Proposal
Values and Ethics in the Decision-Making of Rural Manitoba School Principals

By Chris Hicks

This study examines the extent to which the espoused values and moral and ethical principles of school administrators are reflected in their practice. There is a large body of research in the areas of moral and ethical leadership and of values-based administration (Begley, 1996, 2004; Hodgkinson, 1975, 1991; Samier, 2003; Starratt, 1991, 1994). There are also varied views within this research in the context of morality and the human condition (Foster, 2004; Norberg, 2003; Sergiovanni, 1992). Discussions of ethics and morality and their relationship to leadership date back to the Western tradition of Aristotle and figure prominently in any commentary related to human behaviour, development and interaction.

The present study is framed around the possibility of seeing school administration and leadership ultimately as a moral practice, one that reveals the “humanistic and critical development of the art of administration” (Foster, 1986, p. 17) instead of, though perhaps related to, the science of administration. To do this, attention is given primarily to Western philosophical approaches to human understanding and their relationship to the development of morality and values, along with contemporary understandings that offer a critique of the Western philosophical traditions that have dominated the conversation around ethical administrative practice. The hope is that by doing so there is a reflection of the person in the role of administrator whose influence on the school community in which he/she works is somehow manifested as a consequence of his/her own values base, though affected by the social context in which s/he works.

The social context of this research will concentrate on leadership experiences in rural Manitoba. There are three reasons for this. The first is simply that this is my experience both as a citizen and administrator in rural Manitoba, and therefore I feel that I have some understanding of the values inherent in the nature of leadership within this social context. The second is to add to the scholarship in the area of ethical practice based specifically in rural contexts, as this is an under-developed area of scholarship. The third reason I wish to consider this avenue of research is of a
practical nature; I wish to consider the extent to which recent rural education initiatives can be connected to a leadership approach grounded in the Western philosophical work on values and ethics but informed by a healthy critique found in contemporary ideologies.

Given these ideas, therefore, the purpose of my research will be to 1) examine the extent to which ethical considerations in school leadership can be articulated overtly by school administrators, and 2) examine if recent rural education initiatives can be connected to a leadership approach that is values-based and ethically situated within the unique social context of “rurality” or “place”.

At the time of this writing the formal data-gathering process has only just been given approval from ENREB. By the time of the symposium, however, I have every confidence that the data will be available and integrated into my paper.