Using media as the basis for a social issues approach to promoting moral literacy in university teaching

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Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this research is to explore the use of media as the basis for a social issues approach to promoting moral literacy and effective teaching in educational leadership programs.

Design/methodology/approach – Through a review of relevant literature, mass media sources, and observations, the authors use Starratt’s framework of moral responsibility to identify ethical practice in response to dilemmas brought on by local, regional, national and international crises and conflicts. Regional, national and international crises and conflicts are regularly reported on the Internet, as well as in the local, regional, national and international media (e.g., Time, Macleans, Michigan Citizen, The Washington Post, Education Week, The Boston Globe, National Geographic).

Findings – The use of mass media venues, when compounded with moral grounding better equips educational leaders to act with ethical orientations. Professional organizations should encourage and support leaders who engage in public citizenship activities – answering critical questions, brokering views, encouraging discussion, and serving as resources.

Originality/value – Issues concerning the ethical usage of mass media are complex, often unique, and ought to be an integral component of teaching in formal educational leadership experience. Consequently, the authors advocate the use of the media in university teaching as the basis for a social issues approach to promote morally literate graduates in university educational leadership programs. Actual examples of reactions about the use of media from a class of graduate students enrolled in an ethics class and educational leadership are included.

Keywords Information media, Universities, Teaching, Ethics, Leadership

Introduction
On August 23, 2006, ABC News Special Report “20/20” televised a rather sensationalized broadcast for what turned out to be a scientifically valid two-hour program titled “Last Days on Earth”. Heart-stopping computer graphics filled the gaps as scientists explained how human beings will perish in mountains of ash or mile-high tsunamis, or perhaps “be fried, radiated or smashed by asteroids” (Ostrow, 2006, ¶ 7). Scientists painted seven real-life doomsday scenarios that could wipe out humanity: a gamma ray burst or black hole; runaway artificial intelligence; a super volcano that’s overdue (including one in Yellowstone National Park); the impact of an asteroid; an
explosion caused by nuclear weapons; bioterrorism or modern day plague (i.e. Avian Flu); and global warming. Such cosmic calamities, terrestrial terrors and microscopic organisms, most over which we have no control, cause human beings to ponder about life as we know it while encouraging us to reflect on the meaning and purpose of what we do, as well as our moral responsibilities as citizens on the global stage.

One year earlier, August 26, 2005, Hurricane Katrina rolled over South Florida in the USA, blasting north across the Gulf of Mexico, while whipping up a wall of water that surged toward the city of New Orleans. The catastrophe everyone expected but nobody prepared for struck at daybreak, sacking the Gulf Coast and creating a national tragedy. Human tragedy recognizes no borders. A tsunami in Indonesia, an earthquake in India, a monster hurricane in Louisiana – nothing connects people so easily as the experience of loss. According to Johns et al. (2005, p. 1), “Katrina was more than just a wild card of nature. It was a natural tragedy compounded by an unnatural one: the grim consequence of man’s attempt to control geography”.

Crises such as these are crises of mind, which makes them important leverage points for those institutions that purport to improve minds. Failure to capitalize on these opportunities is a crisis of education, not merely one in education (Orr, 2004). Ultimately, such crises concern how we think, and the institutions that purport to shape and refine the capacity to think. Lee-Boggs (2007, ¶8) reported in the Michigan Citizen that much that has gone wrong with the world is the result of the process and substance of education at all levels, which “alienates us from life in the name of human domination, fragments instead of unifies, overemphasizes success and careers, separates feeling from intellect and the practical from the theoretical, and unleashes on the world minds ignorant of their own ignorance”. As professional educators, it is our duty to engage students in meaningful and critical discourse that focuses on moral literacy in times of catastrophes, crises and conflicts – whether such a discourse focuses on ecological, political, economic, cultural or social issues. In doing this we harness the energies and imaginations of our students in the reconstruction of life in our neighborhoods and communities.

Students currently worry about how to make a living before they know who they are, take classes to acquire the skills and knowledge that will enable the USA to compete on the world market, and “end up as morally sterile technicians and more know-how than know-why” (Lee-Boggs, 2007 ¶9).

Many educational leaders are motivated by a sense of duty to leave the world a better place than it was before they arrived. An internal moral compass directs them to take on tasks, assume styles, and behaviors commensurate with their beliefs regarding right and wrong, virtue and vice, and social responsibility. Much as a ship must have a compass and rudder to reach its destination on a stormy sea, an educator must likewise be guided by personal, thoughtful, considered action to attain personal and organizational goals (Begley et al., 2006; Brooks and Normore, 2005) Leadership in any endeavor is a moral task, but even more so for educational leaders. While educational leaders are responsible for the success of their particular institution, their work also impacts other institutions both now and in the future, for those who are taught are the future leaders of tomorrow. According to Berreth and Berman (1997), adults need to demonstrate by role-modeling to youth that it is possible to live one’s values and advocate for a more just and responsible society. Educational leaders must constantly monitor and reflect upon their actions as they speak volumes about the values these
leaders support. Proactive stands taken by educational leaders are commentaries on how things should be done – the definition of moral action – viewed by everyone, especially students.

In times of crises and conflicts, however, educational leaders may feel events have seized them rather than the other way around (Paul-Doscher and Normore, 2006). The initial shock and ongoing trauma of national and international crises such as the September 11 terrorist attacks in the USA, Hurricane Katrina on the Gulf of Mexico, the war in Iraq, the challenge of North Korea, domestic spying, the crisis in Kandahar, the crisis of global ecology, the world’s deadliest war in the Congo, and the challenge of illegal immigrants, can stimulate an emotional fight-flight response that impedes rational problem solving (Franklin, 2002). Crises such as these beset educational leaders with personal as well as professional ethical dilemmas concerning civic education vs. patriotism, equality vs. equity, and civil rights vs. national security. In a decision-making climate prescribed by reactive choices, educational leaders may naturally question whether they can take a proactive stance as moral agents and responsibly lead for change in schools when faced with daunting, local, national, and global moral and ethical predicaments that seem to defy resolution by international agencies.

The dichotomous purpose of this article is to:

- present ideas and concepts focused around Starratt’s notion of responsible leadership (Starratt, 2005); and
- show how the use of media can stimulate discourse around social, cultural, economic, and political issues.

The emotional “ups and downs” generated by the media can provide a grand array of opportunities and teachable moments that university educators can employ to empower students to become responsible, moral, and transformational leaders. Regional, national, and international social issues are regularly reported on the Internet, in the local, regional, and international media (e.g., *Time*, *Macleans*, *Michigan Citizen*, *The Washington Post*, *Education Week*, *The Boston Globe*, *National Geographic*). These issues are complex and often unique, defying quick moral interpretations. Consequently, the argument is made that moral literacy ought to be a component of the formal educational leadership experience in university teaching and learning. We propose the use of Starratt’s (2005) five “domains” (i.e. clusters of ethical issues around common themes found in the work of educational leaders) of moral responsibility as a basis for identifying ethical practice in response to dilemmas brought on by local, regional, national, and international crises and conflicts as highlighted in the mass media. We contend that Starratt’s framework represents a process that can be integrated into teaching and learning experiences for aspiring and practicing school leaders when responding to controversial issues through the use of moral and transformational means of problem solving. His framework includes:

- responsibility as a human being;
- responsibility as a citizen and public servant;
- responsibility as an educator;
- responsibility as an educational administrator; and
- responsibility as an educational leader.
We argue that use of this multi-perspective approach to analyzing and interpreting social events builds amity, harmony, and trust among stakeholders, positioning leaders to make risky, yet transformational and ethically responsible decisions for the benefit of a morally literate school community and the world at large (Paul Doscher and Normore, 2006).

Media and moral literacy

The media ordinarily engage in language practices that legitimize or alternately criticize existing structures of power. But, moral literacy requires the consideration of alternative discourses and subversive texts that present counterpoints to an unexamined or dominant consensus (Christians, 2003, p. 8). Christians contends that “on those invigorating occasions when the moral contours of the taken-for-granted world are illuminated, the news media enhance our social dialogue”. Such dialogue can help penetrate through the political and economic surface to the moral dynamics underneath. Rather than merely providing readers and audiences with information, the press’ aim is, or ought to be, the development of morally literate citizens (Christians et al., 1993).

News values

Good news, or newsworthiness, is often determined by journalists through the application of criteria known as news values (Bell, 1998) when assessing the newsworthiness of an event. The criteria include: conflict, progress (or achievement), disaster, consequence, (the effect of an event on an individual or community), prominence, novelty, and human interest (Bell, 1998). Newsworthy opportunities to promote moral literacy are available on a regular basis in the media. As mentioned earlier, in 2005-2006 alone, world news headlines included: the war in Iraq, acts of terrorism, Hurricane Katrina, corporate greed, racial profiling, Darfur, immigration, Kandahar, Congo War, crisis of global ecology, tyrannical leaders of the Caribbean, stem-cell research, and sex scandals involving political and religious leaders. For those who do not read newspapers or news magazines, awareness develops through tuning in to television and radio broadcasts where newscasters deliver the same reports. Rarely, however, do such social issues become integral components of the curriculum of university courses prescribed for leadership development, preparation, and training programs. Yet, as individuals, professional educators (i.e. educational leaders, educational administrators), and public servants, our University students will need to make numerous moral decisions throughout their lives – often based on exposure to media texts in which students can theorize, engage in news discourse, and grapple with their own personal and professional codes of ethics. According to Fairclough (1995), cited in Thomas, (2006, p. 49):

... theorization of news as discourse highlights the discursive nature of media power and its influence on knowledge, beliefs, values, social relations and social identities through its particular ways of representing the world, its particular constructions of social identities and its particular constructions of social relations.

Exposure to media representation, discourse about the dominant hegemony, and dealing with moral relativism as it pertains to social, cultural, economic, and political issues become essential for morally literate citizenship. As asserted by Tuana (2003,
"what stronger argument is there for making moral literacy a component of our formal educational experience?"

Research on media representations (e.g., Lewis, 1991; McRae, 1992) provides comment on the media coverage directed at various social, cultural and political issues. Texts, film, television and books have focus on analyses of public debates during political campaigns, assessment processes of schools and education policies, and social and cultural issues (Shapiro, 1989; Smith, 1999; Taylor, 1997). Thomsen (1993), indicate that media coverage have depicted schools in the USA in a negative light and thus contributed to falling levels of public confidence in American schools. Other studies have reported that the medium of film, newspapers and magazines for example influences popular beliefs about current affairs (Giroux, 2002). For example, Hewton (1990), cited in Thomas, 2006) conducted a study that investigated the content, effect, and intent, or influence, of Brisbane newspaper reports on the issues of entrance to tertiary education. A strong correlation between content of press items and public opinion was found, together with evidence of agenda setting involving the selection and omission of items and preferential media access to public elites. As such, it reflects the emphasis on news found in much of the work on media discourse and questions the ability of journalists and news reporters to adequately inform the public and policy-makers on national and global issues (Afflerbach and Moni, 1994).

Research informed by the work of Gramsci (cited in Hall, 1985, pp. 49, 33) shared a theory of news “as a social construction that is ideological in that it is subject to contestation” and asserted that “media knowledge as communication is always a form of social practice…as social practice or interaction, media knowledges carry selective ideological investments and interests” (Thomas, 2006, p. 34) Other researchers (Hall et al., 1978) have asserted that the press constructs a hegemonic consensus within a framework given by primary definers. Thomas identified primary definers as “the powerful and the privileged of society who are seen by the press to be legitimate spokespersons for society…depicting reported crises as a symbol of moral decay…the work ethic and moral order”. Overall, Thomas emphasized the ideological dominance to the process of hegemonic struggle – a struggle in which the media work to give hegemonic consent to the maintenance of existing political, social, and economic arrangements.

Minimalist values
Since public life in democracy is interwoven by social values, opportunities to engage in moral interpretations enable the public to come to grips with the common good. Thus, the various technologies of public communication (i.e. print, television, radio) ought to engender moral literacy. Using the print media as an integral part of the educational leadership experience, for example, can stimulate the moral imagination and help produce morally literate citizens. Moral duty is nurtured by the demands of social linkage and thus the core of a society’s common morality. Children, for example, ascertain that in general, certain things belong to certain people and in the process recognize a moral fact about social relations (see Outka and Reeder, 1993, p. 93). Children learn tolerance too – at least that physical assault is forbidden – though perhaps not sophisticated versions of tolerating various opinions. Bok (1995, pp. 18-19, 41) calls these “minimalist values”, that is, a limited set of fundamental moral commitments that are necessary for collective survival. The minimalist values “most
easily recognized across societal boundaries” are the “positive duties of care and reciprocity; constraints on violence, deceit and betrayal; and norms for procedures and standards of justice”. Without a broad acceptance of such common values, or what appears to be an affinity for them, a viable democratic order is impossible and moral literacy becomes far-reaching.

Moral literacy
Moral literacy ensures that students are knowledgeable, hold moral virtues, and develop skills for moral reasoning. To become moral agents, students must be taught the importance of assuming responsibility to be informed before making moral judgments. Tuana (2003, ¶ 8) asserts that social imperatives must be taken into account. She argues, for example, that “the news media ... in striving to provide interesting sound bites about human cloning has often been ethically irresponsible in failing to adequately explain the science of cloning” and “politicians debating cloning legislation often do not acknowledge the full range of scientific options that are available”. However, Marginson (1987, p. 16) asserted that “media is there for educators to understand and use, to use more effectively than we have done up to now”. Media knowledge as communication is always a form of social practice (Giroux, 2002).

While some cultures do not seem to have the same definitions of “fairness” or “respect” (e.g., in fundamentalist Islamic cultures as compared to European definitions, or adhering to the Geneva conventions as guidelines for “civilized war”), other moral virtues are shared across many cultures. These include honesty, fairness, respect, responsibility, and caring (Christians, 1995, 2003; Tuana, 2003). As Tuana (¶ 8) states, “Our sense of ourselves, as well as what others think of us, often rests on the extent to which we live up to these virtues”. Consequently, developing skills for moral reasoning is necessary, whereby we develop the skills and dispositions to identify the critical values at play in moral situations. Skills such as open-mindedness, careful listening to others’ views, considering ethical implications of decisions, learning how to evaluate strengths and weakness of our own and others’ positions, and taking responsibility for our actions and beliefs have been articulated by Tuana. By engaging school leaders – aspiring and practicing – in such a discourse analysis, these leaders can harness understanding of responsible leadership and learn the reflective practices that can filter throughout school system and connect to local, national, and global awareness (Kohn, 1997; Malley, 2005; Tuana, 2003; Widdowson, 1995)?

Responsible leadership
Whether identifying geographic locations, discussing political ideology, culture, or day-to-day life, most American students do not know how people in other countries live. This is a critical disadvantage to students who will be joining a job market heavily influenced by international economics and politics. In order to show how university teaching and learning opportunities promote moral literacy, we cite examples of how medium items can be successfully used inside the categories of Starratt’s responsible leadership framework. These examples are drawn from a class of graduate students enrolled in an ethics and educational leadership class.

Responsible leadership creates opportunities to teach students global awareness. In schools and colleges of education, students must find opportunities to take on roles of different cultures and walk in another person’s shoes. These opportunities can be
developed from actual recent news events and firsthand experiences. Several examples in the media that provided such opportunities in a graduate level class about ethics and educational leadership include recent media reports released by *Time* and *Macleans*: “Congo: The hidden toll of the world’s deadliest war” (Robinson and Walt, 2006); “The truth about stem-cells: The hope, the hype and what it means for you” (Gibbs, 2006); “Who gets to be American?: Inside the immigration debate that is dividing the nation” (Tumulty, 2006); “Inside America’s secret workforce: A surprising look at the real people behind the debate over illegal immigration” (Thornburgh, 2006); “How ‘Brokeback Mountain’ broke out” (Corliss, 2006); and “It happened here – Yes, Canada had slaves too – for 200 years...one who fought for her freedom and burned down the central core of Montreal” (Bethune, 2006c). Students’ reactions were informed by a conception of these media headlines as discourse, that is, as social practices that represented social realities in specific ways that helped them to construct particular social positions.

In a 2005 speech given in Seattle for the National Association for Independent Schools, Fareed Zakaria, Editor of *Newsweek*, indicated that schools have a responsibility to equip students to live in the global community. According to MindWare Publishing (2006, ¶ 3) a Seattle-based developer of creative training solutions to help educational institutions teach students global awareness about the social, political, and cultural issues facing people, Zakaria stated:

> The most important thing that schools can do is to make people aware that understanding the world is very much part of the requirement of being an educated person... If you look at what’s happening in India, China and Brazil, you are seeing the rise of a new world, where these countries see themselves as equals... But we’re a country where very few people... know much about the world.

Schools with an established culture of cross-curricular connections and considered academic discourse have been able to successfully subsume current events into regular curriculum content (Diem, 2002). For example, school leaders who had taken a proactive approach to students’ social and emotional learning prior to the September 11 crisis were found to be better prepared to assist children in coping and returning to business as usual than those who did not (Lantieri, 2002).

To return to the five domains of ethical responsibility outlined by Starratt (2005), educational leaders have a duty to gather school resources, structures, and processes in support of this kind of constructivist teaching and learning. Starratt poses a framework to assist educational leaders in fulfilling this obligation, identifying five domains of ethical responsibility. He encourages leaders to investigate issues from multiple perspectives, identify best practices, and confront ethical concerns through a scaffold moral approach. Together the domains represent an integrated moral system; the implementation of each successive domain incorporates those previous and encourages broader and deeper reflection-in-action. Starratt’s framework invites leaders to move beyond transactional ethical decision making into the realm of transformational leadership practice. Analysis of the application of each domain to particularly complex educational dilemmas – those resulting from recent national and international crises and conflicts as highlighted in the media – reveals the constructive potential of Starratt’s framework when using media as a social issues approach to promoting moral literacy in university teaching.
Responsibility as a human being

Starratt (2005, p. 125) writes that in this domain “an educational leader considers the humanly ethical thing to do, taking into account the intrinsic dignity and inviolability of the other person”. Morality is based on respect, compassion, and dignity. Starratt concludes that people must act with delicacy and diplomacy towards one another, for a denial of respect and dignity is a denial of others’ humanity – an ethical violation.

Intrinsic to this domain is the ethic of care in which practitioners grapple with issues of loyalty and trust (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2005). In the days following the September 11 attacks and the instigation of the war in Iraq, pundits and educators alike recommended stepped-up curricular attention to international education (Argetsinger and Strauss, 2002; Casey, 2003; Levy, 2002; Rose, 2002; Sanders and Stewart, 2004). More recently, headlines in the media such as Time’s: “Inside the investigation of whether the death of a US marine triggered the killing of 24 Iraqis – and a military cover-up” (Duffy et al. 2006); “How afraid: The foiled plane-bombing plot forces us to ask again – how much risk are we willing to live with” (Ripley, 2006); “Enemies of freedom: China, Muslim Brotherhood . . . and Tony Blair?” (Editors of Macleans, 2006), and “The end of cowboy diplomacy: what North Korea, Iraq, and Iran teaches us about the limits of going alone” (Allan and Ratnesar, 2006), have been cause for discourse on the ethical responsibilities of human beings. Although some called for a Cold War know-the-enemy approach (Artgetsinger and Strauss, 2002; Berkowitz and McFaul, 2005), others pled for compassionate understanding to combat stereotyping and increase tolerance and respect for diversity (Casey, 2003; Rose, 2002). Multiculturalists perceived the controversies associated with September 11 and the Iraq War as teachable moments for peace and opportunities to break down the distrust, fear, ignorance, and misunderstandings that had engendered such crises. Similar to what Fairclough (1995) suggested, graduate students in the same ethics class engaged in group discussions about theorizing “news” as discourse when presented with these media headline. These students highlighted the discursive nature of media power and its influence on knowledge, beliefs, values, social relations, and social identities through particular ways of representing the world, its particular constructions of social identities and its particular constructions of social relations.

This position is not without its critics. Diane Ravitch and Chester Finn, among others, take issue with what they term a blame America approach (Finn, 2003; Ravitch, 2001, p. 1). Ravitch disagrees with those who would have children believe they were responsible for the September 11 attacks due to their own intolerance, countering, “of course, we must teach tolerance, but we must not teach children to tolerate those who hijack commercial jetliners and kill innocent victims”. On the dangers of multiculturalism, Ravitch (2001) cites the late Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, who thought it detrimental to a democratic, multi-ethnic society for citizens to think of themselves in terms of group membership. When reacting to the dangers of multiculturalism, students saw multicultural education as fanning the flames of ethnic tensions rather than focusing attention on the common good. For his part, Finn (2003, p. 7) decries multiculturalism as “dubious instructional counsel” that encourages widespread “disregard for patriotism and democratic institutions, non-judgmentalism toward those who would destroy them, and failure to teach about heroism and courage of those who defend them”. Students supported Ravitch and Finn who call for a renewed focus on world history, geography,
and civics rather than world views. They suggest balance in the curriculum would be best achieved by teaching about “heroes and villains, freedom and repression, hatred and nobility, democracy and theocracy, civic virtue and vice” (Finn, p. 9).

Proponents of the two sides of this debate over multicultural education do agree on one point: Americans suffer from an international knowledge gap which schools bear a distinct responsibility to close (Finn, 2003; Sanders and Stewart, 2004). Most news and opinion sources do not provide relevant geographic and historic information necessary to properly analyze current events (Brecht and Rivers, 2002; Brown, 2002; Finn, 2003; Hines, 2003; Rose, 2002). Still, as aspiring and practicing educational leaders, students generally felt that they must make a moral choice regarding what to teach their students about others during times of armed conflict and upon whom should leaders confer their loyalty and trust – those who admonish them to fearlessly destroy stereotypes or those who boldly urge them to label evil?

Starratt urges leaders who want to rise to the level of moral agents to steer clear of both polarized positions. According to Starratt’s concept of human responsibility, leaders should exercise the ethic of care not so much on the subject of study but upon its object, the free flow of objective, constructive information between and among teachers and students. The first responsibility of school leaders is to bridge the knowledge gap that exists within their schools. They felt the need to cultivate respect for the dignity of learning and analysis; they cannot do so if they have adopted a predisposition towards the interpretation of knowledge or its wider political purpose. Educators are responsible to maintain objectivity, neutrality, and independence regarding teaching and learning. Impartiality enables delicacy and diplomacy in the treatment of controversial topics. Human beings’ tendency towards cultural relativism makes learning to understand one another a controversial act; educators are positively responsible to maximize students’ clarity of thought and mitigate distortion caused by personal biases (Paul-Dosher and Normore, 2006).

Responsibility as a citizen and public servant
In this domain, Starratt (2005) obliges educational leaders to respect the rights of other citizens and the public order. Moral leaders’ ethic of citizenship leads them to work primarily for the common good; as public servants, they provide valuable services to the community. Starratt sees educational leaders as the state-in-action. Their responsibility is to enhance the scope and functioning of democracy while upholding the law and maintaining the public trust. Civil liberties are often the subject of controversy in times of national crisis and conflict. A teacher who had compared the foreign policy speeches of George Bush to those of Adolph Hitler was recently reinstated to an Aurora, Colorado high school after being placed on leave for his classroom remarks (Rouse et al., 2006). A little known provision of the No Child Left Behind Act, requiring all public high schools to provide military recruiters unhindered access to student information pending loss of federal aid, has been challenged by those advocating students’ right to privacy (Goodman, 2004).

Recent events have also placed educators in the crossfire between the competing needs of the community vs. the nation. For example, three recent media headlines highlighted the catastrophic outcomes of Hurricane Katrina: “Katrina: Why it became a man-made disaster and where it could happen next” (Editors, National Geographic, 2005); “The next big one, the human – the American –reluctance to plan for disaster:
Floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, wildfires, earthquakes, why we don’t prepare” (Times, Ripley, 2006); and, “Desperate optimism: 100,000 residents – one fifth of the pre-flood population – have returned to New Orleans... and find desolation and hope among the ruins” (Boydon, 2006). All three headlines reignited the debate over poverty and equity and moral responsibility. The reports provided an opportunity for graduate students to engage in discussion about the responsibility of an educational leader as a citizen and a public servant. Students reacted to the headlines by commenting on a recent plan posed by a conservative USA Congressman to pay for the anticipated $263 billion bill to restore the Gulf Coast includes cuts to Medicaid and food stamps and economy-spurring tax cuts for the wealthy, thus equally distributing the costs to the nation’s senior citizens (who are often on the edge of poverty) and the nation’s wealthy citizens. A response engendered by students about their roles as citizens of the United States focused on the Gulf Coast region’s public schools. They felt that public schools, segregated more than ever by race and class, are required to compete for scanty federal and local funds with burgeoning private and charter school programs. One student made reference to Robert Greenstein, director of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. According to Hardy (2006, pp. 29-30), Greenstein stated “We’ve gone from a situation in which we might have a long-overdue debate on deep poverty to the possibility, perhaps even the likelihood, that low-income people will be asked to bear the costs”.

In another article – one that was highlighted in the Michigan Citizen, Lee-Boggs (2007, ¶ 13) asserts that education is not only information. It is tied up with self-esteem and knowing that one is worthwhile. Graduate students felt that education is not confined to classrooms, Instead it is all over the place – that it comes from everywhere, from all directions. Lee-Boggs further states:

The kids themselves have to decide which way they are going to go. We can help them decide by encouraging and helping them to become more introspective, to keep asking themselves, “Who am I?” “What is my purpose in life?” We can help them develop their self-esteem by learning how to communicate better and by providing opportunities for them to connect with people and groups in the community who are doing positive work. We have to find ways in our schools to discuss divisive issues like light and dark skin and hair, which we still have in our community. So much damage has also been done to our kids by TV and radio. Having conversations about these things in our schools can lead to understanding rather than conflict. We need dialogue about these questions as much as we need dialogue about military recruitment. Once you make a child feel bad about herself, her color, her hair, education stops. We have to protect a child’s self-esteem. We have to lift children up and keep them whole, just as we have to look at education holistically.

There are different kinds of education, and educational leaders must embrace all forms. There is academic education, and there is education for life. Life is problem-solving. Often, education is talked about as if it exists in one form only. However, according to Lee-Boggs (2007, ¶ 2):

All the disruptions that happen every day in school are challenges we have to face in life and our students have to figure these out and still come out OK. From that point of view students are getting a social education in our schools which some people never get. The school is not divorced from the community. The community is in the school. Our schools are a reflection of our society and we have not fixed our society. We have to address issues that have nothing to do with academic education.
One of the hottest curriculum trends in the USA is homeland security education. National security issues press educators in times of conflict. Community colleges around the nation are re-tooling and re-naming existing public safety and emergency response training programs in order to take advantage of billions of dollars in federal homeland security funds (Barr, 2001; de Vise, 2005; Gilroy, 2005; Horwitz and Kinzie, 2005; Roosevelt, 2005; Seyfer, 2003). To prepare students for popular homeland security degrees, secondary school districts are creating specialized vocational programs (Cavanagh, 2004) and adopting new curriculum strands in terrorism and Middle Eastern area studies (Argentsinger and Strauss, 2002). Foreign language study is once again being called a national security priority. President George Bush recently pledged $114 million for the National Security Language Initiative; the Department of Defense has announced it will spend $750 million over the next five years to increase personnel with abilities in Arabic, Chinese, Russian, Hindi, and Farsi and other critical languages (Gilmore, 2006; US Department of State, 2006). Students reflected on the potential impact of the initiative amid concerns about academic freedom and covert recruitment policies. One student presented his thoughts about how government security projects and campuses can be uneasy bedfellows. Another student cited research that reiterated how community colleges and public school foreign language programs, already squeezed for funds, feel forced to accept homeland security aid as their only means of survival (Phillips, 2005; Hines, 2003; Samuel, 2005). Young, poor people of color may be disproportionately targeted for post-graduation homeland security or defense employment due to their greater need for higher education scholarships (Howell, 2007a, 2007b; Samuel, 2005). Language experts likewise bemoan the fork in the road which they tread (Hines, 2003, p. 21): “languages for intellect and illumination in one direction, languages as tools in the conduct of business, diplomacy and intelligence activity in the other direction”.

Some educational leaders are responding to the challenge of educating the citizenry. Nelson (2002, p. 155), writes of the democratic agency of the moral leader:

I believe that we need to make ourselves available for public foray, for gatherings of citizens who come together to wrestle with the confusing and catastrophic issues our country now faces . . . whatever the arena, we need to be in the forefront of it. This does not mean that we know more of the “right” answers, but it does recognize the various special abilities that we have as social educators; recognizing and explicating a variety of viewpoints, supporting or clarifying potentially unpopular views, helping to separate “noise” from actual information, and helping to provide some historical or cultural foundation for the issues at hand.

In short, educators as citizens and public servants must incorporate their objective and neutral responsibilities as human beings into their duty to facilitate and participate in democratic discourse. Nelson (2002, p. 156) also writes of the educator’s ability to view issues holistically and to assist in “separating the grams of knowledge from the tons of available information”. He urges leaders to break out of internal educational debates and respond to parents and citizens’ critical questions in times of crisis, serving as resources, brokering academic views, and promoting discussion. This approach is aligned with both Starratt’s ethic of public citizenship and the ethic of critique as embodied in democratic patriotism, which engenders civic virtue through reflection, inclusiveness, and pluralism (Casey, 2003; Shapiro and Stefkovitch, 2005).
Responsibility as an educator

At this third level of responsibility, educators are charged with knowing (Starratt, 2005, pp. 126-127) “curriculum material in sufficient depth to understand the multiple applications and uses that knowledge provides to the community”. This includes staying abreast of current research, expunging inaccurate or misleading information from the curriculum, and scaffolding learning activities to make learning accessible at all levels. Starratt (2005, p. 128) insists that educators recognize the validity of others’ interpretation of knowledge and ensure, through their hiring, evaluation, and professional development programs, that teachers will:

- know the curriculum they are expected to teach and the academic disciplines that stand behind the curriculum;
- know how to communicate that curriculum in ways that enable youngsters to comprehend and appreciate the many facets of what they are studying;
- insist that students take away from their learning important life lessons that will shape how they look upon the natural, cultural, and social worlds, and appreciate the human adventure more deeply because of their studies; and
- know their students well, enabling them to craft learning tasks to respond to the background, interests, and prior experience of their students – in short, to respond to their moral quest for and ownership of their authentic identity.

Educational organizations have been sharply criticized for this kind of professional activity. As indicated by Paul-Dosher and Normore (2006), a high-profile public controversy raged over the National Education Association’s Remember 9/11 web site that was intended to assist teachers in lesson planning to commemorate the tragedy’s first anniversary. When asked to comment about the controversy, students indicated that pundits disparaged the site for failing to identify the tenets of Islam as the cause of the terrorist attacks and for adopting the “blame America” approach. The NEA was censured for its lack of political savvy in publishing educational links that left the organization vulnerable to opponents’ criticism. Analysts criticized the long-term significance of post-9/11 curricular changes and called attention to the haphazard ways in which educators made them. Teachers were warned of the risk of “adopting a curriculum of crisis” in their attempt to capitalize on student interest by incorporating current events (Levy, 2002, p. 2).

The morality of this domain dictates that educators actively engage in professionally ethical behaviors. Starratt (2005, p. 127) writes, “the ethic of educating is connected to the ethic intrinsic in learning itself. Learning always should be an activity of coming to know and understand something, because knowledge and understanding are always incomplete”. In support of Starratt (2005), the aspiring and practicing school leaders in the ethics and educational leadership class emphasized that leaders must protect the integrity of the pursuit of knowledge and scholarship by protecting the activity itself, e.g. eschewing preconceived notions of subject matter that obstructs acceptance of what one is striving to know. They further added that moral agents should therefore invite public scrutiny of their presentation of information as well as their sources. This may require that leaders, students, and citizens learn the different levels of “proof” as well as the different criteria for what constitutes reliable measures or indicators – in short, rules for deciding “good
information” from questionable or even reliable sources. They should respond to critics by continuously striving to learn more and involve others in their learning (Christians, 1995; Mackey, 2002). Furthermore, educators should refrain from admonishing others for their earnest, though less than thorough, understanding of subject matter, and reprove of those who purposefully misrepresent the facts or represent themselves as all-knowing (Marsh, 2006; Masterman, 1980, 1985; Thomas, 2006).

Responsibility as an educational administrator
The moral administrator in this domain bears a special responsibility to promote the integrity of the learning process through school structures and policies. Here the ethic of justice comes into play; Starratt (2005, p. 128) explains that administrative mechanisms are not neutral, they either support the school’s “core work – authentic learning – or they curtail or block” it. He proclaims that administration often does both simultaneously, to the advantage of the traditionally advantaged and the disadvantage of others. The one-size-fits-all approach to learning schedules, instructional style, textbooks, and assessments leaves low performing students behind. The same approach to teacher evaluation frustrates some and intimidates others. Negative student labeling, biased student tracking, and preferred teacher assignments – administrators could reform all of these in order to raise student achievement.

Some have spoken of Hurricane Katrina’s silver lining as being the ability to start with a blank slate in the re-building of the broken New Orleans school system (Hardy, 2006). The complete devastation brought on by this disaster, while resulting in a “diminished sense of security and a pervasive feeling of loss” (Sanoff, 2002, p. 30), prompts reevaluation of traditional customs and priorities. Responses to critical incidents such as these, however, may be less determined by concepts of security and reality than by personal coping styles. Three primary strategies emerge from the literature: passive, avoidance, and active problem-focused (Franklin, 2002). Children and adults who adopt a passive style “feel paralyzed and helpless in the face of recent events...Some schools, for example, did nothing to process feelings about the recent terror attacks because they did not know how to respond” (Franklin, 2002, p. 4). Those tending toward avoidance are unwilling to discuss events, how they affect the world generally or themselves personally. This reluctance may be the result of a continuing sense of physical danger or fear of offending others’ sensibilities. Administrators in avoidance adopt behaviors associated with their feelings of detachment, numbness, apathy, or confusion (Franklin, 2002).

In contrast, Starratt’s ideal moral educational administrators are problem-focused copers. They “take action and, despite feelings of anger, fear, or grief, purposefully act, or refrain from acting, to make things better” (Franklin, 2002, p. 4). Coupled with both vigilant objectivity and active pursuit of democracy and understanding in the previous domains, problem-focused leaders are more likely to be prepared to confront and create new norms resulting from national crises and conflicts. Likewise, moral administrators work to instill these capacities in others. Research indicates that problem-focused coping skills can be taught in age-appropriate ways at all levels (Franklin, 2002). Educational leaders who reach out to their community to teach problem-focused coping skills adopt an inherently moral stance. Their work is naturally practical and proactive; the trust, democratic discourse, and open-mindedness cultivated through
attention to the previous domains facilitate consensus building during the problem-solving process.

In a Macleans and Times issue, a discourse opportunity for students became available in two similar articles that allowed them to engage in reflection-in-action, overcome reflexive emotional and behavioral reactions, and evaluate potential strategies and consequences from religious perspectives. The reports were titled, “The Da Vinci Code: The author who inspired The Da Vinci Code wages a new war over Jesus: Did he really die on the cross?” (Bethune, 2006b). A headline on the cover of Time carried the title, “The Opus Dei Code: The real story about the mysterious group that has a direct line to the Vatican” (Van Biema, 2006). In response to these media items, rather than center on a discussion about the media representation of whether or not Jesus died on the cross, students emphasized the importance of noting that ethics may not depend on religion, but even if religious ethics are not essentially different from secular ethics, religion can provide other benefits, such as motivation and satisfaction. Further discussion lead to an evaluation of personal and professional codes of ethics where students found themselves grappling with both. Since the class composition was diverse along these lines (i.e. Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Judaism), students shared thoughts about moral relativism and an ethics of belief whereby the behaviors of one group could affect the welfare of other groups or of the world in general. Essentially, a common interest among the students focused on the need to engage in diligent efforts to better understand the commonalities among the religious beliefs found in the world, as well as secular beliefs that may provide a valid foundation for attempts to develop a “global ethic” toward which we may all aspire. Reflection of this nature enabled students to share viewpoints of various religions of the world today and think about ways they may each contribute to such an ethic.

Responsibility as an educational leader

At this level of moral practice, the leader “calls on students and teachers to reach beyond self-interest for a higher ideal – something heroic” (Starratt, 2005, p. 130). Here transactional leaders are invited to become transformational who exhibit a more “courageous humanity” (Starratt, p. 130) and who elicit the same from students and staff. Transformed schools are self-regulating, self-governing, and interactive with the wider world, able to change and be changed through their broad functioning. Teaching is deeply connected to students’ inner life and lively pursuits in order to enlighten through learning. Starratt (p. 131) describes this as a value-added level of ethical enactment, often ignored or considered unattainable by professionals whose more immediate concerns are “preventing harm to students and teachers, guaranteeing their security and safety, supporting equitable consideration, and fulfilling contractual obligations out of a sense of justice”.

Gerald Tirozzi, president of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, calls groundbreaking, transformational school programs “victory gardens” (Sanders and Stewart, 2004, p. 201). Recent research indicates that world views and relationships are expanding in select classrooms, schools, and districts around the country. For example, the International School of the Americas in San Antonio and the Snowden International High School in Boston both offer low-income students international internships in corporations and nonprofit organizations. The Glastonbury School District in Connecticut places an emphasis on global education;
95 percent of students in the district take a foreign language (Paul-Doscher and Normore, 2006). Students in Newton Public Schools in Massachusetts learn not only from textbooks but also from the district’s 20-year-long relationship with the Jingshan School in Beijing, China (Sanders and Stewart, 2004). Individual teachers, often lacking support from principals and superintendents, infuse international, cultural, and historical analysis into their lessons during teachable moments.

Few argue that schools must fulfill a basic responsibility to prepare a competent workforce and informed citizenry. But as former Governor of North Carolina in the USA, James Hunt, has said, “Our children are growing up in a whole new world, and...we have a responsibility to see that they understand that world” (Sanders and Stewart, 2004, p. 205). Our students live in a world transformed from the one in which school leaders were raised. How can educators who barely understand this brave new world themselves be expected to fill such a tall order? Having adapted to the Agricultural, Industrial, and Information Ages, school leaders must now adapt to the demands of the Global Age. The federal government can take a leadership role in this process through funding and legislation, but superintendents, principals, teachers, and parents must lay the groundwork and engage in the daily toil of transforming schools to address this New Order. Educational leaders bear an ethical responsibility to adjust not only school structures, but also their personal leadership style.

Although Starratt (2005, p. 131) poetically describes transformational educational leaders as players in this “drama of the human adventure”, he neglects to invoke one of the aspects of participation in the spectacle – the element of risk. A core value of the transformational leader is a willingness to take personal risks in the name of a higher goal and ought to be addressed in educational leadership programs as well as by school leaders. If the risk is too high one might argue that the educational leader is no longer privileged to exercise leadership role. Transformative leadership also concerns the process of affecting social changes over time (Aviolo and Gibbons, 1988; Burns, 1978, Leithwood et al., 1999; Tichy and DeVanna, 1990; Weber, 1947). Foster (1989) asserts that transformation encourages and supports the examination of one’s life, ideas, and willingness to take risks, which in turn leads to the development of a critical framework for leadership. Self-reflective, transformational leaders who have earned the trust of their community by fulfilling their responsibilities as humans, citizens and public servants, educators, and administrators are indeed better positioned to take risks; nevertheless, at the end of the day transformational leaders are out on a limb all by themselves. Should they fall, there may or may not be someone there to catch them.

The previous four domains outlined by Starratt are primarily transactional; the ethic of justice directs leaders to adhere to explicit objective criteria when dealing with controversies engendered by media crises (Harf, 1989). Detachment and neutrality are implicit in all four of the previous domains. Transformational educational leaders, however, are those who have built up a sufficient bank of respect and goodwill to be able to break free of those constraints and risk espousing proactive, personal, and subjective points of view. Dantley and Tillman, 2006 (as cited in Marshall and Oliva, 2006) maintain that transformative leadership is about social change with a belief that transformation is a process that occurs over time. This kind of leadership, Starratt (2005, p. 131) writes, can be very messy, but the transformational leader “uses the messes as learning opportunities”.

Promoting moral literacy
Four media headlines that provided opportunities to engage in such learning opportunities were reported in *Maclean's*: “Tyrants of the Caribbean: A summit in Cuba” (Petrou, 2006a); “A pope unleashed: First he scolded godless Canadians. Then he took on militant Islam – Benedict XVI is just getting started” (Bethune, 2006a); “Russia goes to hell: Vladimir Putin is quashing freedoms, stifling opposition, bullying neighbors, encouraging Iran, promising an arms race and threatening a new Cold War” (Petrou, 2006b), and; “The scariest man on earth: The nuke-happy, Jew-hating lunatic president of Iran” (Petrou, 2006c). In response to these headlines, students discussed the concept of leadership and how there is no single set of moral concepts or ethical principles upon which to base decision making in educational leadership. They referenced Gardner (1990) five points on what schools do not need in educational leadership: leaders who inflict punishment on followers; leaders who treat subordinates well but encourage evil acts against others; leaders who use bigotry, hatred, revenge, or fear as motivators; leaders who make followers dependent; and leaders who destroy human dignity. As stated by noted ethicist, Alasdair MacIntyre (1966, p. 266), “Conceptual conflict is endemic in our situation because of the depth of our moral conflicts...each of us therefore has to choose both with whom we wish to be morally bound and by what ends, rules, and virtues we wish to be guided”.

The moral agency of the educational leader
There are leaders, and then there are Leaders. Leaders (with a lower case l) are those whose power is based on bureaucratic or personal authority; their transactional activities are characterized by bartering, building, and binding support from staff, students, parents, and community. Leaders (with a capital L) share their moral authority with stakeholders (Paul- Doscher and Normore, 2006). They are bound to the community with whom they pursue school improvement commitments through “mind, heart, and practice” (Sergiovanni, 2006, pp. 159-64). These two styles may converge in the first four domains of moral responsibility – that of the human, the citizen and public servant, the educator, and the administrator – but they diverge in the fifth, transformational educational leadership. It has been suggested that a defining characteristic of the transformational leader is a willingness to take risks for moral beliefs. This gamble is inherent to moral agency. It is also an element of the transformational leader’s distinctive consciousness, which extends beyond the rational into the intuitive.

Certainly both types of leaders are rational in that they are capable of logical, coherent thought. They are also both capable of moral consideration: the weighing of relative degrees of suffering or relief resulting from various decisions. When faced with moral dilemmas, both may choose to act as *homo economicus* by pursuing the greatest utility obtainable through available opportunities. As discussed, however, there are some dilemmas of huge proportions – national crises and conflicts – in which leaders may feel they have no choices. Having examined the situation objectively from as many points of view as possible – human, civic, educational, administrative – they may determine that the core problem is simply too big to tackle in its entirety alone. They may feel that every alternative presents so little utility it is useless to make proactive moves, leaving them in a fully reactive mode, solely composed of transactional consideration.

Transformational leaders as moral agents will not and cannot exist in a purely reactive state. They possess more than a moral compass – their moral agency is an inner intuitive engine, propelling them towards the pursuit of greater good. They may
know that their acts may be a drop in the bucket towards solving problems, but they are compelled to act, nonetheless. They feel obligated to contribute their part in solving the equation; to quote an old saw, they need to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. Knowing the risks, and after having gained the trust of their community through moral fulfillment of moral responsibilities, transformational educational leaders instinctively choose to take positions and pursue programs out of their need to leave the world a better place. In doing so, they transform more than their schools and communities, they transform themselves from being victims of their circumstances into proactive moral agents. That is why it is so crucial that we rethink and transform education at all levels from kindergarten to doctoral degrees. What we urgently need are school boards, school superintendents and college presidents with the imagination and courage to introduce innovative curriculums and structures that create a much more intimate connection between intellectual development and practical activity, root students and faculty in their communities and natural habitats, and engage them in the kind of real problem-solving in their localities that nurtures a love of place and provides practice in creating the sustainable economies, equality, and community that are the responsibilities of citizenship. Schools and colleges dedicated to this kind of education would look and act very differently from today’s educational institutions.

Conclusions and implications
Many researchers have called for educational leaders to develop a moral grounding for their work. In this article, the authors began with an analysis of how the media can be used as a teaching tool in university educational leadership programs in promoting moral literacy. We used Starratt’s framework of moral responsibility to help analyze and identify ethical practice in response to dilemmas brought on by local, regional, national, and international crises and conflicts. In support of a morally literate society, we contend that Starratt’s framework represents a process through which educational leaders can evolve from using ethical though transactional approaches to controversial issues to using moral and transformational means of problem solving. Our assertion is that educational leaders who enter the field might be better equipped to act with ethical orientation while simultaneously positioning themselves to make risky, yet transformational and ethically responsible decisions for the benefit of a morally literate school community and a morally literate world.

Quick and Normore (2004) assert that true leaders understand that their “actions speak louder than words”, and that they must “practice what they preach,” for inevitably they “shall reap what they sow”. Although all of these adages are cliché they serve as a map for the educational leader because of the powerful evidence of experience. Educational leaders will testify that climate, culture, and community are a direct reflection of the leader’s leadership. The relationships the leader creates, the structures that s/he supports, and the decisions that s/he makes will impact the entire school. Therefore, the leader must consciously and intentionally take the actions that s/he believes are in the best interests of the students, while modeling the importance of caring and just relationships and understanding that his/her decisions have consequences across the entire system. Doing this will afford the leader the opportunity to cooperate with all the stakeholders in the community, assuring that the school will reflect the communities intended goals – to assist young people in fully realizing their potential, with the understanding that they are connected to others through a web of national and international interrelationships of
which they may not even be conscious, but one that exists nonetheless. To do this ought to be the goal of every educational leader, especially those who understand that they are role models for ethical and moral action.

By engaging in reflective practice and problems-based-learning activities designed to challenge their growing understanding of local, national, and international issues, and by supporting each individual's creation of a coherent ethical system which can direct their ethical decision making processes, educational leaders at all levels may well be prepared for the moral imperative of leading schools into the twenty-first century. Using media headlines as the basis for adopting a social issues approach to promote moral literacy in university teaching is one promising way of creating a discourse of responsible teaching, learning, preparation, training, and leading. Indeed, media editorials have raised our consciousness related to anti-semitism and heightened our moral awareness of racism and gender discrimination. In the debates over war and worldwide trade in military arms, the moral issues in terms of war theory and pacifism have emerged at various times in news and commentary. In addition to the media issues raised in this article, other issues such as affirmative action, environmental protection, health policy, gun control, incarceration, and welfare reform raise moral conflicts that educational leaders can help the public negotiate. As Christians (2003, ¶ 5) noted, “Building on its unique capacities as a genre, we are empowered toward moral literacy by their appealing to our conscience”.

Educational leaders – teachers, school leaders, parents, and College professors alike – would benefit from study of ethical case studies involving dilemmas of controversy and objectivity. Pre-service and in-service professionals can prepare themselves for inevitable educational predicaments by thoroughly contemplating the application of Starratt’s framework to real-world problems. Useful headlines and articles found on the internet and in national media sources such as *Time*, *Macleans*, and *National Geographic*, can be used as meaningful discourse on particular salient social, cultural, political, and economic issues in classrooms at all levels of education. Educational leadership professors and their students can scaffold case studies around these issues in such a way as to examine the issue from multiple moral perspectives in order to provide mechanisms for teaching and supporting problem-focused coping skills for educational leaders and their communities. Leaders must be able to advocate for their own objective and subjective positions, as well as the rights of others to adopt the same. Professional organizations should encourage and support leaders who engage in public citizenship activities – answering critical questions, brokering views, encouraging discussion, and serving as resources. The educational leader as moral agent should act not only as an arm of the state, but also as the ideal of government in action.

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**Further reading**


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