Professional Ethics for Educators: Perspectives of Christian University Students on ProEthica

Harvey L. Klamm, Liberty University
Samuel J. Smith, Liberty University
Stacey Bose, Liberty University

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/samuel_smith/89/
Professional Ethics for Educators: Perspectives of Christian University Students on ProEthica

Harvey L. Klamm, Stacey L. Bose, and Samuel J. Smith

Author Note

Harvey L. Klamm (hlklamm@liberty.edu), School of Education, Liberty University.

Stacey L. Bose (slbose@liberty.edu), Liberty University. Samuel J. Smith,  
(sjsmith@liberty.edu), Liberty University.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Samuel J. Smith, School of Education, Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, USA 24502. Email: sjsmith3@liberty.edu.


Date of submission to ACSI Forum for Teacher Educators Conference Proceedings: June 30, 2017
Abstract

In recent decades, accreditation standards have required teacher education programs to establish and implement dispositions that define and assess the demonstration of affective beliefs and values integrated within the teacher preparation process. The 2015 publication of the Model Code of Ethics for Educators (MCEE) sought to unify the application and assessment of dispositions relating to integrity and social responsibility. In response, Educational Testing Service (ETS) developed an online program, ProEthica, to challenge individual teacher candidates and school leaders to explore potential-risk scenarios in an effort to produce self-reflection when making ethical decisions. ProEthica is currently being embraced as a licensure component by some state departments of education. Researchers conducted a pilot program, integrating ProEthica as a component in graduate and undergraduate foundations classes in the spring of 2017, to assess the value of using ProEthica as a practical extension of the university’s dispositions. Analysis of the data reported ProEthica principles and indicators for leadership and for pre-service candidates, though written from secular ethical and moral perspectives, to be generally aligned with the Christian university’s worldview and dispositional values and beliefs.

Keywords: ethics, ProEthica, dispositions, teacher education, teacher preparation, school administration, educational leadership
Given the enormous moral problems facing our international society, there is much public dialogue about the need for schools to do more about the moral education of our children. Contemporary surveys reveal that most of society believes that schools should be active participants in the formation of character of our youth. (Staudt, 2001, p. 55)

If schools are to be active participants in youth character development, then logic would dictate that teacher training programs at the university level should incorporate values and ethical instruction as integral aspects of their programs. Theoretical models by Murrell, Diez, Feiman-Nemser, and Schussler (2010); Serdyukov and Ferguson (2011); Cummins and Asempapa (2013); and Osguthorpe (2013) provided foundational and applicable support for such a values emphasis. In response, state and national accreditation agencies initially directed efforts to restructure teacher training and assessment, requiring integration of dispositional character traits within the traditional curricular elements of knowledge and pedagogy. Faith-based colleges and universities found Scriptural support for inclusion of dispositional emphasis in the model of Jesus, the Master Teacher, noting that he taught knowledge (Luke 4:32), used instructional skills (Matthew 7:28, 29), and applied his teaching to the development of character in his pupils (Hebrews 4:15). Within the literature, though, institutional leaders commonly expressed concern as to whose values, principles, and beliefs should be emphasized, and upon what authority the qualities be based. Determining and measuring dispositional beliefs, due to their subjectivity, postulated the greatest challenges.

Ruitenber (2011) proposed moving the argument of dispositional measurement subjectivity away from the faith arguments by stating, “A teacher-educator does not necessarily have the right to know all the beliefs of a teacher candidate, but they do have every right to know
how the teacher candidate is likely to act in professional situations, including ways in which candidates may be required to act in ways incongruous with personal beliefs” (p. 43).

Ruitenberg’s notion proposed the use of ethical dilemmas and social issues, intertwined with daily school-life potential entanglements, to build the value of dispositions as prevalent in the thinking of teacher candidates and to provide an element of objectivity. Among examples of resultant measurement processes is Educational Testing Service’s ProEthica training and assessment program.

ProEthica’s use as an evaluative assessment for dispositional instructional impact, two critical questions must be evaluated by faith-based teacher training programs. Can ethical assessment programs, such as ProEthica, be used in alignment with the Christian university’s biblical mission, vision, and philosophical worldview? Are proposed situational dilemmas counterproductive to established values espoused in Scripture-based dispositions? Seeking answers to these questions, researchers conducted a field-based ProEthica pilot program in foundations courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels. This report provides a review of the literature, findings of the pilot study, and concluding thoughts regarding implications for faith-based schools of education.

Literature Review

Ethics Training in Teacher Preparation Programs

The legal and medical professions have long been self-regulated by a professional code of ethics. In the early 20th Century, ethical codes became increasingly prevalent in business, industry, and trade associations. The field of education, however, has struggled with establishing a universal ethical code until recent years.

Historical trends in teacher education. The 18th Century Swiss educator Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi has been credited as ushering in teacher preparation programs. As a pioneer
in teacher training, he was visited by educators from various Western countries, including the
United States. His ethical code was simple: love the students and do not use corporal
punishment (Smith, 2014). Both before and after Pestalozzi, of course, teachers have been held
to societal moral expectations, codes of conduct, and contractual obligations. Though many, like
Bennion (1927), called for such a code, one did not develop until much later. As recently as
1994, Oser (as cited in Campbell, 2008) lamented

that no clear and sound rationale guides teacher education, that the practical technological
approach to teacher education prevails . . . and that prospective teachers do not acquire a
moral vocabulary. In my view, this analysis reflects all of the dark sides of reality in
teacher training. (p. 372)

One example of assorted trends regarding ethics training in teacher preparation programs
included the global ethics movement. Staudt (2001) argued that increased globalization
necessitated that global ethics be an integral part of pre-service teacher education. The following
sources were identified as foundational for global ethics: the *Universal Declaration of Human
Rights*, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations and supported by organizations
such as Amnesty International and the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee; the *Earth
Charter Project*; and the *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic*, an interfaith declaration introduced
by the Parliament of the World’s Religions. Staudt proposed that the principles of global ethics
be integrated into existing components of teacher education programs, such as multicultural
education, children and young adult literature, and classroom management.

Concerning to Campbell (2008) was the trend of teachers moving away from being moral
agents toward being activists for social justice. Campbell noted the conflation of
social justice perspectives with the language of ethics in teaching . . . . When teachers
come to believe that the ethics of their profession relate more to how they can serve wider
political agenda as social reconstructionists than to how they should monitor their daily practice and duties to their own students, their moral agency is compromised. (pp. 374-375)

**Faith component.** Though there have been numerous studies addressing the impact of faith on how teachers teach evolution, there has not been much attention given to the impact of faith on teacher ethics (Barrett, 2015). Barrett, however, found that faith-based convictions are foundational in teachers’ understanding and decisions related to professional ethics. For teacher candidates holding strong religious beliefs, Barrett concluded that ethics training that ignored their faith “will likely be superficial and ineffectual” because they perceive that “resolving ethical dilemmas and teaching about ethics are not merely intellectual activities” (p. 17). As Craig (1991) observed, what constitute the *modus operandi* of the moral life are the “value commitments of people, embraced through such institutions as the family, the church, society and autonomous convictions” (p. 18).

**Testing of professional ethics.** For decades, licensure exams have been measuring teacher candidates’ proficiency in professional knowledge and skills. A new movement, however, is to measure candidates’ understanding and decision making related to professional ethics. One example of this is the Georgia Educator Ethics Exam. Another, which is the focus of the present study, is the Educational Testing Service’s *ProEthica* training and assessment program being adopted by state departments of education and by university teacher preparation programs. Such a program as *ProEthica* is an exercise in normative ethics, which is moral reflection about what ought or ought not be done. The beginning of moral reflection is the pursuit of questions, such as “Is violating a social rule always wrong?” and “What do I do if social moral rules conflict?” (Craig, 1991). This pursuit is central to *ProEthica* activities and assessments. Although these cautionary words were written in 1986—nearly two decades before
the development of Georgia’s ethics exam or the *ProEthica* assessments—Coles (as cited in Craig, 1991) stated,

Moral life is not to be confused with tests meant to measure certain kinds of abstract (moral) thinking, or with tests that give people a chance to offer hypothetical responses to made up scenarios. We never quite know what will happen in this life; nor do we know how an event will connect with ourselves. (p. 18)

Coles’ statement regarding “hypothetical responses to made up scenarios” describes the key method of *ProEthica*.

**Ethics Training in Educational Leadership Preparation Programs**

Ethics is a critical topic for leaders of all professions but perhaps even more imperative for educational leaders (Lashway, 1996; McEwan, 2003; Northouse, 2015; Sergiovanni, 2009). Educational leaders serve as role models for the students, the teachers, and the parents of the communities in which they serve. As such, there is a moral element to the work that is done by school principals and leaders (Cranston, Ehrich, & Kimber, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2009), which some trace to Dewey’s belief in the moral purpose of schooling (Bowen, Bessette, & Cham, 2006).

**Historical context in leadership preparation.** As with teacher education, over the past two decades, there has been a heightened awareness on ethics for preparation of educational leaders (Langlois & Lapointe, 2010). Ethics for educational leaders came into the mainstream in the mid-1990s (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016), lagging behind other professions which had already established ethical codes (Bowen et al., 2006).

Starratt’s (1991) foundational research proposed a framework for educational leaders including the ethic of justice, the ethic of critique, and the ethic of care. Building on this model, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) added the ethic of the profession in their multiple paradigm
approach. Some contended that the ethic of the profession was encompassed in the ethic of justice, critique, and care; however, Shapiro and Stefkovich firmly believed that the ethic of the profession needed to stand alone to emphasize the important responsibility that educational leaders have as moral agents who make decisions based on the needs of students. Over the years, others have proposed additional dimensions to the framework, such as Furman’s (2003) ethic of community and Robbins’ (2006) ethic of culture.

In response to the emphasis on ethics for educational leaders, professional organizations began emphasizing the importance of ethical codes and national standards for educational leaders. The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) included a standard related to ethics in the Educational Leader Constituent Council (ELCC) standards for building-level principals. Bowen et al. (2006) pointed out the significance of the decision to devote an entire standard to ethics, elevating ethics as a key component for educational leaders. Ethics continues to hold a prominent place, as Standard 2 of the NPBEA’s 2015 Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) specifically states, “Effective educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote each student’s academic success and well-being” (p. 10). Standards and professional codes serve as valuable “guideposts” for educational leaders (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). However, ethical codes or standards alone are insufficient to train aspiring leaders and principals (Lashway, 1996) as ethical codes are rooted in accountability instead of professional responsibility (Cranston, 2013).

**Ethics training in principal preparation programs.** With the growing emphasis on ethics for educational leaders, many scholars in the field of educational leadership began to advocate for the teaching of ethics in the preparation of educational leaders at the university level (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). Yet, others questioned if ethics could be learned as part of educational leadership programs since ethics is intertwined with a person’s own belief system.
(Langlois & Lapointe, 2010). Some even opposed the teaching of ethics citing numerous hindrances to including it as part of the curriculum (Bowen et al., 2006).

In today’s schools, educational leaders must be proficient in ethical decision making to address the daily ethical dilemmas they face (Shapiro, 2006). Leaders cannot depend on their own instincts but must learn moral reasoning skills (Lashway, 1996). Principal preparation programs, however, have provided minimal training in ethics—failing to equip graduates with sufficient decision-making skills (Begley & Stefkovich, 2007; Bowen et al., 2006; Langlois & Lapointe, 2010). According to Dempster and Berry (2003), only 28% of surveyed principals received some training in ethics, and even less felt confident in their ability to deal with difficult ethical situations (Dempster, Freakley, & Perry, 2002).

**Methods for teaching ethics.** Ethical training is essential for educational leaders to become experienced in making ethical decisions. Training in ethics should include more than content knowledge. Theory must be coupled with practice. A dual approach combines formal theory of ethics with informal discussions centered on solving ethical dilemmas (Dempster & Barry, 2003; Wilson, 2014). Group contexts, such as professional learning communities, provide optimal settings for informal discussions in ethics (Wilson, 2014).

Engaging pre-service leaders in case studies is an effective approach to teaching ethical problem-solving skills (Begley & Stefkovich, 2007; Bowen et al., 2006; Rucinski & Bauch; 2006; Shapiro & Hassinger, 2007). There are multiple variations to the use of case studies. For example, aspiring principals may be required to do the following:

- Critique classmates’ analysis of case studies (Begley & Stefkovich, 2007).
- Participate in selecting case studies (Bowen et al., 2006).
- Write their own case studies (Shapiro, 2006).
Selecting the right outcome for case studies is not as essential as using critical thinking skills and problem solving to evaluate challenging scenarios and to determine an authentic course of action (Shapiro, 2006). The use of frameworks provides a systematic method to examine case studies from multiple perspectives (Bowen et al., 2006) and to stimulate discussion as candidates connect theory to practice (Cranston, Ehrich, & Kimber, 2003).

While case studies provide a forum for rich dialogue among colleagues, written assignments provide for self-reflection and self-critique of one’s ethical decision-making skills. Journals can be used to reflect and write about current ethical situations and potential solutions (Begley & Stefkovich, 2007; Rucinski & Bauch, 2006). Discussion and reflection on ethical codes and standards can prepare aspiring leaders to write their own personal and professional codes of ethics (Begley & Stefkovich, 2007; Shapiro, 2006).

**Related research studies.** Empirical studies on ethics training for educational leaders revealed the following:

- Current educational leaders desire additional training in ethics.
- Aspiring leaders can learn how to become ethical decision makers.
- Principals make decisions related to ethical scenarios based on perceived moral intensity.

The respective studies will be outlined below in more detail.

Dempster et al. (2002) analyzed data collected from 500 school principals in Australia and found that principals lacked training in how to make ethical decisions. The majority had received no training in making ethical decisions and requested additional professional development opportunities while serving in a principal role. Participants emphasized the need for face-to-face interaction with peers as part of the learning process; however, they favored learning communities over a university class setting. The analysis of case studies along with discussion in a learning community is suggested. Dempster et al. concluded that professional
Development in ethics should (a) develop interpersonal skills, (b) recognize the ethical components of professional practice, and (c) cultivate thinking skills as part of ethical decision making. Cherkowski, Walker, and Kutsyuruba (2015) underscored the need for additional research in knowing how to assist educational leaders in ethical decision making not only at the onset of their careers but also throughout their careers.

Langlois and Lapointe (2010) developed an ethics training program for candidates in a Canadian educational preparation program to “develop greater ethical sensitivity, judgement, and awareness” (p. 149). The framework was based on the premise that knowledge will lead one to act ethically. The 30 participants went through a five-step training program. The qualitative results revealed that participants used the content from the training program to analyze ethical challenges. The results of the quantitative data showed that through ethical training, educational leadership candidates readjusted their strengths and weaknesses related to ethics. For example, strengths decreased and weaknesses increased, creating an equalizing effect. Through the program, participants became more aware of how important ethical decision making was for their careers.

Feng (2013) conducted a study on moral intensity in which 790 Taiwanese principals participated by completing a questionnaire related to four ethical cases. He found significant differences in moral intensity between the four cases, indicating that the leaders’ ethical decisions were impacted by the moral intensity of the scenario. Feng recommended that principal preparation programs: (a) address moral intensity as it relates to ethical scenarios and case studies; (b) provide students with exposure to a variety of ethical dilemmas and possible solutions; (c) urge students to reflect on past ethical decisions and discuss with peers; and (d) assist students in understanding disharmony in contrasting cultural and ethical codes.

Development of MCEE and *ProEthica*
Development of MCEE. Concerned about inconsistencies among teacher preparation programs regarding professional ethics, the Education Testing Service (ETS) hosted the 2012 Educator Ethics Symposium (“ProEthica,” 2017). Until that time, ETS’s work since its inception in 1947 had been to provide assessments that measure academic knowledge and skills. Some of ETS’s most well-known assessments have been the SAT for college placement, Graduate Record Examination (GRE), College-Level Examination Program (CLEP), and the Praxis tests for teacher licensure (“Educational Testing Service,” 2017). Recommendations from the 2012 symposium, however, led ETS to initiate a movement that would transcend the assessment solely of knowledge and skills. The recommendations included the following:

- Development of a national code of ethics for educators.
- Pre-service and in-service instruction aligned with a national code.

These recommendations led ETS, in conjunction with University of Phoenix and the National Network of State Teachers of the Year (NNSTOY), to sponsor in 2014 the development of the Model Code of Ethics for Educators (MCEE) (McCabe & Davis, 2015). In 2015, the MCEE was adopted by the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC, n.d.).

The rationale provided for the MCEE is that it is an answer to the disparity among the various states’ regulatory codes of conduct, ethical principles, dispositional standards, etc. According to NASDTEC (as cited in “Model Code,” n.d.), “These disparities diminish the ability of the education profession to establish for itself the baseline behaviors that society can and should expect of professional educators and indeed what a practitioner can and should expect of
him or herself” (para. 3). Therefore, the five principles outlined below were adopted to establish a baseline:

**Principle I: Responsibility to the Profession.** The professional educator is aware that trust in the profession depends upon a level of professional conduct and responsibility that may be higher than required by law. This entails holding one and other educators to the same ethical standards.

**Principle II: Responsibility for Professional Competence.** The professional educator is committed to the highest levels of professional and ethical practice, including demonstration of the knowledge, skills and dispositions required for professional competence.

**Principle III: Responsibility to Students.** The professional educator has a primary obligation to treat students with dignity and respect. The professional educator promotes the health, safety and wellbeing of students by establishing and maintaining appropriate verbal, physical, emotional and social boundaries.

**Principle IV: Responsibility to the School Community.** The professional educator promotes positive relationships and effective interactions, with members of the school community, while maintaining professional boundaries.

**Principle V: Responsible and Ethical Use of Technology.** The professional educator considers the impact of consuming, creating, distributing and communicating information through all technologies. The ethical educator is vigilant to ensure appropriate boundaries of time, place and role are maintained when using electronic communication. (“Model Code,” n.d.)

For each of the principles listed above, the MCEE provides from 15 to 23 indicators that serve to demonstrate the principle. There are 86 total indicators. For example, an indicator for
Principle I includes “Taking responsibility and credit only for work actually performed or produced, and acknowledging the work and contributions made by others.” Principle II may be demonstrated by “Protecting students from any practice that harms or has the potential to harm students.” An indicator of Principle III is “Respecting the dignity, worth, and uniqueness of each individual student including, but not limited to, actual and perceived gender, gender expression, gender identity, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and culture.” Principle IV may be evidenced by “Considering the risks that multiple relationships might impair objectivity and increase the likelihood of harm to students’ learning and well-being or diminish educator effectiveness.” Finally, an example of an indicator for Principle V includes “Using social media responsibly, transparently, and primarily for purposes of teaching and learning per school and district policy. The professional educator considers the ramifications of using social media and direct communication via technology on one’s interactions with students, colleagues, and the general public.”

**Development of ProEthica.** With the Model Code in place, ETS was then prepared to launch a product aligned with MCEE. The purpose of this product would be twofold: (a) to instruct candidates in MCEE principles and (b) to assess candidates in their ethical decision-making skills. Candidates would navigate a series of video-based interactive scenarios, participate in scaffolding practice exercises, and take an assessment that would provide a score for each module. Activities would be based on real-life situations experienced by educators. Candidates would be provided not only the opportunity to make choices but also to consider the possible consequences of those choices. Below is a summary of the module topics:

**Module 1: Introduction.** Explores the relationship between the dispositional, ethical and regulatory frameworks as they apply to educator decision making and conduct.
**Module 2: The Professional Educator.** Identifies the educator’s responsibilities to the profession.

**Module 3: The Professional Educator and the Student.** Identifies the educators’ responsibility to establish and maintain appropriate verbal, physical, emotional and social boundaries with and regarding students.

**Module 4: The Professional Educator and the School.** Addresses how educators promote effective and appropriate relationships and interactions with members of the school community while maintaining professional boundaries in and outside of the school building.

**Module 5: The Professional Educator and the Community.** Identifies how educators must reflect the values of the profession as members of the community.

**Module 6: Ethical Decision Making for the Professional Educator.** This module provides a simulation based activity in which educators will examine longterm consequences of shortterm decisions. Completion of this module will require them to apply what they have learned in previous modules as well as in this one.

**Module 7 (for Leadership Candidates Only): Leadership and the Professional Educator.** Identifies a leader’s responsibility to establish and foster an ethical and professional culture within their school by examining some of the unique ethical challenges leaders face. (“ProEthica,” 2017)

Upon completion, candidates download a certificate of completion as evidence of proficiency in the MCEE principles.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

The ProEthica pilot was conducted with two sets of participants: (1) graduate students enrolled in an educational leadership foundations course and (2) undergraduate teacher
candidates enrolled in a general foundations of education course. Data included the results of participant scores for each module, written reflections from individual participants, and notes from focus group discussions. Data reports and analyses are divided below into those for the graduate leadership candidates and those for the undergraduate teacher candidates.

**Data Analysis for Leadership Candidates**

Leadership participants included 18 graduate students enrolled in a foundations course for educational leaders. They participated in the *ProEthica* pilot over the course of one semester. Of the 18 students, 6 were male and 12 were female; 14 of them were in the Administration and Supervision Program for principal preparation; 3 were in the Reading Specialist Program; and 1 student was in the Teaching and Learning Program. The participants held a variety of positions with 15 in a K-12 school, 1 in preschool, and 2 in a university. See Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Leadership Candidates: Demographics |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td>n = 18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Specialist</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching &amp; Learning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Position</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Interventionist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior Specialist</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math Coach</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool Director</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Staff</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substitute Teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Student Coordinator</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Quantitative data analysis for leadership candidates. The ProEthica program for Educational Leaders consisted of seven modules. The first module was an introduction. The remaining six modules provided knowledge about how to respond ethically in a variety of school-based scenarios. Each module concluded with a summative assessment. The summative assessment consisted of multiple-choice questions related to ethical scenarios. Participants had to complete the assessment before moving on to the next module. The mean, median, mode, and standard deviation of the class on each assessment are included in Table 2. Participants scored the highest on the module entitled “The Professional Educator and the School” (M=92.13) and the lowest on the module for “Leadership and the Professional Educator” (M=86.11). The median score for all six modules was a consistent 91.67. The overall mean score for all participants on the six modules was 89.43 with a standard deviation of 5.56. The highest individual participant average on all six modules was 95.83, and the lowest individual participant average on all six modules was 75.00. In summary, participants performed well on the ProEthica module assessments, indicating that students were able to answer questions correctly about ethical situations by applying concepts learned throughout the training.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>Mdn</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2: The Professional Educator</td>
<td>88.43</td>
<td>91.67</td>
<td>91.67</td>
<td>10.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: The Professional Educator and the Student</td>
<td>88.89</td>
<td>91.67</td>
<td>95.84</td>
<td>11.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: The Professional Educator and the School</td>
<td>92.13</td>
<td>91.67</td>
<td>91.67</td>
<td>8.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: The Professional Educator and the Community</td>
<td>90.74</td>
<td>91.67</td>
<td>91.67</td>
<td>9.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6: Ethical Decision Making for the Professional Educator</td>
<td>90.28</td>
<td>91.67</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>8.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7: Leadership and the Professional Educator</td>
<td>86.11</td>
<td>91.67</td>
<td>91.67</td>
<td>11.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Student Average on Total Modules</td>
<td>89.43</td>
<td>90.98</td>
<td>93.06</td>
<td>5.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qualitative data analysis for leadership candidates. After completing the ProEthica course, participants completed a reflection template to summarize each of the modules,
contemplate what they learned, and compare the content of *ProEthica* with dispositions and a biblical worldview. The participants also provided feedback on the use of *ProEthica* in a graduate-level course in leadership.

**Module difficulty level for leadership candidates.** Participants identified which scenarios presented in *ProEthica* were the easiest to resolve and which were the most challenging. Table 3 provides the frequency of participant responses regarding each module. The majority of participants conveyed that the scenarios in Module 5, “The Professional Educator and the Community,” and Module 6, “Ethical Decision Making for the Professional Educator,” were the easiest scenarios to choose an appropriate path of action. In Module 5, the teachers were drinking alcohol prior to a school event and sharing confidential information in public. In reflecting on why the scenario in Module 5 was easiest to solve, one participant explained, “The majority of educators would never speak this way about the families of their students.” Another participant said, “It is obvious that you should not consume alcohol prior to a school activity or discuss private family information in the public.” In Module 6, social media complicated a scenario when a male teacher gave a female student a ride home after a school trip. In reflecting on the scenario in Module 6, one participant declared that it was a straightforward decision because “the teacher should not have been alone with the student under any circumstances.”

The majority of participants considered that the most difficult scenarios were in Module 4, “The Professional Educator and the School,” and Module 6, the same scenario identified above as an easy case to solve. In Module 4, a new teacher observed a veteran teacher verbally abusing students while others in the school community tolerated the teacher’s behavior. In reflecting on this scenario, one participant stated, “Everyone wanted to wash their hands clean and not interfere with the teacher’s reported abuse of his students.” Another participant noted it
would be difficult because you would face resistance for questioning what is accepted by the school culture. In reflecting on Module 6, one participant expressed her difficulty with the scenario, “I felt it was difficult because we all know it will be easier to just take the student home, but we can’t because of the safety of our job.” Others commented that, as educators, their first instinct was to ensure the student’s safety in getting home.

Table 3

Leadership Candidates: Frequency of Easy/Difficult Scenarios

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Easy</th>
<th>Difficult</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Introduction to Ethics</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: The Professional Educator</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: The Professional Educator and the Student</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: The Professional Educator and the School</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: The Professional Educator and the Community</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6: Ethical Decision Making for the Professional Educator</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7: Leadership and the Professional Educator</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Leadership candidate perspectives on dispositions. When asked to reflect on how the ProEthica training supported the dispositions of the university’s School of Education, participants overwhelmingly stated that the training aligned with the university’s dispositions of social responsibility, commitment, reflective practice, integrity, and professionalism. One participant commented that the two “align perfectly.” All participants (n=18) stated the ProEthica training focused on the dispositions of integrity and professionalism. Seventeen participants noted that the ProEthica training aligned with the disposition of social responsibility. Some participants did not feel the connection between ProEthica and the dispositions of commitment and reflection were as strong as the others. Participants commented that the dispositions of commitment and reflection were not explicitly mentioned in ProEthica but were indirectly related.
Leadership candidate perspective on biblical worldview. Participants were asked to explain how they perceived ProEthica to align with a biblical worldview. Fourteen participants confirmed that ProEthica was congruent with a biblical worldview. Two participants stated that it did not directly align with a biblical worldview, and two participants did not specify in their responses. Participants noted that while ProEthica was not based on the Bible, it matched moral principles found in the Bible such as honesty and integrity. Others reported that ProEthica aligned with a biblical worldview because it placed students and their needs first. A few participants noted a conflict between the training in ProEthica and the biblical command to show compassion and care for others. For example, one participant stated, “If any part of the ProEthica course may not have aligned with a biblical worldview, it would be in the way the course addressed every issue as if human compassion should be put aside for the regulatory framework.” Another participant echoed this sentiment, “I believe God would want you to help those students that are struggling with emotional needs and to help them see Him through those situations, but I understand that, because of rules and laws within the school system, this is not really ethical in this setting.”

Appropriateness for graduate-level leadership course: Overall, participants conveyed that the ProEthica training was appropriate for inclusion in a graduate level leadership class. Seventeen participants affirmed that the program should be included. One participant was unsure because of technical difficulties she experienced while trying to navigate the program. Participants noted several positive features of the ProEthica program such as real-life scenarios ($f=10$), emphasis on decision-making skills ($f=6$), ethical guidelines to follow ($f=5$), and the ability to practice ethical scenarios before facing them on the job ($f=3$). Some participants pointed out that the material presented in ProEthica was more beneficial to first-time teachers.
Others mentioned that the course needed to place more emphasis on how leaders, instead of educators in general, face ethical situations.

**Data Analysis for Teacher Candidates**

Teacher education participants included 44 undergraduate students enrolled in a foundational course for preservice teachers. As with the graduate students, they also participated in the pilot over the span of one semester. Of the 44 students, 7 were male and 37 were female. See Table 4.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>84.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Quantitative data analysis for teacher candidates.** The ProEthica program for teacher candidates was overall the same. It excluded Module 7, which addressed leadership issues, and the context for enrichment activities in the other modules was targeted more for preservice teachers rather than for leaders. Otherwise, the scenarios themselves were identical and the practice activities were very similar. Table 5 reports the mean, median, mode, and standard deviation for teacher candidates. Teacher candidates scored the highest on the module entitled “The Professional Educator and the Community” ($M=94.70$) and the lowest on the module for “The Professional Educator and the Student” ($M=89.21$). The median score for four of the five modules assessed was 83.33—the exception being for Module 5, which focused on the Community. The overall mean score for teacher candidates on the five modules was 92.05 with a standard deviation of 9.02. The highest individual participant average on all five modules was 100.00, and the lowest individual participant average on all six modules was 91.67. In summary,
teacher candidate results were higher than those of the leadership candidates; however, teacher candidates did not complete Module 7, which resulted in the lowest scores for the leadership participants.

Table 5

*Teacher Candidates: Means, Median, Mode, and Standard Deviations of the Module Quizzes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>Mdn</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2: The Professional Educator</td>
<td>89.58</td>
<td>83.33</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>11.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: The Professional Educator and the Student</td>
<td>89.21</td>
<td>83.33</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>9.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: The Professional Educator and the School</td>
<td>92.24</td>
<td>83.33</td>
<td>91.67</td>
<td>7.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: The Professional Educator and the Community</td>
<td>94.70</td>
<td>87.50</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>7.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6: Ethical Decision Making for the Professional Educator</td>
<td>94.57</td>
<td>83.33</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>7.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Student Average on Total Modules</td>
<td>92.05</td>
<td>79.17</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>9.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Qualitative data analysis for teacher candidates.** Teacher candidates completed the same reflection template as the leadership candidates.

**Module difficulty level for teacher candidates.** Table 6 indicates that the largest percentage of teacher candidates (43%) agreed with leadership candidates, conveying that the scenario in Module 5, “The Professional Educator and the Community,” was the easiest. One participant stated,

> It was almost hard to watch the teachers drinking in public, shaming their students and their families’ private lives, without regard for the people around them. I wouldn’t have cared whether or not I wanted to be included with the group. I would have spoken up about not speaking that way and would have reported it to my administrator immediately.

This situation is a blatant disregard for the integrity of the profession and is a breach of conduct and confidentiality.

Other comments were similar in nature to those of leadership candidates:
• “The educators are drinking and gossiping, both of which I choose to avoid as a Christian. Since the Bible gives clear instructions on being above reproach and refraining from gossiping, it was clear to me that—if I were the new teacher, Mr. Arnold—I would need to remove myself from the situation and explain why.”

• “The teachers were just being bluntly rude when they were talking about the students and their families. Teachers are supposed to be supportive of their students and be there for the families.”

• “It’s okay to show concern, but it is not acceptable to degrade the lives of the students and their families.”

• “Under no circumstances should I talk badly about my students (especially in the presence of teachers, parents, and other members of the community!).”

• “It’s ignorant to drink at all right before driving, but especially right before going to a school event.”

Two participants astutely noted that, apart from the drinking and gossiping, the teachers were speaking about confidential information in a public area where others could easily hear.

Unlike the leadership candidates, who were split with 33% identifying Module 6 as the easiest dilemma and 33% identifying it as the most difficult, 59% of teacher candidates clearly identified Module 6 as the most challenging for them. Only 11% selected Module 6 as the easiest. This might be due in part to the undergraduate participants being closer in age to the high school student in the scenario. They might have related more immediately to the predicament of the teenager as reflected in the following comments:
• “It is a hassle to find someone to be with you as an escort, and sometimes parents really are not available. But I also understand that a student and teacher should not be alone in a car.”

• “You can’t be alone with the students, but you also can’t just leave them at the school.”

One participant’s extended response revealed an understanding of the multifaceted complexities of the dilemma:

At first, Module 6 seemed very obvious, as I know that teachers should never be alone with a student in a confined space like a car. However, it was also very frustrating. It was a massive inconvenience to the spouse, the principal, and any others who needed to come and assist. In the end, a teacher dropping a student off at home became a fiasco that woke up the principal, the spouse, the kids, and potentially other colleagues.

Sometimes the right thing is the least convenient for the most people. Additionally, with the texts, it was very tempting to say right off the bat that the student should not text the teacher. I am not convinced the cold shoulder would have been the most effective.

Ideally, the text should be shown to the spouse, but I also think you should remind the student that texting a teacher is inappropriate. If the problem persists, then you can ignore them or take other actions.

Interestingly, the 11% of students who identified Module 6 as the easiest did not do so because they thought it was actually easy to resolve. On the contrary, they identified it as a conundrum with no straightforward solution. Their rationale for selecting it as the “easiest” related more to their own ability to decide quickly how problematic the choice would be. Therefore, in their explanations, they were describing their own ability to identify with ease the complexities of a dilemma rather than how easy the choices actually would be within that
dilemma. In essence, they were in agreement with the others regarding how challenging the situation would be to navigate.

Table 6

Teacher Candidates: Frequency of Easy/Difficult Scenarios

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>$f$ Easy</th>
<th>$f$ Difficult</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Introduction to Ethics</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: The Professional Educator</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: The Professional Educator and the Student</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: The Professional Educator and the School</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: The Professional Educator and the Community</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6: Ethical Decision Making for the Professional Educator</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher candidate perspectives on dispositions. Undergraduates agreed overwhelmingly with the graduate students that all of the SCRIP dispositions were reflected in ProEthica, whether explicitly or implicitly. They also agreed that the two that were not as explicit but that were certainly implemented were commitment and reflective practice. Below are some of the statements made by participants:

- “I believe it could have emphasized more reflective practice along with social responsibility.”
- “ProEthica did not fully mention the use of reflective practice.”

Others, however, noted that all five dispositions were integrated throughout, whether explicitly stated by the same term in SCRIP or by implicitly requiring the display of the disposition throughout the decision-making processes:

- “Different words were used, but the same ideas were maintained.”
- “Reflective practice was not explicitly mentioned during this program, but the fourth module’s scenario involved the reflection of another educator’s methods.”
It seemed to be lost on some undergraduates that the entire exercise of resolving the *ProEthica* scenarios and of reevaluating their choices was an application of reflective thinking.

**Teacher candidate perspectives on biblical worldview.** In focus groups, the undergraduates discussed specific biblical principles evident in the various modules and identified the following alignment:

**Module 2:** “In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us” (Titus 2:7-8, NIV). (Scenario: A highly regarded veteran teacher’s performance plummets inexplicably, and colleagues struggle over whether or not to get involved.)

**Module 3:** “The integrity of the upright guides them, but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them.” (Proverbs 11:3, ESV). “For we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord’s sight but also in the sight of man.” (2 Corinthians 8:21, NIV). (Scenario: A teacher considers the degree to which he should provide extra academic assistance to various students and when, where, and how he should do so.)

**Module 3:** “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me’” (Matthew 25:40, NIV). (Scenario: A teacher observes how verbally harsh another teacher is with elementary students. Although others see it as tough love, she struggles with the degree to which this might be abusive behavior.)

**Module 5:** “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen” (Ephesians 4:29, NIV). “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Philippians 4:8, NIV). (Scenario: Before
attending a football game, a group of teachers meet at a restaurant where they drink alcohol, speak derogatorily of students and parents, and discuss confidential information in front of the waitress and other customers.)

Module 6: “Abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:22, KJV). (After a late-evening debate competition, a male high-school teacher considers what to do with a female student who cannot get a hold of her parents and who is the only one remaining without a ride home.)

Implications

The historical strength of biblically-based universities has been their ability to instruct candidates in faith, morals, and ethics. These universities continue to face theoretical, philosophical, and biblical concerns when state and national secular organizations seek to address societal issues through licensure and accreditation mandates, potentially threatening fundamental changes in program emphasis. The pilot project provides an initial study as to ProEthica’s possible validity as an ethical teaching and assessment component in the curriculum. While ProEthica is written from a secular worldview, the MCEE principles and indicators upon which it is based appear to have complementary agreement with biblical worldview and dispositional emphasis already practiced in faith-based universities. This study provides encouraging results. Continued study is recommended to determine the breadth of agreement and functional use of ProEthica in this and other faith-based colleges and universities.

Conclusion

Two key questions guided this pilot study: Can ethical assessment programs, such as ProEthica, be used in alignment with the Christian university’s biblical mission, vision, and philosophical worldview? Are proposed situational dilemmas, assessed by the program’s relativistic ethics responses, counterproductive to established values espoused in Scripture-based
dispositions? Analysis of results from the pilot study of ProEthica, at the leadership and the teacher candidate’s levels, reported a positive alignment with the university’s worldview and dispositional values and beliefs. Researchers also found agreement with ProEthica’s engagement of participants in case study scenarios to be an effective approach to teaching and assessing ethical problem-solving skills. For the faith-based university, though, ProEthica’s value is not in being a stand-alone ethical instructional methodology. Integration of the ProEthica program, for the faith-based university, becomes applicable as an extension of an already established biblical foundation embedded within its curricular emphasis. As an application activity, the use of ProEthica enables the Christian university an evaluation tool that meets state and national agendas and augments its biblical identity.
References


