

An Elementary Leadership Challenge: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This case involves an incident of physical aggression that occurred between two students at an elementary level. It typifies the complexity, multidimensionality, and tension involved in school based leadership. A principal in this case made a unilateral decision, instead of considering viable alternatives, thereby deciding on a course of action that would adequately address the tensions between many inherent competing values. The clear bias of this case combined with a deliberate provocative orientation and tone produces the resultant tension herein.

Keywords – Leadership, conflict, administration, behavior, stakeholders, perspective

BACKGROUND: CONTEXT

Havoc Public School is an elementary school in Hicton, Ontario (Canada). Hicton has a population of 6500 people during the winter months and a significantly larger population during the summer months due to an influx of seasonal residents. Its primary industry is tourism. As a result, many individuals are either employed in low paying service sector jobs or in seasonal construction positions. Many others collect employment insurance benefits or rely on social assistance programs. Havoc Public School is centrally located and serves a population of approximately 400 students. Due to its proximity to low income housing, a large portion of the student population lives at or below the poverty line as many of their parents are either working poor or rely on some other form of assistance.

Approximately 100 of the students who attend Havoc Public School are enrolled in the Extended French program which is available to students in grades 5 to 8. The program is offered at Havoc Public School because the school is centrally located relative to 6 other feeder schools in the Western Region of the Peril District School Board. Students in the region who have demonstrated an acceptable standard (Level 3 out of 4) of academic achievement in the regular program are permitted to enter the Extended French program in grade 5. Most students in the Extended French program come from middle to upper-middle class backgrounds. This demographic varies significantly from that of the 300 students enrolled in the regular program. This often causes schisms in the student population as both groups share classroom facilities and playground.

One of the author's children, Emily, age 11, and Colin, age 10, attend the Extended French program at Havoc Public School. Our daughter Emily is in grade 6 Extended

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French and our son Colin is new to the Extended French program, and he is currently in grade 5. A husband of one of the authors, James, is a teacher at the school. He has been teaching grade 8 in the regular stream at Havoc Public School for the past three years.

Problem: An Orientation

This problem stems from a situation involving a son and another male student on a junior (elementary) playground. At this school, as in many others, it is common practice at the school for classes to line up outside at the end of recess in order to proceed into the school in an orderly fashion. On Thursday, September 11, 2008 at approximately 11:00 a.m. Colin was lining up to go inside for the eating portion of the nutrition break when he allowed his friend Aaron to “butt” in line behind him. Frank, the student who had been immediately behind Colin, took offense to this action and shoved Aaron. Colin shoved Frank back and said, “Leave my friend alone”. This further angered Frank who then punched Colin in the face. Colin pushed him away. Frank gave Colin three more successive punches to the face. Again, Colin pushed him away. Frank moved toward Colin with his fist closed ready to punch. In an effort to stop Frank from punching him again, Colin decided to use an offensive-defensive karate kick that he had learned to use only when needed for the purpose of self-protection. The kick was aimed at Frank’s mid-section, but landed at groin level as Frank moved forward. When Colin stepped down from the kick, Frank placed Colin in a headlock and gave him three additional punches to the top of his head. At this point in time, the teacher on duty noticed Colin in a headlock at the end of one of the lines. The teacher asked Frank to stop, to get out of line, and to stand by him. Frank was asked to wait until all of the other students had entered the school before going in. The teacher on duty then allowed Frank to go back to class for the eating portion of the nutrition break without investigating the matter any further.

Inside: The Aftermath

During the eating portion of the nutrition break one staff member patrols the halls and supervises three classrooms on a rotational basis. The teacher on duty that day noticed Colin crying at his desk and asked him what had happened. Colin told the teacher that his head hurt because Frank had punched him both in the face and on the top of his head during recess. The teacher allowed another student to leave the classroom to obtain an ice pack for Colin, but she did not address the situation that had occurred outside.

It just so happened that this was also Colin’s birthday and arrangements had been made to pick him up and take him out for lunch during the second nutrition break at 12:50 p.m. Upon meeting Colin in the lobby of the school it was noticed that some lumps were on the top of his head and the beginnings of a bruise was under his right eye. His classroom teacher stopped to in the lobby of the school on her way to the staffroom to eat lunch to explain that Colin had been punched by another student in the class. The parental response was to ask: “A punch?” and the teacher shook her

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head and further explained that Colin had received several punches to both his face and to the top of his head. The classroom teacher reported that the student who had inflicted the blows was having home difficulties and he had already punched another student this year. The teacher added, that Frank was very angry right now and that Colin was just “in the wrong place at the wrong time”. The parent asked the classroom teacher what she intended to do about the situation and she stated that she wasn’t sure.

This was the first the parent had heard about the incident and it was now almost two hours after it had taken place. No phone call had been made by the teachers on duty, by the classroom teacher, or by the administrative staff to inform the parent about what had happened. Does Board protocol require parental contact when an injury happens (head shots)? Is this not part of the school/Board “duty of care”? Should this occurrence have been documented in an incident report? Colin did not say much about what had happened except to say that this had been “the crappiest birthday ever” because he had been “beaten up”. Colin refused to return to the school following lunch at 1:30 p.m.

Evening: Problem Growth

Thursday evening the parent went to pick up their spouse (teacher) from the grade 8 camping trip, so that he could join Colin during his birthday supper. The parent told the spouse about what had happened and it was during the car ride home that Colin described the events that had occurred earlier that day to the best of his recollection. Colin ended by saying that he was most upset about the fact that when he had held out his hand to Frank and offered a “truce”, Frank responded by saying, “Never” and placing both of his hands behind his back.

During supper Colin stated that he felt nauseous. He ate very little and ran to the bathroom several times. The parent gave him Tums, but this did not seem to alleviate his symptoms. James (teacher/spouse) had to return to the camping trip following supper and he assured me that he would talk to the principal about what had happened at school that day. The principal, Mr. Perfunctory, had not been at school when the incident had taken place as he was also chaperoning the grade 8 camping trip.

James phoned from the camp to let the parent (spouse) know that he had indeed spoken to Mr. Perfunctory about the situation and Mr. Perfunctory said that he was going to look into the matter the following day. James also stated that he had told the camp nurse about what had happened to Colin and he had informed her about the nausea Colin was experiencing. The camp nurse said that although the nausea was most likely due to general upset, it could also be the result of a concussion. She advised James that the best course of action would be to wake Colin two hours after bedtime and every two hours after that in order to ensure that he could accurately respond to questions. Colin fell asleep at around 10:00 p.m. and the parent woke him at 12:00 a.m. and asked him his name to which he responded, “Colin”. The parent was still nervous, so the parent brought him into bed with the parent and lay awake

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listening to him breathe. The parent continued to ask him his name every couple of hours throughout the night.

An Intervention: The Principal Action

The parent did not hear anything from the school during normal school hours on Friday. The parent went to the school at approximately 3:10 p.m. to pick up Colin and several other friends for a birthday party that had been arranged prior to the incident. On the way into the school, the principal, who was on bus duty at the time, stopped and spoke to the parent about the outcome of his investigation earlier that day. Mr. Perfunctory stated that he had gone to Frank's house before school and had spoken to Frank's father. He informed the parent that he had interviewed both the boys separately and they had independently provided a similar account of what had happened the previous day. He then stated that in his opinion both boys were equally at fault and being that it was the first time that either student had been to the office he had decided that a suspension was not in order. Mr. Perfunctory finished off by saying that if he were to suspend, he would be suspending both students.

The parent was taken aback and shook their head in disagreement and said that her issue was that my son had not received one punch in anger, but several punches intended to inflict harm. Mr. Perfunctory responded by saying that the teacher on duty had not seen any punches at all, only a headlock. Was he intimating that Colin had been lying? Could bumps and bruises lie? This was the day after the parent had been up all night checking Colin to ensure that he did not have a concussion. The parent then pointed out that the other student had shown no remorse when Colin had offered a truce. Mr. Perfunctory responded by saying that in all likelihood Frank was still too mad to resolve the conflict so soon after the incident had occurred. He also stated that Frank's dad had reported that Frank was extremely frustrated with the demands of Extended French. This brief, but troubling encounter happened out in front of the school with other students and parents within earshot. The parent apologized and stated that I could not discuss the matter any further as I was on my way to pick Colin and other students who had been invited to Colin's birthday party.

The Evening: A Birthday Party

At the supper table during Colin's party, the students were still talking about what had happened to Colin. The parent (Jill) did not join the discussion, but did listen to what was being said. They were discussing previous occasions when Frank had been physically aggressive toward other students. They were concerned because he never seemed to receive any consequences for his behavior. A student at the party (Marshall) talked about being hit in the temple, another student talked about being threatened, and yet another student recalled an instance when Frank had punched a female student in the class for no apparent reason.

At pick up time Jill asked Marshall's mom if it was true that he had been punched in the temple by Frank last year. His mom stated yes and she went on to say that she had

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not been contacted by the school. Marshall's mom stated that she had no knowledge of the situation until that evening when she noticed a welt on the side of her son's head and asked him how it got there. Marshall had told her that Frank had punched him in the temple and that both he and Frank had been sent to the office. Apparently, Frank had been "spoken" to by the vice-principal and sent back to class.

Jill was now even more disturbed by the way the incident involving Colin had been handled by the school and by the principal in particular. Jill found both Mr. Perfunctory's view and the position he had taken rather confusing. In Jill's opinion, Mr. Perfunctory had adopted a "knee-jerk" response to an "ethically charged" crisis (Duignan, 2006, p. 15). Frank had a history of violent behavior, but if Frank was to be suspended, Colin would have to be suspended too? Colin had pushed and kicked Frank in self-defense after receiving successive punches to the face. Jill did not feel that her son deserved to be suspended for these actions. Granted, he was not entirely faultless. He had allowed another student to "butt" in line and he had pushed Frank on Aaron's behalf. Colin had been spoken to at home regarding the inappropriateness of both of these actions. He realized that it would have been better to report the push instead of retaliating. Jill believed that Colin deserved a detention for his involvement in the incident. However, I did not feel that Colin was equally culpable or that his actions merited a suspension as he had no prior history of physical or violent behavior.

Jill felt somewhat intimidated. The principal's implicit message seemed to be that if pushed for Frank to be suspended, then he in turn would suspend my Jill's son. Jill was uncertain if the matter should be further pursued. Jill knew that if Colin were suspended, a permanent record of that suspension would appear in his Ontario Student Record (OSR). Yet it seemed unjust that the other boy involved seemed to be getting away with repeatedly engaging in violent behavior toward other students without receiving any apparent consequences. Mr. Perfunctory had not made an effort to get the facts before making his decision. He had not consulted with other staff members or with students who may have been able to shed more light on what had happened. Instead he had clung "to a more readily understood view" of the school as a "linear, deterministic and mechanistic" system when making his decision which resulted in an "insufficient understanding of the dynamics and complexity" of the situation (Duignan, 2006, p.14). Mr. Perfunctory's hierarchical view of leadership caused him to assume what Duignan (2006) calls a "power over people" approach (p.14). Jill was angry. Initially, Jill wanted to go to the school on Monday and give the principal a "piece of my mind". However, Jill knew that it was essential to get the facts before speaking to the principal. Paul and Elder (2006) caution that "all of us fall victim at times to an inevitable illusion of objectivity" (p. 19).

Saturday: Another Day

On Saturday Jill spoke to Colin about what had happened in the office on Friday. He verified that Mr. Perfunctory had spoken to him and Frank separately, and that afterward, he had spoken to them together. Jill asked him whether Mr. Perfunctory

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had mentioned anything about a suspension. Colin said that Mr. Perfunctory had told them that he and Frank were equally at fault and that if a suspension were given it would be given to both of them. Colin said that he wanted to tell Mr. Perfunctory that the kick had been an offensive-defensive move that he had learned in karate, but he stated that once Mr. Perfunctory had mentioned the word “suspension” he was too afraid to say anything more. His exact words were, “I decided that I wasn’t talking anymore”. Now Jill was faced with the fact that Colin had heard the word suspension too.

On Sunday evening Jill was torn about what should be done. The way the situation had been handled seemed unjust, but did Jill feel that way just because my son was involved or would she have felt the same way if this had happened to another student? Paul and Elder (2006) warn that “the human tendency to judge the world from a narrow, self-serving perspective is powerful” (p. 6). On the other hand, Duignan (2006) states that:

Feelings can easily prejudice judgement, but they can also be a good, almost instinctive, guide to right and wrong. An immediate feeling of rejection or revulsion for a proposed line of action should at least give pause, and suggest that the whole issue needs closer examination. (p. 102)

Jill needed to analyze the situation from multiple perspectives to decide whether or not it was worthwhile to make an appointment to see the principal in order to voice her concerns. “Openness to a range of insights from multiple points of view and a willingness to question one’s own are crucial to ‘objectivity’” (Paul & Elder, 2006, p.27). Jill conferred with my parents, colleagues with school-aged children, the teachers who had been on duty that day, and one of Colin’s previous teachers in search of an answer. Jill also had to be sure that my decision would not cause an undesired ripple effect. This was not only her children’s principal, but it was also her husband’s boss and the ramifications of Jill’s actions could potentially harm other parties involved.

Underlying Principles: A Rationale Mind?

Jill made the decision to speak to the principal about her dissatisfaction regarding the manner in which the situation had been handled. Her rationale for making this decision was as follows:

1. If Jill did not speak to the principal regarding this matter she could end up harboring resentment towards him and lose confidence in his credibility as a leader. Jill needed to clear the air and to inform him about some of the facts relating to the case that he may not have considered.
2. It was widely known that Mr. Perfunctory intended to stay at the school until he was eligible for retirement in five years time. This meant that he would be the principal at the school for the remainder of Colin’s elementary school years. While

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Jill felt that Mr. Perfunctory had considered many of the mitigating circumstances that may have influenced Frank's behavior in the situation, she felt that he had not sufficiently investigated the matter in order to determine why Colin acted in the manner that he had. The principal had stated that Frank had a difficult home life and that he was currently frustrated with the demands of Extended French. He also stated that Frank was still "too mad" to accept Colin's attempt at resolving the situation between them. He had made allowances for Frank's behavior, but he had not offered Colin the same consideration. Mr. Perfunctory did not know that Aaron had been Colin's friend since early childhood. He did not know that Aaron had been severely bullied at his previous school and that Colin was extremely protective of him as a result. He did not know that the kick was an offensive-defensive karate move and that it was used only after several attempts to push Frank away had failed. He had assumed it was a low blow intended for the groin area. The principal made a personal visit to Frank's home in order to discuss the situation with Frank's father, but we had not been given a similar opportunity. We had only been told in an open forum that Colin would be suspended if we pushed for the suspension of the other student involved. Jill did not expect preferential treatment, but did expect to be treated equitably. She wanted to make the principal aware of the aforementioned mitigating circumstances surrounding Colin's behavior.

3. In Jill's opinion, the principal had solved the problem using a linear, "one-dimensional" *either/or* response rather than a *both/and* response that more accurately reflects the complexity of the competing values involved in human relationships (Duignan, 2006, p. 4). The principal's knee-jerk reaction was an oversimplification; both boys were fighting on the schoolyard, both boys were equally at fault, therefore, *either* both boys are suspended *or* both boys are given a verbal warning to refrain from engaging in this type of behavior in the future. This expedient resolution failed to adequately consider the past behavior of both boys in order to gain insight into their characters. The fact that Colin had never before been involved in a physical altercation at school was not considered. Either Mr. Perfunctory was unaware or was choosing to ignore the fact that physical violence was Frank's primary means of solving problems with other students. It is possible that the principal had no knowledge of past incidents because "large systems are sometimes slow to process issues and problems, so gaps in communication may occur" (Duignan, 2006, p. 30).

4. Jill felt that the principal's decision negatively impacted Colin, other students, and the school community in general. Paul and Elder (2006) contend that "we have an ethical responsibility...to make the world more just and humane" (p. 23). There were inherent messages being sent that Jill did not believe the principal had considered prior to making his decision. The short-term consequence of exhibiting compassion toward a disadvantaged student may result in serious long-term consequences for everyone involved. These are some of the things that Jill felt Colin and other students may have learned based via the principal's reaction: (a) "Don't defend yourself"; (b) "If you do defend yourself, make it count because the victim gets suspended too"; (c) "Disadvantaged students are allowed to be aggressive and to resolve conflicts using physical violence whenever they get frustrated"; and/or (d) "The adults in the school

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will not protect us, so we have to be bodyguards for each other". The final message was a view shared by Colin and many of the other students who had been physically bullied by Frank in the past. Jill asked herself some of the following questions: (a) "Is this climate of tolerated aggression conducive to a safe school?"; (b) "Is this what we as parents want for our kids?"; and (c) "Was it in the best interest of the rest of the student body to witness Frank continually going without consequences for his behavior?" Jill's response to each of these questions was a resounding no. One of the long-term consequences of Mr. Perfunctory's decision could be an escalation in the number of students utilizing physical violence as their primary means of solving conflicts.

5. Frank had a history of using physical aggression to solve his problems. Jill felt that it was not in Frank's best interest to let his violent behavior remain unchecked. She knew that ignoring his problem entirely would certainly not make it go away. If not a suspension, then Jill felt that a voluntary parental withdrawal day would represent a reasonable compromise. A parental withdrawal day is not as punitive as a suspension in that it does not require paperwork to be included in the OSR, but stakeholders are not necessarily aware of this differentiation. This would *both* alleviate the anxiety and frustration felt by students, staff, parents, and other stakeholders who felt that a consequence was necessary in order to send a clear message that physical aggression would not be tolerated by the school community *and* it would still penalize Frank *and* it would give the principal the opportunity to speak to Frank's father about obtaining the help Frank needs to deal with his feelings of anger and aggression. Arrangements for in-school counseling or counseling from outside agencies could be made on that day. Frank needed to be taught how to manage his anger in more productive ways.

After considerable reflection Jill determined that her decision was not solely based on an egocentric need to obtain justice for Colin. She recognized that my son was not without fault, but Jill also felt that there still was something inherently wrong with the outcome of the situation for not only Colin, but for many of the other stakeholders involved, including Frank and the school community as a whole.

If educational leaders instinctively feel that a decision...is unjust, then it may well be worth searching to see if there are other alternatives. If past experience, either their own or that of others, suggests that a certain decision will cause more harm than good, then leaders should at least reconsider. (Duignan, 2006, p. 103)

Jill believed that the principal had not considered all "viable options or alternatives" when making his decision; his rush to judgment had resulted in a "narrowly-based" *either/or* solution that had caused and would cause unintentional harm to many of the stakeholders involved (Duignan, 2006, p.96).

OBJECTIVES

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The objectives for Jill's meeting with the principal were as follows:

1. To inform the principal about some of the facts that may have altered his decision in this case and may also influence his future decisions. To suggest that the principal send a clear message to staff that all cases of physical aggression should be immediately reported to the office whenever they occur. It is difficult to be "formed" and informed to meet the challenges and tensions" (Duignan, 2006, p.2) you encounter as an educational leader if you do not have all the facts regarding a student's behavior. To encourage the use of a case sensitive approach based on the progressive discipline model in order to develop appropriate individual student action plans. This would increase the principal's credibility with stakeholders and improve the defensibility of his future decisions related to student discipline.
2. To develop the principal's awareness of some of the long term consequences that could result from his decision to downplay Frank's aggressive physical behavior toward other students. In an attempt to demonstrate care for an individual student, the principal may have inadvertently set the stage for a school climate of vigilante justice and tolerated aggression. In addition, while the decision to withhold a suspension demonstrates care and concern for Frank's current circumstances, it may result in more serious long term consequences for Frank as well. Physical violence will continue to be Frank's primary means of solving problems if he is not stopped and shown other alternatives. In my opinion, addressing the problematic behavior is the first step to its resolution. The old adage, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" seems to apply. A suspension or a parental withdrawal day represents a *both/and* solution. It would have demonstrated to stakeholders that physical aggression would not be tolerated and it would have also given the principal the opportunity to speak to Frank's father about possible ways to help Frank overcome his anger and aggression. Although it was too late to issue a suspension or to arrange for a parental withdrawal day in this case, it may be an option worth considering should Frank be involved in another physical altercation at school. However I felt that it was not too late for the principal to try to seek help for Frank in order to address his underlying issues. The principal could still speak to the Child Development Counselor at the school about possible courses of action and contact Frank's father in order to obtain parental consent.
3. To have an open and honest dialogue with the principal about my perceptions of his decision as a stakeholder.
4. To recognize and acknowledge the challenges faced by the principal as an educational leader. To demonstrate a willingness to share in that leadership by coming equipped with *both/and* alternatives that considered the best possible outcomes for the students involved, the staff, and the school community as a whole.
5. To act in a manner consistent with the ethical principles of trust, respect, integrity, and care denoted by the Ontario College of Teachers in *The Ethical Standards for the*

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Teaching Profession, June, 8, 2000. To make evident that the ethic of care is the predominant ethical principle that guides my decisions and actions.

Stakeholders

The key stakeholders are: Colin, Frank, Colin's parents, Frank's father, the principal, other students who had been bullied by Frank, the classroom teacher, and the other teachers on duty that day. The peripheral stakeholders are: students who attend Havoc School, teachers and support staff, parent council and other parents, the Child Development Counselor, the Peril District School Board, community social service agencies, service clubs, the school community, and the community of Hicton.

Decision Style

A reflective inquiry decision style was used to methodologically deconstruct the tensions involved in this case. A framework was used to systematically analyze the critical incident and evaluate the ethical implications of possible alternatives. Throughout the process we collaborated with others to ensure that all facts were noted, we considered the effects of possible actions, and decided on a course of action that was congruent with our ethical principles while ensuring the best possible outcome for stakeholders.

ANALYSIS

Alternatives

This playground incident highlights the complexity of issues that educational administrators face on a daily basis (Duignan, 2006). It illustrates that tensions in human relationships often involve competing values. In this case, there are tensions between: common good and individual good; care and rules; and long-term and short-term considerations.

The alternatives are:

1. Do nothing and advise Colin to make it count the next time that Frank touches him.
2. Demand that the other student be suspended and threaten to take the matter to the supervisory officer if the principal does not comply.
3. Tell Colin not to worry about it because Mr. Perfunctory was in error.
4. Make the principal aware of both Colin's and Frank's past behavior to ensure that he has the facts when making future discipline decisions.
5. Make the principal aware of both Colin's and Frank's past behavior to ensure that he has the facts when making future discipline decisions. Make principal aware of the implicit messages and probable consequences associated with his decision. Offer possible *both/and* alternatives that consider the best possible outcome for all stakeholders. Suggest that the principal arrange for in-school

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counseling and/or seek help from outside agencies in order to address Frank's anger and aggression.

Effects/Consequences

The probable effects/consequences of each alternative respectively are:

1. Colin uses physical violence in order to solve problems with Frank and he learns that aggression is an acceptable way to handle difficulties. Colin could generalize this behavior to other students and he could possibly get suspended and/or injured in the future.
2. Frank would receive a suspension well after engaging in the inappropriate behavior. He would learn very little except to know that individuals with power can exert the political pressure necessary to make his life more miserable. This may further his feelings of anger and resentment towards other students and possibly heighten his aggression rather than curb it. A threat to go a supervisory officer would strain my relationship with the principal and this would have implications for my son, my daughter, and my husband who is a staff member at the school.
3. This action would likely lessen my son's sense of accountability for his actions. He could think he was "allowed" to engage in inappropriate behaviors because his parents would "rescue" him. It would also diminish the principal's credibility with my son and other students. This could ultimately harm the climate of the school and the legitimacy of the school as an equitable and valuable learning community.
4. This action would give the principal some insight into the complexities related to the incident and hopefully encourage him to adopt a more case sensitive approach when dealing with future matters related to student discipline. The use of a progressive discipline approach that considered the past actions and behaviors of each student would result in variable, but just and defensible consequences for all students. This would lend credibility to the principal's decisions and increase stakeholder confidence in the safety of the school.
5. This action would result in the effects stated in #4 above, but it would also achieve a greater moral purpose. Duignan (2006) contends that "effective educational leaders have an ethical responsibility to optimize learning opportunities and outcomes for their students" (p. 7).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations include the final alternatives for the following reasons:

1. This alternative informs the principal about past behavior and gives him the information necessary to ensure that future discipline decisions involving Frank and Colin are appropriately addressed using a case sensitive progressive discipline approach. This in turn would increase the principal's credibility with stakeholders and their confidence in the safety of the school.

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2. Delineating the inferred messages of his decision and the possible consequences related to those messages in terms of playground dynamics will allow the principal to take preventative measures. He can make his staff aware of the potential for playground difficulties and request that they notify the office when any incidents of physical aggression occur.

3. The most important element of this alternative is that it allows the principal to address *both* the needs of the common good *and* to demonstrate care and concern for an individual student in an authentic way. Frank may be less likely to engage in aggressive behavior if measures are taken to alleviate his anger and aggression instead of overlooking it. Arranging counseling and involving outside agencies may help Frank to cope with his anger in more productive ways. Duignan (2006) argues that “educational leaders and teachers have a particular responsibility to ensure that students in their care receive the type of education and learning experiences that help transform their lives” (p. 6).

COMMENTS

The proponents arrange to speak to the principal regarding this incident and had an open and honest dialogue. Mr. Perfunctory was open to critique and he seemed relieved that the person had not come with hidden agenda. parents informed Mr. Perfunctory that Colin did not and would not have any knowledge of this meeting as it was not our intent to diminish his credibility as a leader. This seemed to disarm Mr. Perfunctory and he then showed a willingness to enable us as key stakeholders to share in the leadership responsibility of the school community (Duignan, 2006, p. 9). Mr. Perfunctory was receptive to our suggestions and he demonstrated a capacity to “build relationships, to make connections, to build partnerships, to build strong alliances with others” (Duignan, 2006, p. 22). Mr. Perfunctory was “present” in that he wanted to be fully aware of the details of the situation and was “sufficiently concerned and motivated to take action to rectify the situation” (Duignan, 2006, p. 134).

In this tension situation common ground was found in our care and concern for Frank. Duignan (2006) emphasizes that “in a situation where facts, values, ideas and opinions are all in tension, it is essential to look for and build on the common ground or touchstone” (p. 70).

The adults discussed various options for Frank; including counseling and involvement in extracurricular activities. The parents suggested karate as it would provide a physical outlet for Frank, yet instill principles of non-violence. Karate was cost prohibitive, but Mr. Perfunctory knew of a community agency that provides funding for kids who are unable to participate in extracurricular activities for financial reasons.

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The parents left feeling hopeful that together the stakeholders could make a difference in the lives of the students by creating “learning opportunities and experiences for...students that will help transform their lives” (Duignan, 2006, p. 130) because our “first responsibility...is to ensure the best possible outcomes for the students” (Duignan, 2006, p. 37).

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