and academic achievement drives this study. The Jubilee Centre (2017) states, "the ultimate aim of character education is the development of good sense, or practical wisdom; the capacity to choose intelligently between alternatives" (p. 7).

In addition, The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2002a) states that educational leaders need personal values that integrate the ethical dimensions of decision-making (p. 3). PSEL (2015) Standard 2 also emphasizes the need for ethical importance in an educational leader's training. In addition, Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards (TILS) identify core performance indicators of ethical and effective instructional leaders (TDOE, 2018). As written, each of the TILS starts with the phrase "Ethical and effective instructional leaders..." to articulate the intrinsic connections between ethical behavior and school leadership. The ethical attributes emphasized are "honesty, respect, inclusiveness, sound judgement, commitment, fairness, compassion, work ethic and a genuine belief that all children can learn and grow and contribute to the foundation of ethical behavior connected to leadership" (TDOE, 2018).

The need for guidelines and training regarding ethical decision-making and values emphasis in the school setting is a growing research area for educational administration leaders. For example, K-12 schools worldwide implement and emphasize character education programs like PeaceBuilders (2020) and Capturing Kids' Hearts (Campus Design, 2020). These programs work with school administration, teachers, and students to promote healthy relationships and develop student values that enhance their character. A number of research teams have developed frameworks for understanding character education in schools. One important framework has been developed by the Center for Character and Citizenship called PRIMED, an acronym for five principles of effective character education (Berkowitz et al., 2017):

- **Prioritization:** Prioritization of character and social emotional development in school
- **Relationships:** Strategic and intentional promotion of healthy relationships among all school stakeholders

- **Intrinsic Motivation:** Promotion of the internalization of core values/virtues through intrinsic motivational strategies
- **Modeling:** All adults and older students model core values/virtues and socioemotional competencies
- **Empowerment:** Schools empower all stakeholders as co-owners and coauthors of the character education initiative and the school in general
- **Developmental Pedagogy:** Schools intentionally foster the development of student character and socioemotional competence and utilize methods that are developmental in purpose

The second framework, adopted for this review (see Figure 1) is the Jubilee Center's Character Education Framework, which emphasizes the Building Blocks of Character (The Jubilee Centre, 2017). These Blocks of Character include: (a) intellectual virtues, (b) moral virtues, (c) civic virtues and (d) performance virtues (i.e. self-management) which all lead to practical wisdom, and ultimately, human flourishing of individuals and society. According to the Jubilee Center (2017), human flourishing is "necessary to achieve the highest potential in life" (p. 6).

The Jubilee Centre's Character Education Framework (2017) represents the most recent and comprehensive studies on virtue education and its application to K-12 and Higher Education environments. Substantively integrating aspects of character education related to flourishing within PPP curricula provides school administrators with the necessary tools to address today's ethical issues. Several administrators cite examples of difficult decisions that require attention to ethical considerations. For instance, one principal states, "It's an everyday thing for me...I get the most problematic children, and I'm their last chance...every day there's drama in these children's lives" (Cherkowski et al., 2015, p. 626). Larson and Derrington (2012) state, "it is our responsibility and job as administrators to follow through on what is right, not what is easiest" (p. 10). More recently contributing to this discussion, Angelle (2017) stipulates that, "the values we hold influence not only actions and behaviors, but also decision making" (p. 12).

The implementation of training in ethical decision-making within PPPs and its applications for school leaders in K-12 schools is documented in scholarly literature. Prominent researchers, particularly those that focus on best practices in educational leadership, have expressed their difficulties in establishing commonly acceptable definitions of key terms in ethics education (Beck & Murphy, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1992; Starratt, 1991). Bezzina (2012) states that moral purpose, expressing underlying values and ethics, has been consistently identified as one of the fundamental necessities for bringing about change and improvement to deliver desirable student learning in schools.

Key Terms

To adequately study the subject of ethical decision-making and implementation of character education and human flourishing in K-12 PPP's, it is necessary to more carefully define these and other, related terms provided by notable scholars. Therefore, for this review, the following key terms are defined as follows:

- character – The complex set of psychological characteristics that enable an individual to act as a moral agent (Berkowitz et al., 2004, p. 76).
- character education – Educational practices that foster the development of student character (Berkowitz, 2011, p. 156).
- ethical decision – A decision that is both legal and morally acceptable to the broader community (Schwartz, 2015).
- ethics – An autoregulatory process to ultimately find the necessary axiological justifications to what gives meaning to our decisions. Autoregulation signifies that the regulation comes from within us in our choices and actions and calls for personal effort (Langlois & Lapointe, 2010).
- human flourishing – Human flourishing is the widely accepted goal of life. To flourish is not only to be happy, but to fulfil one’s potential (The Jubilee Centre, 2017).
- phronesis or practical wisdom – the overall quality of knowing what to want and what not to want when the demands of two or more virtues collide, and to integrate such demands into an acceptable course of action (The Jubilee Centre, 2017).
- morals – The first-order beliefs and practices about good and evil which guide our behavior (Sun, 2011).
- value – A preference, an ideal that guides our behavior, and something we try to live up to (DeRoche & Williams, 2001).
- virtue – Character trait that enable human beings to respond appropriately to situations in any area of experience (The Jubilee Centre, 2017).

Methodology

Detailed procedures were used to select included research, using specific search criteria within the topic’s scope. Inclusion/exclusion criteria were defined as a result of eligibility considerations developed by the research team. Strict screening procedures were employed to ensure that all literature included a broad, yet comprehensive, understanding of the main topic, and answered one or both of the research questions. Procedures used to select the included literature followed guidelines widely accepted by the research community (Galvan & Galvan, 2017).

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

To ensure that the research material included in this study focused on the research questions and were substantive in nature, the researchers garnered articles published in the last 25 years in peer-reviewed, scholarly journals, as well as relevant books and National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES) reports. Studies that focused on character education programs in K-12 schools were included, and principal preparation programs at the university level. Also included were studies that described the ethics of administrative focus on standardized testing, single K-12 site case studies, and various school/district administrator attitudes. In this study, administrators included principals, superintendents, assistant principals, and other persons serving in full and part-

time administrative roles. These professionals work in urban, suburban, and rural geographic areas, serving students from diverse racial, ethnic and socioeconomic neighborhoods. There was no restriction on articles that included teachers and administrators regarding gender, race, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, or sexual orientation.

The process of sifting through a wide variety of source material was recursive, evolving until a final, well-defined group of 28 articles remained. At the onset, the following computerized reference databases were used - Education Resources Information Center (ERIC); JSTOR; NCES Database; and Education Full Text. The researchers searched these databases for all peer-reviewed publications published between 1980 to 2020 using the following search criteria: (a) character education AND (school administration or school leaders) (b) Educational Administration AND Ethics AND Character Education (c) Educational Administration AND Virtue (d) Educational Administration AND Morals (e) Journal of Character Education AND Leadership (f) Journal of Moral Education AND Leadership, Flourishing, Character Education (g) Educational Leadership AND Principal AND Character.

The results of these searches provided 61 unique listings. Twenty articles were added from an inspection of the reference sections of these articles whose titles contained references to either "educational administration", "principal", "ethics", "character education", "values", "morals", and "virtues". An additional three literature review articles, which included these terms, were used. After an initial review of the literature was completed, two research articles and a book were added at the behest of the reviewers as well as to capture research completed most recently. Also, two reports published by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) provided the researchers with statistical information based on survey results from the nationally representative National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS). After all searches were completed, annotated bibliographies were created for each of the included articles, which provided the researchers with a secondary way to evaluate the relevancy of each article.

An inspection of these annotated bibliographies resulted in the removal of 10 articles which, under examination, do not specifically reference character/character education, morals, virtues, ethics, or values. Also excluded were 38 dissertations, editor columns, position papers, case studies, magazine/newspaper articles, and fictitious case studies. Removal of this grey literature was justified based on the understanding that they either: (a) did not represent empirical research (e.g., reviews of literature, fictitious case studies), (b) were not peer-reviewed by persons outside their organizations (e.g., dissertations), or (c) included bias and misrepresentation. Inclusion/exclusion of all material for this study was accomplished in a collaborative, in-person format where each researcher critically examined the other's expressed rationale. In all, 16 qualitative, nine quantitative and six mixed-methods articles were included, resulting in a final group of thirty-one articles. The final list of included articles and related details is included in Table 1.

Findings

As a result of an analysis and qualitative coding of the articles included in this study, four distinct, but interrelated, themes emerged: (a) principal preparation program practices that focus on professional ethics, (b) implementation of character education interventions in schools, (c) non-commensurate school administrator attention to student achievement, and (d) school administrator attitudes on ethics and the development of character.

Articles related to the “principal preparation programming” theme (six articles) include those related to academic degree training programs dedicated to ethics (e.g., ethical competencies and decision-making practices, pedagogy, and principal perceptions of educational administration programs). Literature contained within the “character education interventions in K-12 schools” theme (six articles) relates to the effectiveness of character education intervention (e.g., evaluation, justifications for character education, school perceptions, effectiveness regarding student attitudes and performance). The “non-commensurate school administrator attention to student achievement” theme (two articles) includes research which focused on accountability obligations regarding testing and ethical decisions (e.g., tensions, professional values, and moral literacy). Finally, articles grouped in the “school administrator attitudes on character” theme (fourteen articles) include literature describing school administrators' attitudes regarding ethical decisions (e.g., perceptions of student outcomes, ethical dilemmas, spirituality, the ethic of caring, and moral purpose).

Principal Preparation Program Practices

According to a recent report evaluating principal preparation programs, approximately 700 PPPs train educational leaders across the United States (G.W.I., 2016). Principal preparation programs (PPPs) are a primary means for providing beginning principals with the tools they need to effectively lead their schools (Grissom et al., 2019). A number of studies included in this review provided evidence that PPPs should provide ethics training (Cranston & Kusanovich, 2013; Eyal et al., 2011; Greer et al., 2015; Langlois & LaPointe, 2010; Larson & Derrington, 2012; Mullen, 2017). For this study, ethics training refers to the internalization of moral values and virtues that guide personal and professional practices.

Understanding how principal preparation programs emphasize care, justice, professionalism, and critique, Mullen (2017) investigated pedagogic intervention designed to raise consciousness about ethical leadership and learning within the graduate school. This yearlong study was performed by using a document analysis of student assignments in a principal preparation program affiliated with the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA). The participants were asked, "open-ended questions [that] prompted views of ethics" (p. 264). The author discovered that "the teaching of ethics is thus essential...ethics in [educational leader] programs can be strengthened, such as in the form of a continuous curriculum rather than a discrete unit or course only, although this is a good start" (p. 267). Similarly, the effects of three, one-year-long Trajectory, Ethics, Responsibility and Authority (TERA) principal training programs were explored by Langlois (2010) using observations, surveys, and individual/group

interviews. It was the aim of the TERA training program to "develop greater ethical sensitivity, judgment, and awareness among educational administrators of the moral dimensions of their decision-making processes and to the impact of their decisions on people, their organization, and their community" (p. 147). After the first year, student data showed a greater capacity to use Starratt's (1991) ethics of care, critique, and justice in their decision-making processes. Students in years two and three progress towards a more balanced use of all three ethics rather than an unbalanced use of the ethic of care. Langlois concluded that the TERA program increased student ethical awareness, in general. It also emphasized the need for a school value statement to promote the adherence to greater ethical standards.

A multiple ethical paradigm approach using ethics of care, community, critique, justice, and professionalism were adopted to understand better how educational leaders resolve everyday ethical dilemmas. The study's purpose was to examine ethical considerations of aspiring principals (Eyal et al., 2011). By analyzing the ethical issues faced by principals, this study suggests that value conflicts are the core issues in resolving these dilemmas. Potential conflicts arise "between the value of justice and the values of profession and care, between the value of care and the values of utilitarianism and community, and between the school community and the wider public interest" (Eyal et al., 2011, p. 399). Thus, Cranston et al. (2013) identified the focus and content of principals' dilemmas and used the idea of multiple ethical paradigms to explore contradictions among the accepted ethical categories underlying common dilemmas. Eyal took this even further by amplifying the tendency of principals to prefer certain values over others when dealing with school dilemmas.

Studies emphasize using drama-based and conversational techniques in preparing principals to face ethical dilemmas (Cranston & Kusanovich, 2013; Mullen, 2017). Educational leaders experienced alternative pedagogical approaches to generate meaningful and lasting insight into the stories inevitably found in leadership preparation programs. Dynamic enactment of dramatized scripts representing positively charged school leadership situations enabled principals to experience ethical dilemmas in a more realistic context. "Although not conclusive, the findings of this study point toward a natural fusion of the ethical and the creative act" (p. 51). Cranston also emphasizes that the lists of traits or dispositions of moral leaders, responsibility, authenticity, and presence are easily and readily available to analyze, enact, and practice in an interdisciplinary manner.

In a 2015 study, Greer researched levels of moral reasoning exhibited by graduate students enrolled in an educational administration program, PPP, of study in one Southern state and compared their scores with national averages for graduate students, in general, to determine if educational interventions are needed. Results showed that moral reasoning scores of the students in the educational administration program were lower than those of students enrolled in graduate programs focused on other professions. "Teachers risk becoming technicians instead of morally engaged people who think critically about and reflect upon their ethical and moral responsibilities to students" (p.514). This study shows the need for more concentrated studies regarding moral reasoning for educational administration students.

In a six-year study, Larson and Derrington (2012) surveyed students from Western Washington University's Principal Preparation Program (PPP) about ethical dilemmas. The researchers stated that, "by examining survey data obtained from recent program graduates and their supervisors, the researchers sought to assess the extent to which those who have completed the principal licensure program are prepared to address practical circumstances in which their moral compass might be challenged" (p. 5). Based on their survey, the researchers found that PPP supervisors observed graduates in the program to have a high moral compass. The study did not determine if the PPP students exhibited these high morals prior to matriculating in the program or if the PPP assisted them in developing these traits.

Ethical decision-making and effective moral leadership are related (Roberts & Sampson, 2011). A prominent leader in ethical educational leadership, Pijanowski (2017), states that "moral leadership has been the focus of policy initiatives, accreditation standards, and a body of research has emerged over the past two decades identifying moral leadership as a characteristic of high performing schools, particularly among high poverty schools" (p. 35).

Pijanowski's survey of 75 graduate educational leader programs in the United States showed varying methods of integrating ethical and moral instruction into their programs. Rest's (1994) moral reasoning model was used to evaluate curricula used in a number of PPPs in the United States. The model revealed that 91 percent of PPPs surveyed reported that moral sensitivity was covered in a course or integrated into their curriculum, and 86 percent explicitly taught moral judgment. The topic least likely to be taught was motivation at 58 percent. This still represents a sharp rise in the attention that ethics and moral leadership were receiving in the early 1990s (Pijanowski, 2017). These studies show that an increased awareness and emphasis on ethical leadership is growing in educational administration programs.

Character Education Interventions in K-12 Schools

Studies included in this literature review provided evidence concerning the effectiveness of implementing character education interventions in K-12 schools, including the programs that focused on: (a) reducing negative behaviors in students, (b) increasing academic performance, (c) increasing the prevalence of prosocial attitudes, and (d) increasing understandings of virtue and morals in the school.

Bezzina (2012) focused on the connections between moral purpose and teachers who install interventions of values and ethics into learning modules in Catholic schools in New South Wales, Australia. The article summarizes effects on six Leaders Transforming Learning and Learners (LTLL) schools, both before and after the LTLL intervention, and examines changes that took place as a consequence of the change. The LTLL pilot phase (2005–2006) included nine primary and secondary schools from four school systems, and the post-pilot phase involved 11 primary and secondary schools from five school systems. The study provides a solid rationale for an approach such as that of LTLL, which engages schools in evidence-based inquiry in their schools with a focus on greater explicitness about moral purpose, and which consciously seeks to share new learning across a group of schools and their systems (p. 262).

Holtzapple (2011) investigated the Capturing Kids' Hearts Campus by Design model, a school-level intervention that impacts student behavior by enhancing school climate through endorsement of improved relational and conflict management skills. The study included 8,350 students in Grades 7-12 and 469 teachers from six high schools located in districts served by the Oneida-Herkimer-Madison Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) in New York and two high schools operated by the Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE) in California. Using discipline referral archival data, statistical analyses demonstrated that schools implementing Capturing Kids' Hearts Campus by Design experienced on average a 22 percent decrease in discipline referrals. In contrast, control schools experienced, on average, an 11 percent increase in referrals. Also, students in intervention schools exhibited a 26 percent increase in prosocial behaviors associated with the training, while students in control schools exhibited a 15 percent decrease in these behaviors. The theoretical framework underlying the Capturing Kids' Hearts Campus by Design learning approach is the Social Cognitive Theory developed by Bandura (1986). A central premise of Social Cognitive Theory is that behavior is dynamic and dependent upon both personal constructs and environmental factors that influence each other simultaneously (p. 73).

Prominent leaders in the character education movement, Benninga et al. (2006), surveyed 120 elementary schools to determine character education's effectiveness. The results of this survey led the researchers to conclude that well-conceived character education programs exist in conjunction with strong academic programs. They identified a direct correlation between an emphasis on character education and academic achievement, specifically as they relate to standardized test scores.

A more recent study by Hoedel (2018) evaluated a 15-year character education initiative, initially devised as a pilot study that later was implemented in 2000 high schools nationwide. The study showed that an emphasis on specific character traits to influence positive behavior directly affected student behavior outcomes, demonstrating a significant harmful behavior reduction. In a similar study, Kim (2018) surveyed 159 school teachers who implemented a character education program in their schools. Documented results showed improved student behavior in conjunction with timing of the implementation of the character education program; Teachers in this study also reported increased career satisfaction.

Another two-year study of "promising practices" in high school character education focuses on the use of eight specific character strengths integrated across the curriculum (Davidson et al., 2014). outcomes. The Smart & Good Schools framework proposes eight such strengths of character as the crucial outcomes of schooling: (1) lifelong learner and critical thinker, (2) diligent and capable performer, (3) socially and emotionally skilled person, (4) ethical thinker, (5) respectful and responsible moral agent, (6) self-disciplined person who pursues a healthy lifestyle, (7) contributing community member and democratic citizen, and (8) spiritual person engaged in crafting a life of noble purpose. This model emphasizes that character is not just about "doing the right thing; it's about doing our best work" (p. 373). Connections between moral character and

academic achievement are documented. “Character is a foundation for, and a critical outcome of, all academic and ethical endeavors” (p. 378).

Impacts of curriculum emphasizing character and virtue reflects differences between understanding and practicing virtue. Ofsted’s new requirement of England’s assessment of curriculum and the effects on character development influenced a study of 1226 eleven- and twelve-year-old children experiencing Narnian Virtues character education curriculum. The research showed children’s understanding of character improved rapidly in the experimental group. This is important, as knowledge of virtue generally precedes behavioral application (Pike et al., 2021). In 2013 another study of English students used a version of the Intermediate Concept Measure for Adolescents, involving dilemmas, to assess an important component of character—moral judgement—among 4053 pupils aged 14–15. Data reflected students’ overemphasis on “self-interest” and conformity to friends. Knowing what to do more than why they do it reflected choices concerning poor actions and justifications (Walker et al., 2017).

Non-commensurate School Administrator Attention to Student Achievement

Studies in this review have also focused on administrator attitudes related to schools focusing an increased amount of time, energy and resources on standardized testing as related to student achievement. This has become a highlighted area of concern for administrators since the implementation of measures associated with the NCLB Act (2001). Mintrop (2012) "explore[d] the tensions between external accountability obligations, educators' professional values, and student needs. Strategic, cognitive, and moral dimensions of this tension [were] captured with the central category of integrity" (p. 695). Non-systemic factors, like collective integrity by faculty and school leaders, can influence whether an accountability system, NCLB measures, produce educationally desirable outcomes Whether integrity develops or survives seems to require a good dose of educational leaders' strength but may also depend on the profession's insistence to fully exhaust the “moral horizon” of an institution, which obligates educators to balance equity, system efficiency, child-centeredness, and professionalism with prudence. These results demonstrate the power of integrity as a critical virtue of leadership under accountability pressures. It shows the different ways integrity can be forged in schools and how it can be missed with school life consequences. “The paper stresses the point that it is quite conceivable that ideological zeal, Machiavellian strategizing, or eager system conformism may produce more forceful agency than integrity" (p. 695).

Willis (2011) interviews an Indiana principal who is faced with the dilemma of increased accountability measures for his high school students. "With all of the pressures faced by John and his staff, he has to make decisions about how he intends to approach the testing cycle in the 2010-2011 school year" (p.49). The principal and his staff decide to select certain students to test in the first semester, 50 out of 106, to meet the state requirements and “keep the doors to his school open”. This difficult decision reflects a leader's choice of following guidelines or accommodating his students and staff's needs.

School Administrator Attitudes on Ethics and the Development of Character.

A substantial portion of the research articles in this study, approximately 50 percent, is related to the school administration's attitudes towards ethics. This would include concepts related to: (a) ethical decision making, (b) ethical use of data, (c) overseeing character education programs, (d) moral reasoning, and (e) the "ethic of care".

One descriptive study explains the relationship between moral agency and ethical decision-making processes among a sample of Canadian school principals (Cherkowski, 2012). This study found that modeling moral agency is essential for encouraging others to engage their moral agency to serve their students' best interests. Despite efforts to engage in collaborative decision-making, principals are often faced with the reality that they must alone absorb the cost of decisions. The study contends that school principals who act as moral agents need to become aware of the ethical issues and challenges that permeate their day-to-day work lives (p. 1).

A study of Ohio superintendents highlighted the importance of promoting ethical leadership tenets in their various school districts. Ethical Leadership Surveys conducted in this study investigated superintendent attitudes regarding ethical perspectives related to leadership. Leader ethical views were related to several other factors, including school culture characteristics, as well as the superintendent's age and prescribed values. Results of this research study suggest that, overall, "public school district superintendents in the State of Ohio have strongly positive ethical leadership perspectives" (Fowler, 2014, p. 106).

Ethical decisions based on data and accountability permeates articles in the literature. For example, Ehrich's (2015) article focuses on ethical issues related to accountability measures and how to use data to drive ethical decisions. Study conclusions include the notion that ethical leaders can achieve goals within the context of an accountable, data-driven structure. More practically, the author states, "the dilemma between adhering to the system's needs (i.e., rules/regulations) vs. the needs of individual students (i.e., mercy and compassion to individuals) was one of several dilemmas articulated by these principals" (Ehrich, 2015, p. 208).

Educational leaders modeling the values of character programs in their schools are themes in the selected literature. The promotion of shared leadership with teachers and shared decision-making with students represent ways to model character (Bezzina, 2013; Francom, 2016). There were also connections to the importance of parents supporting school leader decisions and programs, but not necessarily implementation of these programs. Francom (2016) concedes that it is vital for school leaders to be action-oriented by regularly monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of their character education programs. The author concedes that including student voice is important in this process, because "we're going to make the decisions along with the students, and that's the way it is" (Francom, 2016, p. 26)

Another theme to be explored is how administrators explore the concept of spirituality within notions of character development. Gibson (2014) discussed key findings from his qualitative case study focused on lived experiences of school administrators and their teachers in three New Zealand public primary schools. Teacher participants perceived spiritual aspects of leadership in their principals' practices as influential in their schools' development of character,

competence, and positive conduct. The author states, "most of the teacher participants were able to attribute positive emotional and practical effects to spirituality in principal leadership in terms of morale, professional attitudes, care of students and management practices" (p. 533).

In addition, Gibson directly references the "care of students" (p. 532). Several additional articles emphasize the use of care in ethical decisions; the ethics of care and justice often "collide" when principals make decisions (Bass, 2009; McGee & Mansfield, 2014). As a result of interviewing African American women principals, Bass (2009) stated, "most of the women readily admitted to having 'broken the rules' in the best interest of the children they cared for" (p. 626). In Angelle's (2017) case study, the primary participant used an authentic leadership style to express an attitude of care for her students and teachers. Understanding the dimensions of morality can help school administrators promote care and emphasize (positive) values in the profession (Lowery, 2019). School administrators are required to navigate ethical complexities in their school communities. In support of this statement, Rintoul and Goulais (2010) add that effective leadership preparation requires elements of moral literacy, such as ethics sensitivity, ethical reasoning skills, and moral imagination (p. 754). The importance of principal training in moral dilemmas is emphasized, given the principal's inexperience (Hightower & Klinker, 2012).

Discussion and Future Research

Educational leaders' ethical decision-making impacts the school they lead and the growth of their character. Using the Jubilee Centre's (2017) framework to provide a basis for discussion, research shows a correlation between principal preparation training in ethical decision-making using specific training tools related to intellectual virtues, ethic of critique and judgement, which focus on Starratt's ethics model and positive growth in leadership decision on the front lines in a school setting. Leaders feel more equipped to think more critically and handle difficult decisions after participating in PPP learning activities focused on ethical decision-making. This increased capacity ensures that present and future educational leaders are empowered to serve as change agents to support an increasingly diverse group of stakeholders in their schools (Center for Leadership, Equity, and Research, 2022). The literature suggests additional connections between a leader's sense of moral virtue and the effectiveness of the school to implement character education and emphasize productive values. Ideas associated with authentic leadership permeate articles that relate to the alignment of school leader attitudes and school priorities. An ethical leader sets the tone of character education across the curriculum and emphasizes professional development for school employees. Leaders who place an emphasis on "human flourishing" at their sites keep the welfare of students, teachers, and staff at the forefront of decision-making.

Educational leaders who consider previous and current student opinions about their experiences are more apt to endorse student-centered learning strategies in their schools. A school leader's implementation of character education programs in their schools provides students with models for ethical citizenship and civic service to their communities. An ethical leader's emphasis on both academic achievement and active service among diverse community members is grounded in effective character education.

There are other articles in this review that relate to the efficacy of focusing on character education and professional ethics. These articles suggest that students with certain positive character strengths perform better academically and behaviorally. For example, Wagner's (2015) article makes the connection between a student's understanding of their character strengths and their academic achievement. Students with particular characteristics strengths, such as perseverance, self-regulation, prudence, love of learning, hope, gratitude, perspective, teamwork, and social intelligence, relate to a student's overall perception of themselves (Wagner, 2015, p. 3). According to the author, students with these character strengths show a predisposition towards positive behavior and academic performance. While more research needs to be done in this area, this study and others mentioned support the premise that character traits relate directly to a student's understanding of their capacity to achieve academically. As school administrators deepen their practical wisdom, or *phronesis*, of the roles that character development plays in their schools, they increase their capacity to support various school stakeholders.

A few limitations and delimitations to this study should be noted. The most significant limitation is the selection of articles from databases which, in themselves, are limited, perhaps excluding literature that may have more fully informed this study. In terms of delimitations, the selection of articles within these databases, as well as the inclusion/exclusion criteria as described in the methodology section, were of the researchers' choosing, based on their own knowledge and experience.

In terms of areas for further research, the use of the Character Institute's Values in Action (VIA) character strengths survey as a tool in Principal Preparation Programs needs to be investigated further. Additionally, the effect of educational administrator self-care on decision-making presents another possible area of research (Pijanowski, 2017). It is recommended that additional research be focused on the degree that character development training in PPPs affects school administrators who received this training. Finally, future studies would do well to evaluate the differences between character education and professional ethics for administrators who serve as part of a larger administrative team versus those who serve as the sole administrator in their schools.

Overall, the goal of answering the study's research questions was achieved to the degree that the select literature provided comprehensive answers to these inquiries. The first, and more general, research question – "What does the literature say about character education initiatives related to K-12 school administration?" – was addressed by the selected literature that provided philosophical and/or empirical means to define terms and characterize situational cases toward these ends. The second research question – "What does the literature say about how principal preparation programs (PPPs) support the concepts of character education?" – was specifically highlighted in no less than a third of the articles investigated in this study. The notion that intentional efforts to nurture the development of character and ethical training to prepare aspiring school administrators was beneficial to the professional development of these future leaders and the schools they served in was not disputed in any of the literature reviewed in this study. Answering these two questions, within the constraints of the study, aspires to inform policy

makers, researchers and practitioners alike, adding to the increasingly relevant conversation about the relationship of professional ethics and character development to educational leadership.

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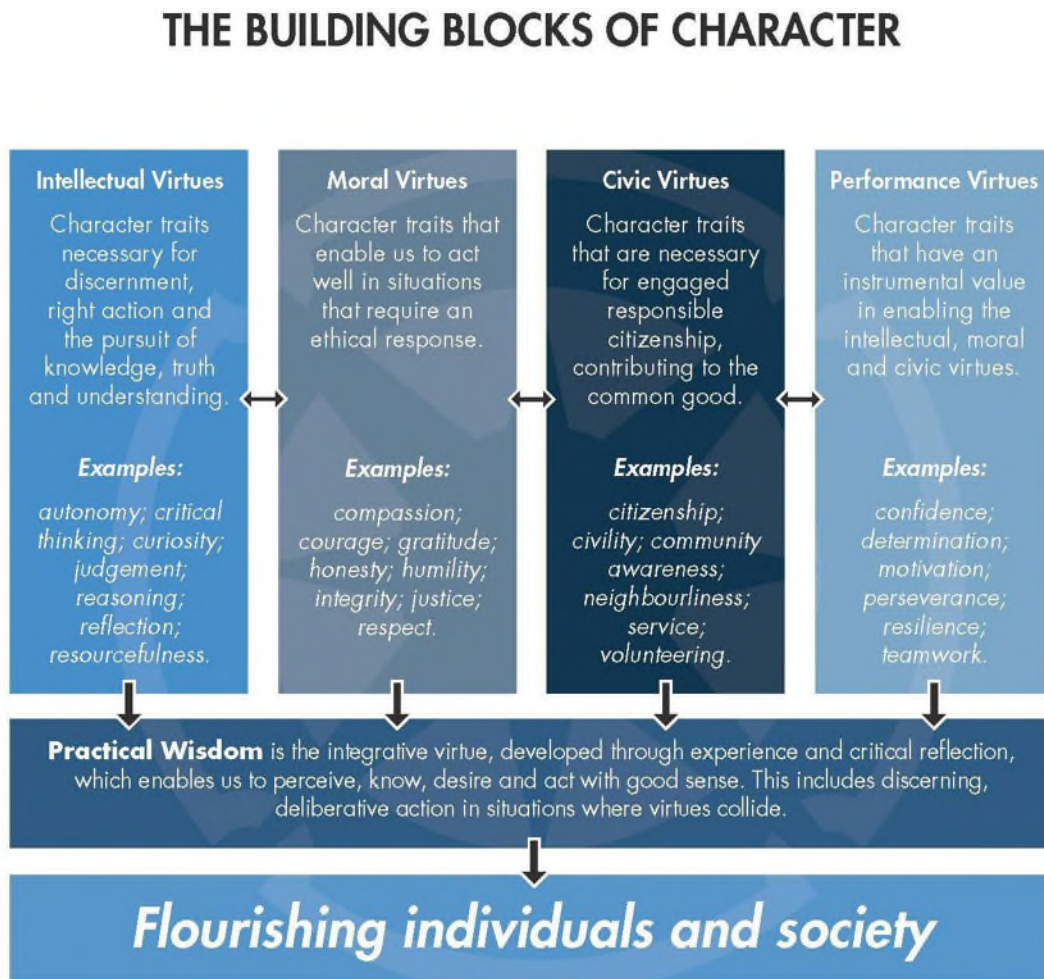
Table 1

Author Inclusion Table

Author(s) (year of publication)	Subject	M	R	P	ST	Y	Purpose
Angelle, (2017)	School/District Admin. Attitudes	QI	N	1	E	Pu	Authentic Leadership
Bass (2009)	Ethic of Care	QI	N	5	E, MS, HS	Pu	Fostering Caring in School
Benninga, et al. (2006)	Character Education K-12	Qn	S	120	E	Pu	Implementation
Bezzina (2012, 2013)	Ethical Leadership	X	I	11 schools, 45 teachers	MS, HS	Pr	Moral Purpose and Emphasis
Cherkowski, et al. (2012)	Principal Ethics	QI	S	14	E, MS, HS	Pu	Decision Making Process
Cranston, et al. (2013)	Ethical Decision Making	QI	S, O	1	U	Pu	Effectiveness Performing Arts
Davidson, et al. (2014)	Character Education	X	I,O	36 High Schools	HS	Pu,Pr	Character Education Model
Ehrich (2015)	Ethical School Leadership	QI	I	6	E, MS, HS	Pu	Principal Perceptions and Practices
Enomoto (1997)	Ethics of Care and Justice	QI	I	1200	HS	Pu	Application of Care and Justice
Eyal, et al. (2011)	Ethical Judgement	QI	S	52	U	Pu	Principal Perceptions of Training
Fowler, et al. (2014)	Ethical Leadership	X	S,I	606 districts	E,MS,HS	Pu	Superintendents Perspectives
Francom (2016)	Character Education K-12	QI	A,I	NSOC*,14 schools	HS	Pu,Pr	Implementation
Gibson (2014)	Spirituality in Leadership	QI	I	3	E	Pu	Principal Perceptions
Greer, et al. (2015)	Principal Ethics Training	Qn	S	539	U	Pu	Baseline Moral Reasoning
Hightower and Klinker. (2012)	Principal Perception	QI	I	1	MS	Pu	Moral dilemmas
Hoedel, et.al. (2018)	Character Education K-12	Qn	S	2000.	HS	Pu	Effectiveness
Holtzapple, et.al (2011)	Relational and Conflict Mgt.	Qn	A	8350 students/469 teachers	HS	Pu	Leadership Effect on Intervention
Kim, et al. (2018)	Character Education K-12	Qn	S	159	E	Pu	Teacher Perceptions
Langlois & LaPointe (2010)	Principal Training Program	X	S, I	30	U	Pu	Ethics Training Impact
Larsen & Derrington (2012)	Principal Preparation Ethics	Qn	S	Admin/ Supervisors	U	Pu	Decision Making
Lowery (2019)	Ethical Dilemmas	QI	I	10	E, MS, HS	Pu	Moral Literacy and Ethical Decisions
McGee & Mansfield (2014)	Ethical Conflict	QI	S	42	E, MS, HS	Pu	Experienced Principal Experiences
Minthrop (2012)	Professional Values	X	S,I	157, 9 schools	MS	Pu	Integrity Issues
Mullen (2017)	Pedagogical Support PPP	QI	S	14 Principals	U	Pu	Ethical Student Learning
Pijanowski (2017)	Principal Preparation	QI	I	75	U	Pu	Moral reasoning
Pike, et al. (2021)	Character Education Programs	Qn	S	1226 Students	MS	Pu	Character Curriculum
Rintoul & Goulais (2010)	Vice Principals	QI	I	3	E, MS	Pu	Developing Moral Literacy
Roberts & Sampson (2011)	Superintendent Preparation	Qn	S	20	U	Pu	Ethics in Leadership
Walker, et al. (2017)	Student Moral Judgement	Qn	S	4053	HS	Pu	Moral Reasoning
Willis. (2011)	Principal Perception	QI	I	1.	HS	Pu	Moral dilemma testing

Note. T = publication type (J = journal article, RR = research organization report, B = book, G = government report); R = research design (S = survey, I = interview, O = Observation, A = Database Analysis, N=Narrative); M = research method (Qn = quantitative; QI = qualitative, X = Mixed Method); D = Duration; P = sample size; ST = Setting (E = elementary, MS = middle school or junior high, HS = high school, U=University); Y = school type (Pu = Public, Pr= Private, Pa = parochial, Ch = charter, NA = not applicable); *NCEE =National Center for Education Evaluation

Figure 1
Framework for Character Education



Note. Used with permission from the Jubilee Centre, 2017.