Andrews University

School of Education

A COMPETENT SCHOLAR:
A WORKING KNOWLEDGE OF ETHICS AND
PERSONAL/PROEFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

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Introduction

I grew up in the Seventh-day Adventist system with their values of what is right and what is wrong. It was during an era when we were basically told what to believe and what is right and wrong. Generally, as children and young adults any questioning of why or why not was strongly discouraged and even frowned upon by some. However, even though I grew up in a Seventh-day Adventist home, my parents raised me to ask questions and not just accept something because of who said it. They instilled in me a personal responsibility to make decisions for myself regarding what was right and wrong and not accept something just because a church leader said it. During my high school and some of my early college years, my tendency to ask questions about why and what if, got me into trouble more than once. I found this disheartening and frustrating. This experience is always in my mind and I try to be respectful of those who have a need to ask questions. Over the years, I have grown and developed my own personal ethics, which of course, affects my professional ethics. I share some details of this development in this paper. Below is an overview of my paper's contents.

In this paper, I discuss my knowledge base and application of ethics has led to my own ethical and personal/professional development. I share some details about my personal ethics and development ending the paper with how my personal development affects my workplace and a reflection summary.

Knowledge Base and Application

The Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics (Spano & Koenig, 2008), proposes a six-stage model that builds on existing literature and adds new elements for social work professionals. Although the model features social work professionals, I believe the model can be adapted to address educational professionals as well. The model includes the following stages (See **Table1**): (1) self-awareness, (2) self-refection, (3) understanding and applying the *Code of Ethics* within a professional knowledge base, (4) comparing personal worldviews with the Code, (5) ethical decision-making, and (6) professional ethical action. Understanding of the *Code of Ethics* and its professional knowledge base (See Stage 3) is central to competent and ethical practice. In the next paragraphs, I will discuss each stage, adapting and discussing how it applies to the personal and professional development of the Seventh-day Adventist educator.

Stage1: Self-awareness

Stage 1 focuses on the development of a clear understanding of the educator's personal worldview and the values that undergird that perspective. For Adventist educators, most of this has happened through their own educational process within the church. However, becoming more self-aware by further examining their own personal values could help to minimize conflicts among personal, societal, and professional values. This could be accomplished through personal ethical assessments using resources such as *Reflections on knowing oneself ethically: Toward a working framework for social work practice* (Abramson, 1996) or (Letendre, Nelson-Becker, & Kreider, 2005). Without the capacity to develop self-awareness of our values, no other steps can be taken to move toward competent ethical practice(Spano & Koenig, 2003).

Table 1: Model for Examining Personal Worldviews and the National Association of Social Workers *Code of Ethics*

Stages	Description
Stage 1: Self-awareness	Develop an awareness of one's personal worldview and the values that undergird that perspective
Stage 2: Self-reflection	Use self-reflection skills to examine the implications of and consequences of one's personal worldview on professional work
Stage 3: Understanding and applying the *Code of Ethics* within a professional knowledge base	Thoroughly examine the NASW *Code of Ethics* to understand its meaning, historically and currently, as the basis for defining values and principles like diversity, social justice, self-determination, respect for human dignity, and other core elements articulated in the profession's literature
Stage 4: Comparing personal worldview with professional Code	Engage in a process of examining discrepancies between the *Code of Ethics* and one's personal worldview
Stage 5: Professional Decision Making	Make decisions about what needs to be done to remain faithful to the *Code of Ethics* (Decisions in practice should never be made solely based on one's personal worldview.)
Stage 6: Professional Ethical Action	Take action and monitor conformity to the *Code of Ethics*

(Spano & Koenig, 2008)

Stage 2: Self-reflection

Education has not always emphasized self-reflection. In my personal experience, self-reflecting was not a formal part of my thinking until I began participating in teacher study groups as a teacher. There was more training on the technical aspects of teaching, rather than why we should teach a certain way (Goodlad, 1990). In the ethical development of teachers, both personal and professional, it is important to conduct regular self-reflection. An unexamined teaching career could lead to little more than a glorified babysitter where the teacher is stuck in a rut and no longer enjoying teaching (Lewis, 2011). A necessary part to becoming a successful

teacher includes conducting honest, on-going self-reflection as part of the personal and professional development (Moss, 1997).

Teachers who learn to reflect on and evaluate the effectiveness of their actions become more effective and self-regulated in the development of their personal and professional ethical practices (Moss, 1997). These kinds of reflection questions can lead to higher ethical practices for the benefit of the students. Where did I fail as a teacher in the past? Where did I succeed? What resentments do I need to resolve in order to move forward more optimistically and with a fresh mind? What types of students do I tend to ignore or do I need to spend more time serving? Do I bring additional stress upon myself? If so, how can I decrease or eliminate it? How have my beliefs about learning and pedagogy changed over the years (Lewis, 2011)?

In Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, reflection is a key element in the cycle of learning. The learner has an experience, reflects on the experience, (makes or draws) a conclusion, and then applies the new learning to a new experience with the cycle beginning all over again. We have applied this theory to the pupil in the classroom, but we have not done a particularly good job in applying it to the personal/professional training of teachers. When we begin to see the teacher as a learner, we can better understand the need for self-reflection to move teachers towards their full potential (Moss, 1997). This can lead to dialogue where teachers must ask themselves to self-reflect on the moral consequences of their choices based on their worldview, especially when those decisions conflict with the values of others or are not consistent with the *Code of Ethics* (Spano & Koenig, 2008; World Education Directors Consultation, 1997).

Stage 3: Understanding and applying the *Code of Ethics*

When applying this model to Seventh-day Adventist educators, I would take the approach of addressing the polemics of conflict between the pressure of teaching academic skills, such as reading, to all Pre-K and Kindergarten children and the "developmental philosophy" as outlined for Seventh-day Adventist Early Childhood education (Southern Union Conference, 2011). One can argue that parents have the right to demand that teachers provide their child with academic instruction. However, to suggest that Seventh-day Adventist educators conform to the will of such parents, opens the door to the deconstruction of the Seventh-day Adventist Education standard of helping the child to grow and develop according to what is developmentally appropriate for that child at the time (World Education Directors Consultation, 1997).

I would suggest that Stage 3 in this model, opens the door for an heightened awareness of possible existing discrepancies between themselves and the parents, their schools boards, local conference, or even themselves and the *Code of Ethics* (World Education Directors Consultation, 1997) with which they are expected to function. This naturally leads to Stage 4.

Stage 4: Comparing Personal Worldviews with the Code

In this stage, educators begin to engage in identifying discrepancies between the *Code of Ethics* and their personal worldviews. For example, Seventh-day Adventist Teachers are Christians of Law and Morality, so serving gay and lesbian clients, parents or single, pregnant women present challenges to their personal worldviews and run contrary to traditional understandings of sexuality and marriage. The Seventh-day Adventist *Code of Ethics* states that the educator "Affirm our belief in the dignity of all human beings and pledge fair treatment of all students" (World Education Directors Consultation, 1997, p. Item 2a). To develop and grow as ethical educators, teachers must wrestle with personal worldviews and their congruence with the

Code. When this wrestling can occur openly among teachers with their colleagues and administrative supervisors, personal worldviews can be discussed and weighed against the *Code (Moss, 1997).* I believe that when teachers can openly discuss and share with each other regarding their thinking such quandaries, they will be able to take greater personal responsibility in making ethical decisions in place of seeking solutions through the Education Office.

Stage 5: Ethical Decision-making

Seventh-day Adventist educators must make decisions about what needs to be done to be faithful to their professional ethical responsibilities. Decisions in teaching can never be made solely on the basis of the teacher's personal values. Instead, decisions must be made in a way that is consistent with the *Code of Ethics.* When personal values conflict with professional values, the *Code of Ethics*, as understood within the knowledge base of Seventh-day Adventist Educators, should take precedence (Moss, 1997). For Adventist educators to be faithful to their professional ethical obligations, they must be able to manage their personal disagreement with clients' worldviews without sacrificing the principles in the *Code of Ethics.*

Stage 6: Professional Ethical Action

Stage 6, the final stage, has to do with taking action and monitoring the results. First, the educator takes action to implement the ethical decision s/he has made. However, the educator's responsibility does not stop once the action is taken. Now, s/he must monitor the effects of that action on the individual, school board, or constituent members. Sometimes unforeseen consequences of the action may result in other ethical dilemmas or issues with far reaching implications. For example, a parent disapproves of celebrating Christmas. The teacher plans a church program in December, depicting the story of Jesus' birth, and one particular parent objects very adamantly. After establishing the reason for the objection, the appearance of a

Christmas celebration, not the actual program content itself, the teacher faces several dilemmas. The *Code of Ethics* requires that the teacher's action honor the dignity of all human beings and pledge fair treatment of all students (World Education Directors Consultation, 1997, p. Item 2a). The school program is a required activity for all students. How can the teacher be fair? How can the teacher honor the dignity of the objecting parent? How can the teacher excuse one child from participation, and no one else, and protect that child from treatment as odd to outright ridicule by the other students because of a differing belief?

Once the teacher makes a decision regarding the child and the school program, it becomes critical to monitor the results of the decision on the child, the parent, and possibly the whole school or church. What will happen if the parent removes the child from school? What is the teacher's obligation to the child? What is the obligation of the teacher to the parent? How does one know the difference between respecting the rights of parents to raise their children as they choose and child abuse?

A successful Seventh-day Adventist educator must respect the *Code of Ethics* and have skills that enable her/him to take professional action, which honors the *Code of Ethics*, even when they personally disagree with the choices made by others. They must learn to pay attention to unforeseen consequences that may develop from their decision and never desert the best interest of the child, even after the decision is in action.

Summary

In conclusion, I believe the model outlined by Spano & Koening (2008), has application for Seventh-day Adventist educators. Training for Seventh-day Educators in ethic development needs more intentionality for educators at the elementary level. I believe the model developed by Spano & Koenig (2008) can provide a good framework for facilitating this kind of training. This

model makes the *Code of Ethics* the primary document to set parameters within which educators must operate as they define their personal worldviews within the context of their professional roles. When addressing conflicts or dilemmas that arise between personal and professional values, the model encourages reliance on the *Code of Ethics* and provides a way to manage the complex process of ethical decision-making. Finally, the model emphasizes the importance of teaching ethical decision-making in teacher education programs and amplifies ethical decision-making as a central feature of ongoing professional development for practitioners (Spano & Koenig, 2008).

Application in the Workplace

When I began my career as an associate superintendent of education in the Seventh-day Adventist system, one of my concerns was how we treat teachers who are having difficulties in the system. When teachers are having repeated difficulties, it seems they fit into one of two categories. One category is the teacher who seems to have repeated problems that follow him/her from one school to another. The other category, though rare, is the teacher who does not honor the *Code of Conduct* (World Education Directors Consultation, 1997) and are a detriment to the students. Historically, these teachers were moved from one school or conference to another in hopes the problem would disappear. In my opinion, this approach has not worked very well. The problems do not go away and the distress and pain continues. This was unacceptable to me and I believe dishonored the *Code of Conduct*.

First, let me discuss the teacher who is a detriment to the safety of the students. Sometimes, it is easy to identify this teacher kind of teacher. The specific complaints contain content that raises safety and moral issues for the students. More often than not, the teacher blames others or circumstances for the behavior or interpretation of the behavior. An example

would be a teacher bringing a gun to school. When concern and fear is expressed to the supervisor, the teacher is confronted. The teacher explains that the gun is an antique, it does not work, and now it is at a gun shop and may have already been repaired. The gun had come to school as an artifact for history class. First, clue there is a problem in lack of ethical judgment of the teacher, both in bringing the gun to school and in not informing parents and supervisor or asking their feelings before bringing the gun to school. Second, the teacher's inability to provide evidence of the nature of the gun causes additional concern. Teachers whose judgment is thus impaired, cannot provide a safe environment for student learning and, in fact, may be a danger to their students either physically or emotionally.

I have sat in personal meetings where adults debated back and forth what to do about the teacher. I listened to them discuss the teacher, how to help the teacher, and how the adults in the church were reacting. There was little focus on the implications for the students. In fact, since it was a student that had brought the issue to our attention, and the student was not entirely credible, there seemed a tendency to disregard the student's input altogether. When they raised the question of where to draw the line when both child and adult behavior is in question, I had to speak up. I believe you always draw the line in favor of the child. When these kinds of things happen, one cannot be sure the students are safe. Those teachers should never return to the classroom, regardless of what others say. Our first responsibility is to the children, their welfare, and their safety. Teachers who fall in a category of behavior that might possibly jeopardize the students' safety should be immediately removed from the classroom. However, the work with the teacher does not end there. I also believe that as Seventh-day Adventist employers, we have an ethical obligation to offer that teacher professional counseling and career guidance in an effort to help her/him find an occupation that better fits their talents. Allowing them to continue the

behavior by moving them elsewhere is endangering the students. Secondly, it does the new employer a disfavor, and is ultimately unfair to the teacher who repeats the same types of experiences again. The ethical decision to remove the teacher may seem clear and even simple. However, putting that decision into action can be very challenging and involve several issues. First, finding a new teacher for the local school can be difficult, depending on the time of year, and the new teacher can find local acceptance challenging, especially if the dismissed teacher had a charismatic personality with "followers" and has not moved away from the geographical area. Secondly, the dismissed teacher may or may not be receptive to any help or guidance in resolving the conflict and moving his/her life in a more productive direction. Personal introspection can be painful and there is the tendency to blame others instead of accepting personal responsibility for the results. As an employer I, too, have to be certain that my motive in dealing with the dismissed teacher is focused on valuing that person enough to help him/her move towards a better fit for their life work. The extent of how much influence I can have depends on my own ability to lay aside the personal anger of what happened in the classroom to jeopardize the students, and the teacher's ability to hear what I have to say. It may be that all I can do is agitate the thinking about new possibilities. If so, I hope this will move him/her towards others who will influence him/her favorably in their search for a more successful and fulfilling career.

Another category of teachers with professional challenges is the teacher who seems to have repeated problems that arise year after year or follow them from one school to another. I call them struggling teachers. I believe these are the teachers I can help the most as a supervisor. In competency 3a, I propose a model for reallocating the resource of supervisor time with teachers. One of the categories referred to in this model is the struggling teacher. In competency

6a, *a working knowledge of ethics and personal/professional development*, I am referring to the same struggling teachers. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss ethical issues involved in dealing with the struggling teacher.

Presently, I find no official document for a *Code of Conduct* for Seventh-day Adventist Administrators. In the *Journal of Adventist Education* Melgosa (2004) discusses the need to craft a code of ethics that deals adequately with the issues and satisfies the majority of employees and constituents for Seventh-day Adventist education administrators. He presents a list of eight tentative principles to consider. These principles are integrity, professional competence, respect, conflict of interest, confidentiality, transparency, justice (fairness), and truthfulness. Briefly, integrity "means that one's beliefs and behavior adhere to a code of ethics and are acted upon consistently" (p.43). Professional competence "refers to the duty of educational administrators to improve their own personal and professional competence and that of those under their care" (p.43). Respect "requires that educational administrators recognize the dignity of subordinates and colleagues, as well as their own" (p. 44). Conflict of interest "occurs when the administrator's private actions and interests are, or appear to be, incompatible with his or her professional obligation to the school" (p.44). Confidentiality includes "personal data on individuals (i.e., students, colleagues, church leaders) should not be shared with anyone without the specific authorization of the individual involved (or parent/guardian if a minor)" (p.44). "Transparency refers to the use of administrative policies and procedures known to colleagues and open for inspection by constituents" (p.45). Justice or fairness "ensures equal opportunity for those under the care of the educational administrator" (p.45). Finally, "truthfulness refers to the administrator's commitment to tell the truth and to scrupulously avoid deception, especially in cases where such behavior produces benefits for the individual and his or her friends" (p.45).

These eight basic principles have been a good place for me to start with ethical applications in dealing with teachers.

As an administrator, I have had to deal with many ethical challenges in working with teachers, parents, and school boards. I have built trust by a establishing a level of personal integrity through a steadfast adherence to moral or ethical behaviors (Farlex, 2011). I do what I say I will do. Part of my personal ethics believes that I should never ask a teacher to do something that I am not willing to learn or do myself, therefore, I receive the same training I ask them to take. Then I put that learning to practice. An example is Cooperative Learning. I ask the teachers to use Cooperative Learning in their classrooms. Therefore, I use the Cooperative Learning method when I have meetings with the teachers. I try to model strategies I want them to use in their classrooms. This helps to establish professional competence with the teachers.

Everyone, no matter who they are, deserves respect and value. I always listen with care to those who come with concerns. I make sure they feel understood by rephrasing what I hear them saying until they indicate that I understand. Whether I agree with their point of view is not important. Communicating your respect for them and making a sincere effort to understand what they are saying is what is important. This shows respect and value for the person.

Holding confidentiality is also critical in showing respect and value of others. I believe it is more than just keeping in confidence information you are asked not to divulge. It also involves not telling things you discover when they add not value, contribute damage, or make someone else look bad unnecessarily.

Transparency, truthfulness, and justice can provide their own particular challenges. How do you demonstrate all three of these qualities when a school board demands to interview a teacher that you will not interview because of the teacher's personal weaknesses? It can be very

tricky to be transparent and honest with that school board and still honor the private information regarding the teacher that you cannot professionally share with that board? How does one be fair to both sides?

I encountered a situation like that some time ago. The school board found a teacher they thought they wanted. In a board meeting, they demanded that I bring this particular teacher in for an interview. They were sure this teacher was exactly what they wanted. I was thoroughly acquainted with both the school situation and the teacher. I knew this would not be a good match for the school or the teacher. Both the teacher and the school had inflated ideas about what the teacher could accomplish. So how do I deal with the board openly and yet protect the teacher's reputation?

This is when I realized how important it is to have established respect and value before a difficulty can arise. Months before, when I first started with that particular school board, we had to work through the removal of a principal. At my first board meeting, the school board confronted me with their distress regarding the recommendation of my office and wanted to know why he was recommended for the job. I was new, the previous administrator was gone, and now I was being blamed for the decision. They had, in fact demanded that this particular principal be interviewed, when my office really did not recommend it. As the intensity of the discussion grew, an opportunity opened for me to refocus their attention to what they could expect from me. I apologized on behalf of my office, helped them take responsibility in the decision, and then made a solemn promise to them that I would never bring a candidate to them for an interview that I could not professionally recommend for their school. Somehow, the discussion had been open enough, they felt understood and heard, and my promise provided

them with the satisfaction they could depend on. Little did I know how helpful this would prove to be in the very near future.

Now, this same board was demanding an interview the same as they had done in the past. I listened respectfully to their request for this teacher. They ended their speech with the comment that this teacher was just what they wanted. After a few seconds of silence in which they were all looking at me expectantly, I said, "Do you remember my promise that I would not bring anyone to an interview I could not professionally recommend for the position? I know you feel you have found the right person, but I disagree and to keep my promise, I will not bring this person for an interview." Someone asked why, and I responded by saying that it was not a good match. I really expected them to argue a bit with me, but instead, they completely respected and accepted my statement. We moved on to the business of looking for someone else and that teacher request never came up again. I was so thankful I had been able to establish a level of trust with that board that enabled this to happen.

Reflection Summary

Something that stands out in my mind is a lesson I learned early in my office experience. Sometimes you have to take personal risk to protect others in an ethical decision. Sometimes policy can cause possible harm in certain situations. For example, policy dictates that a full investigation takes place when an employee complains of a sexual harassment. However, the employee shares with you in confidence that a fellow teacher makes him/her uncomfortable with a particular behavior and asks to be moved to a new group. The teacher further explains that because of his/her own background of being abused, they realize this may well be only a perception on their part and does not want the person confronted. In fact, if the person is confronted, the whole abuse issues come up all over again and it could ruin a career. I consider

both the uncomfortable teacher and the teacher causing the discomfort. There is no background for such behavior and the teacher has many years of successful behavior. The distressed teacher emphatically states that this is not an accusation of inappropriate behavior. An investigation would likely ruin the career and life work for the teacher who is not aware of what is happening. Carefully decisions must be made in a situation like this. How do you protect both, the previously abused, and the possibly and probably innocent? If you follow the policy, both parties can be hurt. If you don't follow the policy, both parties can be hurt. If you do not take action, your company can later be sued. How do you know when to move forward and when to just deal quietly with the one complaining? Situations like this call for careful and discrete judgment. One must rely on the wisdom of God in situations like this.

    In summary, applying and establishing ethical principles are extremely important for an effective leader. The amount of influence I have as a leader is based on how much those I lead respect and trust me. Consistency of behavior provides patterns that others come to understand and expect and lays the foundation for ethical practices both personally and professionally.

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