Education Policy Analysis Archives

Volume 10 Number 27 **May 17, 2002** **ISSN 1068-2341**

A peer-reviewed scholarly journal
Editor: Gene V Glass
College of Education
Arizona State University

Copyright 2002, the **EDUCATION POLICY ANALYSIS ARCHIVES**.
Permission is hereby granted to copy any article if **EPAA** is credited and copies are not sold. **EPAA** is a project of the Education Policy Studies Laboratory.

Articles appearing in **EPAA** are abstracted in the *Current Index to Journals in Education* by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation and are permanently archived in *Resources in Education*.

Mentoring Narratives ON-LINE: Teaching the Principalship[1]

Alison I. Griffith
York University

Svitlana Taraban
York University

Citation: Griffith, A. I. & Taraban, S. (2002, May 17). Mentoring narratives ON-LINE: Teaching the principalship. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *10*(27). Retrieved [date] from http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v10n27.html.

Abstract

The need to develop new models for preparation of school administrators has been a prominent concern in educational discourse in the last decade. Having been criticized for the inadequate preparation of the school leadership cadre, academic departments responsible for training future school administrators have had to revisit their approaches and to reframe their teaching philosophies to ensure the readiness of their graduates for

the challenges and complexities of school leadership. This article reports on the new model of principals' training that has been used in York University's Principals' Qualification Program (PQP) from the late 1990s onward. One component of the program brings traditional case methodology into a computer-mediated/on-line environment. The on-line cases are narratives from the everyday lives of the Ontario school administrators who serve as mentors in the on-line environment. Situating our discussion within the context of the rapidly changing educational landscape of Ontario, we focus on the PQP model to explore experientially generated case narratives as one method for teaching and learning the work of the local school administrator. We focus particularly on the teaching and learning embedded in computer-mediated or on-line case narratives used in training teachers for school leadership. We argue that the complexities of school leadership—the social, cultural, relational, ethical and moral context of school leadership—can be taught effectively through the reflective processes of on-line case narratives. We seek to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on the potential of new pedagogies and new technologies to help prepare the competent and responsible leaders for tomorrow's schools.

Introduction

The preparation of classroom teachers to be principals (local school administrators) is, at any time, a complex teaching process to re-frame individual horizons of professional interest and knowledge. The immediacy of classroom teaching and learning that forms the lived experience of teachers must be brought into the context of relationships and responsibilities that extend throughout the school, its communities and the bureaucratic relations linking the school to the educational system. The principal must mediate these complex relationships. Indeed, complexity is one of the distinguishing features of the principalship. Traditionally, the work of the school principal has been to coordinate the relationships and tasks of the school with the community and the demands of the larger system in which the school is embedded. In Ontario education today, the preparation of principals for local school administration must also address the dramatic changes in public schooling that have been mandated by the current neo-Conservative government and the subsequent job unrest in the teaching profession. Thus, teaching and learning the work of the principal requires programs for preparing leaders that address the complexity of the position within the rapidly changing educational landscape of Ontario education.

In this article, we focus on York University's Principals' Qualification Program (PQP) to explore experientially generated case narratives as one method for teaching and learning the work of the local school administrator. We focus particularly on the teaching and learning embedded in computer-mediated or on-line case narratives used in training teachers for school leadership. We argue that the complexities of school leadership—the social, cultural, relational, ethical and moral context of school leadership—can be taught effectively through the reflective processes of on-line case narratives.

The Educational Context in Ontario

In Ontario, school administrators are working in a new and difficult context. The neo-Conservative government has been engaged in a dramatic restructuring and marketization of the Public and Catholic education systems. Curriculum, assessment and budgetary authority have been centralized in the Government and the Ministry of Education. "The Ontario government slashed welfare benefits by 20%, higher education budgets by 15%, and public schooling by some 12% … [educational funding was cut] in excess of 1 billion dollars, if higher education is included along with primary and secondary education" (Axelrod, 2000, p. 2, 8). Boards of Education are closing low-enrolled schools and user fees for school facilities have been instituted. School Boards were amalgamated to form very large administrative units and supervisory staff has been reduced. Curricula are being (or have been) rewritten for all levels and subjects, and grade-level testing has been instituted. Teacher testing is on the immediate horizon although the method and focus of this centralized review process is as yet unknown. Principals and vice-principals have been removed from the teachers' unions, thus disrupting the collegial relationship on which school leadership has traditionally been grounded.

Educators in the educational system in Ontario are struggling to make the pedagogical, curricular and administrative changes at the required pace and form. Experienced teachers and administrators were given the opportunity for early retirement and many did so. Ontario is now experiencing a teacher and principal shortage that is expected to continue for some time. The morale of Ontario educators is low and strikes and job actions are not uncommon in Ontario school system.

At the same time and particularly in the large urban centers in Ontario, the schooling context of teaching and learning has changed. Immigration to Ontario, particularly to the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) from other provinces in Canada and from around the world, continues to be at the highest rate in Canada. There are more students as well as more students whose first language is neither English nor French, fewer teachers, and fewer resources. Ontario's education was developed and has been based on White, Anglophone, and European assumptions—assumptions that no longer hold for huge numbers of students and their families, nor for many of the teachers within urban systems. Students, parents and communities of diverse of languages, race/ethnicities, abilities and family structures form the everyday context of many local schools. Local Board initiatives to include the teaching and learning of equity and diversity have been undercut by the new curriculum (which excluded words such as "equity") and the intensification of teachers' classroom teaching hours.

It has been claimed that the current elected government is deliberately running the public and Catholic school systems into the ground so that charter schools and other private institutions will be welcomed into the education landscape (Barlow & Robertson, 1994). My research suggests that the traditional links between the local or regional organization of social class and the education system are being disrupted as Ontario re-orients its education system toward the requirements of a global economy (Griffith, 2000). This is the social and educational context of the current principals' qualifying programs.

The Principals' Qualification Program at York University

In Ontario, teachers who are appointed as school principals must have completed (or be in the process of completing) the Principals' Qualification Program (PQP). It is a required preparatory program offered by most universities in Ontario and, recently, by the principals' associations. The York University PQP is accredited by the Ontario College of Teachers and is offered through the Field Development unit of the Faculty of Education.[2] York's PQP was completely revised in 1997, shifting the emphasis of the course toward relational leadership (Regan & Brookes, 1995), leadership strategies for equity and diversity, and incorporating an action-research practicum. At any one time, 250–300 candidates are enrolled in the program. Ten to fifteen program facilitators (current school principals) teach in one of the two required programs at four course sites in the Greater Toronto Area. A focus on change at the school and system level is integrated into the program through the seminar topics and through an on-line mentoring process.

Case Methodology in the York University PQP

A small, but important feature of the York PQP (14 out of 125 hours) is taught via computer-mediated communication to groups of candidates who converse on-line. In contrast to the course seminars, the on-line groups are not site-based. PQP candidates are randomly assigned to online discussion groups (the number of the groups grew from eight in 1997 to sixteen in 1999, to 20 in 2000). Each on-line group consists of 15 - 20 candidates who are mentored by two principals from different Boards of Education in the GTA. The On-Line Mentors are volunteers and represent a variety of Public and Catholic Boards. They are recruited for their knowledge and experience, and for their 'fit' with the underlying principles of the York PQP. Each week, the On-Line Mentors post cases for discussion drawn from their everyday experiences as principals.

The on-line component of the program was developed for a number of reasons:

- To provide the opportunity for ongoing learning using computer-mediated technologies, including electronic mail and Internet information resources.
- To broaden the candidates knowledge of the range of issues and administrative practices of different Boards of Education across the GTA, for example to highlight differences between rural and urban schools, mono-cultural and multi-cultural schools, schools that are mono-lingual and those with a broad linguistic diversity.
- To extend the range of contacts so useful to recently appointed administrators.
- To provide a different learning medium for the candidates—one that is non-linear, reflective, and not tied to the schedules of face-to-face teaching and learning.

Computer-mediated discussion groups allow for interactions between experienced and aspiring administrators, mentoring relationships that no longer need to be confined to a single classroom or school. Indeed, the on-line technology allows for networking across the large distances of the GTA, and provides the opportunity for people working in diverse school situations to learn from each other through the discussion of cases drawn from the everyday experience of principals working across the diversity of GTA schools.

Case Methodology

Case methodology has a long history in education for leadership and administration. It originated as an instructional technique at Harvard University Law School in 1870 and later became widely accepted in a variety of professional disciplines. Clamp (web-page) defines a case as an account or description of a situation or sequence of events confronting an individual, a group of individuals, or an organization. Rather than deliver concepts and theories, cases (also called clinical correlation, leadership stories, real-life narratives, critical incidents, and vignettes) present situations for analysis about which decisions must be made. There are similarities of structure between case histories, clinical cases, problem-based learning and other experientially based methods in that they are all oriented to the particularities of practice while drawing on the generalities of theory. The purpose of cases and case-based instruction in any professional field relates directly to the nature of the body of knowledge that exists in that particular field (Merseth, 1997). For example, in teacher education cases are used to develop reflective practitioners and to promote teacher reflection and enhanced understanding (Richert, 1991). In the field of educational administration where decision-making skills are crucial, cases can offer opportunities to practice analysis, problem solving, action planning, and evaluation (Merseth, 1997).

In the educational studies in general and in the area of school administration in particular the interest in the case methodology is manifested through a wide incorporation of and experimentation with case-based instruction in pre-service and in-service training of teachers and administrators. To date, numerous guidebooks and collections of cases for principalship training have been published in North America (*cf*: Hanson, *Preparing for EducationalAdministration Using Case Analysis* (2000); Lynn, *Teaching and Learning with Cases: A Guidebook* (1999); Miller and Kantrov, *A Guide to Facilitating Cases in Education* (1998), Merseth, *Cases in Educational Administration* (1997)). At the university level, special centers have been established for research and promotion of the case methodology in the field of education (Pace University Center for Case Studies in Education is but one example). Likewise, educational journals devote a great deal of attention to this matter and provide a forum for discussion of the value of case methodology for preparation of educational cadre. For example, *The Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership (JCEL)* published by University of Utah is devoted solely to the publication of cases that can be effectively used in preparation of educational leaders.

Principal preparation programs have used case studies to remedy problems that arise in the gap between theory and practice. A major criticism of principal preparation programs has been: "Regardless of the year appointed, [principals] have been trained and certified as administrators through programs largely irrelevant to and grossly inadequate for the work responsibilities found in the school principalship" (Muse & Thomas, 1991). The use of cases that emphasize the "value of both theory and practice, experience and reflection" (Danzig, 1997, p. 125) were (and continue to be) viewed as an important way of addressing this criticism.

The need to bridge the worlds of theory and practice in the training of school administrators has been accentuated by Danzig (1997; 1999) who developed a "leadership stories" approach for university training of school administrators. His model is based on a mentorship through narrative where experienced school administrators

offer their experiences—their leadership stories—to the next generation of school principals. Danzig argues that "leadership stories (or "narrative research") is a powerful tool for connecting the privileged discourse of universities with the smart hands of experience – connecting theory to practice" (quoted in Hopkins, 1998).

According to Ashbough and Kasten (1991), cases can be used for several purposes:

- to help students acquire analytical skills;
- to develop the skills of synthesizing information;
- to promote concept development;
- to develop mature judgement and wisdom in a relatively risk-free environment;
- to illustrate and apply widely accepted techniques of administration.

Richert (1991) suggests that case methodology combines both artifactual and social elements. The artifactual component is the case itself, a description of an actual situation. The social component of case method is the discussion of the case by colleagues that usually takes the form of a case discussion (often referred to as a "case conference"). Our data suggest that case methodology also draws on the complexities embedded in the structure of narratives. We return to this point below.

Using Case Methodology On-line

The emergence of computer-based technologies opened up new possibilities for case conferencing. According to Desberg and Fisher (1996), the collision of technology and case methodology was inevitable. The combination of technology and case-based instruction gave birth to new applications of case methodology in teacher and principal preparation programs, for example video-cases, computer-based simulations, virtual case competitions on the World Wide Web, cases presented as CD-ROM and laser disks, and electronic meeting systems. Sudzina (1999) notes that the technological formats of case analysis can be written, spoken, or based in hypermedia utilizing the Internet or World Wide Web. Unlike the traditional classroom discussion of cases, electronic meeting systems (EMS) allow for constant ongoing dialogue between participants. Moreover, electronic brainstorming produces significantly more fresh ideas than traditional classroom analysis of cases (Olaniran, 1994). EMS also allows more people to interact without interruption and to input ideas simultaneously. Opportunity for the participation of all group members is also enhanced in computer-mediated case discussions.

On-line case discussion in the York University PQP resonates with the need to decrease the gap between classroom instruction and practice and to enhance students' ability to make good decisions that are at the core of school leadership. The PQP on-line cases are experiential narratives that focus on a broad set of concerns specific to the work of the principal. The cases, referred to by participants as scenarios, problems or situations, are posted weekly by the On-Line Mentors. Each week, candidates read the posted cases and respond to the issues, events and dilemmas of the case taking the perspective of a principal. This requires them to shift their reading of the cases from their experiential teaching horizon toward a one that encompasses the relationships within the school, the school community and the educational system with it's diverse participants.

The role of case discussion facilitator is important in case methodology generally and the York PQP specifically. The facilitator guides the discussion by probing, directly challenging, or simply observing the discussion process (Merseth, 1997). Feedback plays an important role in the learning process: as people receive information about the results of their actions, they are able to correct themselves progressively until they achieve the intended results (Silver, 1987). The PQP On-Line Mentors, all of whom were classroom teachers prior to becoming a principal, bring their knowledge of teaching and learning to the CMC environment. They provide feedback in the form of comments addressed to candidates' responses, suggestions for different presentation strategies, ideas for deepening the responses, or concluding thoughts. The On-Line Mentors also direct discussions and monitor candidates' participation in order to facilitate discussions that are reflective and thoughtful. In order to make case discussions challenging, educative and interesting, On-Line Mentors may make suggestions and ask questions related to the posted case.

The on-line narratives are written rather than oral interactions, often presented in a laconic and point specific form rather than lengthy and comprehensive manner. The audiences for whom the narratives are constructed are other educators attending or teaching the course. Although one face-to-face meeting of the on-line groups is scheduled during the course, candidates may never meet their on-line mentor or other members of their on-line group. Group cohesion is developed through a combination of required participation, the skill of the on-line mentor, and the ongoing involvement of the participants.

Case methodology has changed in recent years from the method of instruction based on face-to-face discussion of oral cases/narratives confined to the classroom space to computer-mediated asynchronous discussion of on-line cases in virtual classrooms/cyber-classrooms. Narratives in cyberspace, rather than being a part of an oral discourse, entail new communicative styles and ways of engagement with texts/cases on the part of the learners. In theorizing of learning, claims have been made that we learn from the other's response to what we convey. Thus, learning the art of school leadership through on-line narratives necessitates the learners to put their responses out there and to find out what comes back.

A unique feature of the York PQP cases posted on-line is that often they present an account of events that happened in the same week (or sometimes even the same day) as the case is posted for discussion. While varying in content and length, the cases are authentic narratives from the work experience of GTA principals. As such, they have some pedagogical similarity to more traditional principal training methods such as "inbox" and "shadowing" exercises. Some of the cases posted by On-Line Mentors open up with the words like: "Just a quick situation we had at our school this week that caused us some thought" or "Here is the situation based on a real case that happened recently." The fact that cases posted for discussion are "fresh" cases enables On-Line Mentors to enrich the dialogue by adding new details and nuances to the case and informing participants about the trajectory of events. Unlike other case study models that have been 'worked up' for teaching purposes, these case narratives are generated in the immediacy of the principals' workday and give a strong sense of the complexities of the fast-changing educational landscape in Ontario.

Case Narratives in On-line Learning

The literature on case study methodology neglects one of its most striking features. The case studies are narratives –#151;stories constructed with an audience in mind and located in a particular time and space. They are expressions of local knowledge, both constructing and depending for their sense on a world known in common. Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992) claim that, "The culture speaks itself through each individual story…. Narratives are a chorus of coordinated stories." On-line cases, as narratives, are the chorus of coordinated stories of Ontario schools today. As narratives, they suggest issues that are both practical and theoretical: " Studying cases actually relies on a dialectic between events and meanings, practice and theory. We learn from the narrative as we reflect on the content and make sense of it based on what we know and believe. In studying the particular, we consider the general; similarly, we challenge the general by studying the particular" (Richert, 1991, p.140-141).

Our data point to the importance of case narratives for situating on-line speakers in the stories and events of their profession. The use of narratives brings into view the implicit and explicit ethical and moral issues that permeate the stories of schooling. Narratives bring the complexity of the coordinated stories about school leadership and administration to the medium of on-line group learning. Equally important, they allow beginners "to consider and inspect the informal or tacit systems which exist side-by-side with the formal manifest systems operating in schools and organizations' (Danzig, 1997, p. 124).

Teaching and Learning Complexity using Narratives

One of the program challenges that confront PQP candidates and their program teachers are to develop the skill to see the case narratives through the eyes of an administrator rather than a teacher. Our prior experiences, history and knowledge shape our interpersonal engagement with others and form the interpretative lenses through which we "see" (analyze) a particular narrative. Working through case narratives with other members of the on-line group is one way of teaching and learning new ways of seeing the events of the school day.

The following case narrative was posted early in the program.

> Posted case experience:You are the principal who has been trying to visit a teacher who is on the first year of a two-year probationary contract. Often when you scheduled a visit, the teacher was absent that day. Your collective agreement indicates that the principal will endeavor to give 48 hours notice before the teacher is observed for evaluation purposes. There have been a number of people (parents and students) complaining that the teacher's classroom control is unsatisfactory. Your Superintendent wants any terminations recommended within the week. You tell the teacher at 8:30AM that you will be visiting her tomorrow afternoon. She says that is "unacceptable" and walks away. What will you do?

In the case responses posted early in the York PQP, candidates have difficulty seeing the complexity of cases as well as to sort through the diversity of approaches to a posted case—what Bridges (1992) calls the one best decision syndrome. Particularly during the first weeks of the course, students often headed in the direction of searching "right"

answers rather than exploring the case complexities. This observation resonates with the findings of a growing body of research on the new computer mediated modalities of teaching/learning and the challenges they pose for learners who are required to interact with knowledge in a new way. Research on computer mediated instruction in the training of school administrators suggests that students oftentimes tend to look for a right answer and thus are "likely to focus on surface problems rather than underlying problems. Thus, the solutions would ultimately not solve the root of the problem and are unsatisfactory for the school setting" (MacNeil, 1997). Addressing this issue, MacNeil (1997) argues that the ambiguities and complexities of school decision-making should be at the heart of computer-mediated case instruction and that case study methods that came to education from the fields of law and business need to be re-examined as a method of instruction for use in the preparation of school leaders.

In response to the case narrative above, the candidates' responses were diverse but focused on the administrative and bureaucratic 'rules' of the principalship. For example, responses were,

- Judgmental: "This is a new employee, who is arrogant and does not fit the needs and profile of the school community."
- Legalistic: "Termination is a multi-step process beginning with a plan for improvement."
- Few of the responses were collegial: "Find out from discussion with the teacher what his/her perceptions are about the students. As a principal, I might already have some prior knowledge/history about the key players or instigators." Even fewer focused on the school as a social and cultural unit with interdependent relationships across faculty, students and staff.
- Supervisory: "... this can be confirmed through the appraisal process. This can be targeted as an area of growth for this teacher."

In part, the tendency to assume there was one best answer to a posted case was supported by the on-line medium. A first response to the computer-mediated case discussion sets the frame for analysis, apparently limiting the scope of potential responses for other participants. Students had access to the responses of other group members that had been posted earlier. Often, the subsequent responses did not take up different perspectives and were greatly influenced by the ideas and thoughts from prior responses—a kind of group think such as that which occurs in face-to-face groups. One of the students summed up her frustration in the following way: "I have read all the answers and now don't have anything to add."

As candidates continued through the program, they found ways to work towards an understanding of the complexities of collaboration and school-based issues. For example, one student opted for an approach that would allow her to respond to the cases without experiencing the influence of the thinking of her group members. "I have not read any answers provided thus far in fear of not being able to provide my own opinions or having them all said already." Yet another candidate noted, "This year I am not reading anyone else's [responses] until I have done mine." After posting her responses, she read the responses of her classmates and wrote her comments that supported or criticized other's responses. Regardless of the strategies candidates use to find their 'voices' on-line, the collaborative capacity of the on-line medium supports candidates' learning of the range of perspectives on a given issue as well as bringing into view the complexities of the issues facing school leaders.

Ongoing feedback from the On-Line Mentors as well as subtle peer assessment are salient components of the PQP. They contribute to the development of the candidates' ability to address the issues in a more complex ways, to identify approaches that are more effective than others, and to set forward their reasons for choosing a particular approach. Take, for example, the response of the on-line mentor when closing the case noted above:

> Let me offer some thoughts on the situation. As principal, I realize that teacher evaluation is stressful, and I'm dealing with a fellow human being. I must never lose sight of that fact. She and I have different roles but we are two equal people. Remembering that lets me approach problem solving with a win-win goal in mind.

Another on-line mentor addressed the focus on the 'right' answer in his follow-up message to candidates: "I preface this feedback with the disclaimer that I, like you, am giving my opinion. There are no right or wrong answers to this issue… I think growth lies in the debate, and the opportunity to see many different approaches to the same set of facts." In the on-line mentor responses, we see a complex teaching and learning about the social and professional mores of the principalship.

As the course progresses, candidates felt freer to speak from their professional experiences in the teaching profession and from their life experiences as people interested in education. Bringing their life experiences to bear on an administrative framework, students came up with diverse (often even polar) responses and felt free to disagree with one another. The consensual uniformity of candidates' standpoints was less present in the analysis of the cases that dealt with ethical concerns or involved moral judgements. The following case is illustrative:

> *The Case:*A parent has phoned the Superintendent to complain that her son has been given a mark that is unfair. The Superintendent phoned the principal saying that the parent seemed to be making a good point. The principal is asked to deal with it!
>
> *The Details:*Jack is an "A" student who has scholarship offer from a major university if he can maintain his average in this, his graduating semester. The head of the geography department discovered that Jack had sold an essay to another student in the same class who submitted it to the teacher as his own. Jack has written the essay last year when he was taking a different geography course. Jack submitted a different, original paper that reflected his usual high standards, and was given a 98. When the department head realized what had transpired, both students were given a zero for that portion of the course (40%) which was evaluated on the basis of the essay. The parent had called the department head to explain that she is a single parent who cannot afford to send Jack to university without the scholarship, which will be denied if Jack gets a zero. The department head would not change the mark and the mother appealed to the principal. The principal was still investigating the situation when the Superintendent called. The mother had explained to the Superintendent that the principal was refusing to deal with it.

Two of the student responses to this case were:

> Jack needs to understand the severity of his behavior and the consequence that was put in place was appropriate. That being said, I don't believe that his future should be destroyed as a result. We all make mistakes and need to assume the responsibility of our behavior. Consequences are put into place in order to facilitate learning. Hopefully, we learn from our mistakes and move on. Some creative problem solving is needed here. Perhaps, Jack could be given the opportunity to make up this mark. Assign him another paper and allow the grade for that paper to replace the zero.

And:

> Based on the four responses that I have read, everyone seems to be concerned with a variety of factors regarding Jack's zero for an essay in Geography class. My question to all of you is, however, quite simple: Did Jack actually commit a crime? After all, the essay he submitted was an original piece of work in which he received a 98. This is obviously a bright student! On this basis alone, Jack should receive full credit for whatever his essay was worth… I do not believe it to be a crime, unless there is a specific school policy on the selling term papers, and this is where the key lies! If no such policy exists, Jack didn't do anything wrong, his friend did. After all, there are hundreds of Internet sites where one can purchase term papers for a nominal fee. If Jack had legally set up his own business on the Internet, and his friend had purchased the paper electronically, is Jack still responsible? No way! Jack is innocent!

The experientially based case narratives allow participants to connect the case to other narratives from their own experiences or the experiences of someone they know. This kind of reflection was encouraged by the On-Line Mentors who often peppered their comments, feedback, and summaries with instances from previous events evoked by the narrative cases and responses. For example, with reference to the case narrative of the teacher who would not agree to have the principal come to her classroom (above), the on-line mentor stated in parentheses:

> One of the common mistakes that I have seen principals make occurs at this stage. Instead of checking for data, the principal reacts to the teacher's stance by creating a confrontation and setting up a win / lose situation. The principal must manage to be part of the solution, not the problem.

He then went back to the case under discussion, focusing on his plan of administrative action.

Juxtaposing similar narratives enabled students to identify common themes and to unravel and refine the problems that are at the heart of the narratives from the life of educational administrators. Equally important, this process helped students to anticipate the consequences of their proposed actions and to generate more effective solutions. For example, one of the posted case narratives dealt with school closure,

Case: You are the principal of a school that has been identified for possible closure. The

demographics in your board suggest that there are about 6,000 excess student places in schools in your board. The government has set down a tight timeline which dictates that School Boards that want to increase their funding for maintenance and new school construction in growth areas, must identify schools by December that will close in June 1999. Although the final decision has not been made, the fact that your school has been targeted is of great concern. As a principal of this school, what role should you play in the next few critical weeks?

Some of the participants juxtaposed similar narratives dealing with the same situation. One of the students wrote:

> When I was talking to a retired principal about this case he told me that many years ago the board that I work for was going to convert an old elementary school in a prominent section of the town into the board office. Apparently the principal decided to inform many vocal parents about this in an effort to stop the closure. The parents were successful in keeping the school open but the principal found himself as Vice Principal in a smaller school out in the country.

An encounter with a case invites the reader to forge connections between his narrative and other narratives (Shulman, 1996). Inquiring into the relationships between cases and theory, Shulman states that to assert that a narrative is a case is to engage in an act of theory. To become a case, a narrative "must be seen as an exemplar of a class, an instance of a larger category." (p. 208). He further argues that "it appears to be a characteristic of our species that stories explicitly breed yet other stories and, implicitly, the categories of analysis that connect stories to one another conceptually. Even in the concrete act of narrative, underlying theoretical categories emerge and often become explicit." (p. 209). Therefore, relating cases to one another and relating cases to larger categories of which they are instances helps to answer the question "what is this case of?" and connect it to organizing principles or theories (Shulman, 1996).

The complexity of narratives, and case narratives are no exception, supports the teaching and learning of the coordinated stories of schooling and the principalship. A narrative always tells more than the story line, often more than the story teller is aware of saying (Mishler, 1984). Working with cases, or narratives, in a group situation requires learning to manage the complexities of multiple perspectives and diverse points of view as group members work through the artifactual, social (Richert, 1991), and cultural features of the narrative. In educational administration where the thinking that lies behind effective leadership is complex and varied, this understanding of the relational, cultural and systemic levels becomes extremely important. The PQP's interactive computer-based discussion of case narratives emerges as "one means of socializing neophyte administrators, that is *aspiring administrators begin thinking like the practitioners they wish to become* [emphasis added] " (Ashbaugh & Kasten, 1991).

Traditionally, the emphasis in principal preparation programs was placed (and oftentimes continues to be placed) on teaching practical skills and job specific knowledge that would allow neophyte administrators to cope successfully with challenges and demands of principalship. According to Mitchell and Tucker (1992, p.30), "educators tend to think of leadership as a matter of taking action and getting results." Less prominent has been a concern for an ethical dimension of school leadership which in part can be explained by the fact that in literature on school

administration the work of school leaders was compared to and consequently viewed through the lenses of effective management and problem-solving skills rather than through the perplexities and ambiguities arising from the need to make decisions and choices that have significant ethical ramifications for all of those involved. In the last decade, the evolving concepts of leadership attempted to address the previously overlooked and under-theorized aspect of ethics of school leadership. Among the theories that explored the "ethics-leadership" nexus were the concept of moral leadership, the ethics of caring, transformational leadership, to name a few. These theories testified, at least to some extent, that "leadership is less a matter of aggressive action than a way of thinking and feeling—about ourselves, about our jobs, and about the nature of the educational process" (Mitchell and Tucker, 1992, p. 30).

Despite the recognition (at the theoretical level) of the importance of addressing the issue of ethics in the preparation of school leaders, this question has continued to receive only peripheral attention at the level of practice and, by and large, was not incorporated into the formats of principal preparation programs offered by universities and principals' associations. It is within this context that narratives in general, and on-line narratives in particular, emerged as a pedagogical space for exploration of the issues of ethics as it relates to school leadership. As such, on-line narratives provide an opportunity to shift the focus from teaching skills to teaching reflection and thinking. Narratives that present explicit (or otherwise) ethical dilemmas and challenges faced by school leaders require a clear vision and ethical commitment on the part of those in the position of decision-making. Narratives become a powerful pedagogical tool for helping future administrators to "think and feel" (rather than to judge and fix), to reflect and listen, to challenge widely held assumptions and biases and finally, to shape and articulate the core values. In his article on leadership stories, Danzig (quoted in Hopkins, 1998) notes, that "Professionals need to understand not only the technical aspects of their job but moral basis of their work. Stories provide a more complete view of the meaning of professional practice." Indeed, calling for articulation of individual moral stances, narratives offer a pedagogical space for engaging with the aspects of ethics as it relates to the everyday work of school administrator, and, more broadly, to the mission and goals of school leader at this historical juncture.

Returning to our analysis of the PQP on-line narratives, student responses to less complex and more transparent cases often resulted in producing collective virtual texts where each ensuing individual script, more or less, echoed the line of thinking developed in responses posted earlier. In contrast, the responses to case narratives that drew on local experience with ethical issues embedded in the stories did not turn into unitary, virtual texts—one-best solution—produced by collective efforts of on-line participants. Instead, those cases generated the breakdowns and discontinuities of the texts and the plurality of individual standpoints. Rather than searching for a common ground and attempting to fit their responses into the Procrustean bed of emerging collective narrative, the students were challenged to

- voice their positions,
- develop their on-line identities as future school leaders,
- produce their idiosyncratic texts that did not necessarily fit into the evolving trajectory of thinking about the posted case,
- and finally, produce polyphonic virtual texts in which the center of gravity was shifted towards diversity of opinions and plurality of voices.

Concluding Comments

Our analysis of the on-line narrative cases and responses of the on-line groups in York University's PQP shows some of the features that contribute to an effective use of case studies in an on-line environment. While York University's PQP has a variety of pedagogical forms including course seminars, an action practicum and the on-line discussion groups, a cornerstone of the program is reflective practice. The Program Facilitators who have the major responsibility for the program have built reflective practice into each section of the course. The case narratives and the interaction of the On-Line Mentors support and enhance the reflective features of the PQP within their group. The case narratives are drawn from the immediate school experiences of the principals who serve as On-Line Mentors and the character of such case narratives engages the student in a reflective process. Posted cases situated in the life of the school construct the case narrative as an event worthy of reflection. The necessarily-reflective character of the on-line discussion groups build on the social and cultural complexities of the narrative format in interesting, non-linear ways.

The indicators of successful utilization of computer-mediated communication in the PQP are two-fold. First, there is a high level of candidate participation in the discussion of cases. While 14 hours of on-line participation is a course requirement, we have found that many of the candidates participate in the on-line discussions for more than the required hours. Second, despite their workload and variety of commitments, few On-Line Mentors withdraw from the program. The PQP archives show that the mentor / principals were positive about their role as On-Line Mentors as opportunities for learning and professional growth. The following response exemplifies the attitude of the principals participating as On-Line Mentors in the PQP: "This is my third year mentoring Principal candidates at York University. The reason that I do this is to increase my own learning and test the effectiveness of electronic communication." (A Principal in a grade 7-OAC school).

Our analysis points to two other features of case study methodology. First, cases that link to the professional experience of teachers provide the cognitive basis for generalizing from local experience to the more-general perspective required of school principals. In contrast to the uncertainty and subsequent 'group-think' that occurs when candidates must respond from within the conceptual framework of educational administration, when candidates are able to construct responses based on their experience the resulting diversity of response and debate provides fertile ground for teaching by the on-line mentor. Second, encouraging narrative forms would seem to enhance the complexity of the on-line responses. Beginning in the everyday experience of school administrators and constructing case studies that evoke narratives that include ethical and moral issues would seem to be an effective way to teach leadership.

In sum, the texts produced via the medium of technology become excellent "raw" material for thinking about and reflecting upon the nature of the school leadership. They push the students to explore the limits of their knowledge, to test the strengths and merits of their beliefs, to encounter other views, to share values and to reflect upon the vicissitudes of the school principalship. Pedagogically speaking, narratives that include moral and ethical issues are an effective way of teaching the art of school leadership and of developing and strengthening the sense of ethical responsibility in future educational

leaders.

Notes

[1]Article prepared for the Fifth Annual Leadership Conference on Ethics and Values, Bridgetown, Barbados, Sept 25—Oct 1, 2000. We would like to thank Terry Gray, the volunteer On-Line Mentors and the Program Facilitators of our principals' program for their excellent teaching and their comments on this work.

[2]The York PQP does not carry university credit.

[3]These similarities were brought to our attention by one of the principals teaching in the York PQP who had previously been an On-Line Mentor.

[4]As with all narratives, the on-line cases are located in time and space—within a particular course context that shapes the boundaries of the stories. The course philosophy attends to those features of educational administration that deal with human experiences and interactions, suggesting that the relational character of leadership is as important for administration as are specific educational acts and regulations. The majority of electronic archived cases from the program year that we selected for our analysis are narratives that emphasize the complexity of people's behavior and interactions. The cases and responses emphasize the skills of problem solving, analysis and critical and creative thinking rather than specific knowledge of any particular educational issue.

[5]The data for this article were drawn from (archived) on-line discussions between PQP candidates and volunteer mentors during one of the recent program years.

References

Ashbaugh, C. & Kasten, K. (1991). *Educational Leadership: Case Studies for Reflective Practice.* New York: Longman.

Axelrod, P. (2000). *Neo-conservatism and the Politics of Education in Ontario.* Paper presented at the Faculty Orientation, Faculty of Education, York University. September 7.

Barlow, M. & Robertson, H. (1994). *Class Warfare: The Assault on Canada's Schools.* Toronto: Key Porter.

Bridges, E. (1992). *Problem-Based Learning for Administrators*. ERIC Clearing House for Educational Management.

Clamp, J.C. (web-page). *Teaching through the Case Method.* Available on-line <http://www.abacon.com/lefton/case-method.html>

Danzig, A. (1999). How Might Leadership be Taught? The Use of Story and Narrative to Teach Leadership. *International Journal of Leadership in Education* , 2(2), pp.117-131.

Danzig, A. (1997). Leadership Stories: What Novices Learn by Crafting the Stories of Experienced School Administrators. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 35(2), pp. 122-137.

Desberg, P. & Fisher, F. (1996). Using Technology in Case Methodology. In Colbert et al. (eds.), *The Case for Education: Contemporary Approaches for Using Case Methods* (pp.39-55). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Griffith, A. (2000). Texts, Tyranny and Transformation: Restructuring in Ontario. In J.P. Portelli & R.P. Solomon (eds.), *The Erosion of Democracy in Education: From Critique to Possibilities* (pp. 83-98). Calgary: Detselig Press.

Hanson, K. (2000). *Preparing for Educational Administration Using Case Analysis*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Hopkins, G. (1998). *Follow the Leader: School Principals in Training*. Available on-line <http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin048.shtml>

Lynn, L. (1999). *Teaching and Learning with Cases: A Guidebook*. Chappaqua, NY: Seven Bridges Press.

MacNeil, A. (1997). *Case Study Method and Electronic Meeting System for Principal Preparation.* Available on-line <http://www.coe.uh.edu/insite/elec_pub/HTML1997/el_macn.htm>

Merseth, K. (1997). *Cases in Educational Administration.* New York: Longman.

Mishler, E. (1991). *Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative.* Boston, MA: Harvard University Press.

Miller, B. & Kantrov, I. (1998). *A Guide to Facilitating Cases in Education.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Mitchell, D. & Tucker, S. (1992). Leadership as a Way of Thinking. *Educational Leadership,* February, pp. 30-35.

Muse, I. & Thomas, G. (1991). The Rural Principal: Select the Best. *Journal of Rural and Small Schools*, 4(3), pp. 32-37.

Olaniran, B. (1994). Group Performance in Computer-Mediated and Face-to-Face Communication Media. *Management Communication Quarterly,* 7, pp. 256-281.

Regan, H. & Brooks, G. (1995). *Out of Women's Experience: Creating Relational Leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Richert, A. (1991). Using Teacher Cases for Reflection and Enhanced Understanding. In Lieberman, A. & Miller, L. (eds.), *Staff Development in the '90s: New Demands, New Realities, New Perspectives* (pp. 113-131). NewYork*:* Teacher College Press.

Richert, A. (1991). Case Methods and Teacher Education: Using Cases to Teach Teacher Reflection. In Tabachnic, R. & Zeichner, K. (eds.), *Issues and Practices in Inquiry-Oriented TeacherEducation* (pp. 130-150). New York: The Falmer Press.

Rosenwald, G. & Ochberg, L. (1992) (eds.), *Storied Lives: The Cultural Politics of Self-Understanding*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Shulman, L.S. (1996). Just in Case: Reflections on Learning from Experience. In Colbert,J., Desberg, P. & Trimble, K (eds.), *The Case for Education: Contemporary Approaches for Using Case Methods* (pp.197-217). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Silver, P. (1987). The Center for Advancing Principalship Excellence (APEX): An Approach to Professionalizing Educational Administration. In Murphy, J. & Halliger, P. (eds.), *Approaches to Administrative Training in Education* (pp. 67-82). New York: State University of New York Press.

Sudzina, M. (1999). Organizing Instruction for Case-Based Teaching. In McNergney, R., Duchame, E. & Duchame, M.(eds.), *Educating for Democracy: Case-Method Teaching and Learning* (pp.15-27). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

About the Authors

Alison I. Griffith, PhD, is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Education, York University, ON, Canada. As Associate Dean of the Field Development unit at York University, she is actively involved in the design and implementation of professional development programs for Ontario educators and has published extensively in the area of school leadership and educational reforms.

Svitlana Tarabanholds Master's degree in Educational Administration from University at Buffalo. Currently, she is a Doctoral candidate at the Faculty of Education, York University, Canada.

Copyright 2002 by the *Education Policy Analysis Archives*

The World Wide Web address for the *Education Policy Analysis Archives* is **epaa.asu.edu**

General questions about appropriateness of topics or particular articles may be addressed to the Editor, Gene V Glass, glass@asu.edu or reach him at College of Education, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85287-2411. The Commentary Editor is Casey D. Cobb: casey.cobb@unh.edu .

EPAA Editorial Board

Michael W. Apple
University of Wisconsin

Greg Camilli
Rutgers University

John Covaleskie
Northern Michigan University

Alan Davis
University of Colorado, Denver

Sherman Dorn
University of South Florida

Mark E. Fetler
California Commission on Teacher Credentialing

Richard Garlikov
hmwkhelp@scott.net

Alison I. Griffith
York University

Ernest R. House
University of Colorado

Craig B. Howley
Appalachia Educational Laboratory

Daniel Kallós
Umeå University

Thomas Mauhs-Pugh
Green Mountain College

William McInerney
Purdue University

Les McLean
University of Toronto

Anne L. Pemberton
apembert@pen.k12.va.us

Richard C. Richardson
New York University

Dennis Sayers
California State University—Stanislaus

Michael Scriven
scriven@aol.com

Robert Stonehill
U.S. Department of Education

Thomas F. Green
Syracuse University

Arlen Gullickson
Western Michigan University

Aimee Howley
Ohio University

William Hunter
University of Calgary

Benjamin Levin
University of Manitoba

Dewayne Matthews
Education Commission of the States

Mary McKeown-Moak
MGT of America (Austin, TX)

Susan Bobbitt Nolen
University of Washington

Hugh G. Petrie
SUNY Buffalo

Anthony G. Rud Jr.
Purdue University

Jay D. Scribner
University of Texas at Austin

Robert E. Stake
University of Illinois—UC

David D. Williams
Brigham Young University

EPAA Spanish Language Editorial Board

Associate Editor for Spanish Language
Roberto Rodríguez Gómez
Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

roberto@servidor.unam.mx

Adrián Acosta (México)
Universidad de Guadalajara
adrianacosta@compuserve.com

Teresa Bracho (México)
Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económica-CIDE
bracho dis1.cide.mx

Ursula Casanova (U.S.A.)
Arizona State University
casanova@asu.edu

J. Félix Angulo Rasco (Spain)
Universidad de Cádiz
felix.angulo@uca.es

Alejandro Canales (México)
Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México
canalesa@servidor.unam.mx

José Contreras Domingo
Universitat de Barcelona
Jose.Contreras@doe.d5.ub.es

Erwin Epstein (U.S.A.)
Loyola University of Chicago
Eepstein@luc.edu

Rollin Kent (México)
Departamento de Investigación Educativa-DIE/CINVESTAV
rkent@gemtel.com.mx
kentr@data.net.mx

Javier Mendoza Rojas (México)
Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México
javiermr@servidor.unam.mx

Humberto Muñoz García (México)
Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México
humberto@servidor.unam.mx

Daniel Schugurensky (Argentina-Canadá)
OISE/UT, Canada
dschugurensky@oise.utoronto.ca

Jurjo Torres Santomé (Spain)
Universidad de A Coruña
jurjo@udc.es

Josué González (U.S.A.)
Arizona State University
josue@asu.edu

María Beatriz Luce (Brazil)
Universidad Federal de Rio Grande do Sul-UFRGS
lucemb@orion.ufrgs.br

Marcela Mollis (Argentina)
Universidad de Buenos Aires
mmollis@filo.uba.ar

Angel Ignacio Pérez Gómez (Spain)
Universidad de Málaga
aiperez@uma.es

Simon Schwartzman (Brazil)
Fundação Instituto Brasileiro e Geografia e Estatística
simon@openlink.com.br

Carlos Alberto Torres (U.S.A.)
University of California, Los Angeles
torres@gseisucla.edu