

Reviewed by Denver J. Fowler
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Strike’s text is one book in a series of books dedicated to enhancing the capacity of school leaders to improve the quality of teaching so that all students learn at high levels. This is in part of a series of books supported by the Leadership for Learning initiative of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) (http://www.aasa.org/). The AASA is the largest association in the world representing school system leaders and, in particular, school district superintendents. The Leadership for Learning books address a broad range of knowledge and skills that school superintendents, exceptional principals, and researchers believe are essential to ensure effective

Kenneth Strike has written an important book that will surely become a prized text in every school leader’s bookcase. His book, *Ethical Leadership in Schools: Creating Community in an Environment of Accountability*, will be read initially with interest by administrators struggling with the ambiguities of their leadership role” (E. Joseph Schneider, Ethical Leadership in Schools, 2007, p. ix). Perhaps one of the most significant themes throughout this book is that it is written in such a way that it could serve as a general reminder to school leaders everywhere about the importance of remaining true to the premise that their job is really all about the children. This is important for current and aspiring school administrators because of the increasing demands placed on individuals in these positions. Those demands and expectations can make it easy for school leaders to forget what their job is really all about, the children. Although the book does not provide a simple guideline on what defines ethical leadership, it does address the everyday life of a school leader and the ethical dilemmas in which they face. The author expresses an openness to the fact that many of the dilemmas school leaders face are seldom met with easy answers. Strike’s book aims to answer a fundamental question, How shall we live well together? The text contends that schools should be good educational communities of students, parents, families, and supporters.

In this book, Strike argues that ethics are all about creating and sustaining that very reality. The book is an easy read and does an excellent job at exploring real dilemmas that face school leaders everywhere. Within the text, Strike openly recognizes that many school leaders are going to face constant challenges in their efforts to maximize their limited resources to provide maximum benefit to all students while also needing to decide what will produce the greatest good for the greatest number of students. These are challenges that
all school leaders, regardless of demographics, can relate to.

*Ethical Leadership in Schools: Creating Community in an Environment of Accountability*, offers several ethical dilemmas typical of what school administrators will likely face, and offers ethical ways of coming to grips with such dilemmas. These ethical dilemmas are offered in the form of scenarios in each chapter. This is particularly helpful since school leaders are often required to make judgments about what is desirable and at the same time possible for all their students, regardless of their different needs. Strike contends that this is called leading from the principle of equal respect, that is, the duty to respect all people is not dependent on their particular capacities and their potential. In usual fashion, Strike argues that our communities are stronger and better when all are cared for. This is a recurring theme within the book as well. Strike offers several ideas and recommendations for how to sell this belief to all stakeholders involved including students, parents, families, and supporters. This is very beneficial as it offers a rationale for school leaders to do the right thing as well as methods for convincing others to act accordingly. It is probable that school leaders will revisit Strike’s text when preparing ways to convince stakeholders to help in pursuing actions that support a commitment to justice, fairness, and respect.

Perhaps one of the most beneficial items in the text is Strike’s intention to help principals understand that the idea of democratic leadership. Strike contends that democratic leaders make decision democratically. These democratic leaders make decisions based on two criteria. Democratic decisions are those where “the interests of all citizens of the polity”¹ are fairly considered” (p. 95) and “decisions are made democratically when all citizens of the polity have a fair chance to influence decisions via voice and/or authority” (p. 95). No only does this give

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¹ Strike’s definition of polity is defined as a certain type of community in which decisions are made in a way that respects the political equality of all citizens. Strike defines political equality to consist of two things: One, people have equal interest and no one is inherently entitled to better treatment than anyone else. Second, people are entitled to a fair say in decision-making.
members of the school community a voice but while doing so he maintains that it does not confer upon them authority, contending instead that authority resides with the school leader. Strike believes that this means the principal needs to understand what it means to be mindful conduit of legislative authority as well as what it takes to educate all stakeholders in regards to the legitimacy of his role.

In chapter 1, titled *Moral Principles and Moral Principals?* Strike offers a scenario in which he uses it to introduce some issues surrounding the ethics of leadership. Strike contends that ethics has often been understood to involve two basic questions: What is good? and furthermore, What is right? The questions on how to live well together focuses the discussion of these two questions on the nature of good communities. “What is good?” concerns the fundamental aims of communities, while “What is right?” concerns the principles and shared understandings that enable social cooperation. Strike encourages the reader to view ethical leadership as the art of creating good school communities. He does an excellent job of offering many possibilities on how your stakeholders may feel in regards to the scenario given. In chapter 1, the focus is to introduce many issues surrounding ethical leadership while offering information on ethics and leadership, ethics and morality, ethics and pluralism, lying, trust and community, and three historical approaches. Since the book is about the ethics of leadership, I feel that chapter 1 gives all readers, regardless of experience in school leadership, a good foundation in the ethics of leadership and how it relates to morality. It accomplishes this while encouraging the reader to view ethical leadership as the art of creating good school communities. Strike insists that the role of the educational leader is to create good educational communities and that these such communities should have worthy aims and a fair basis of cooperation, thus his aim is to help school leaders gather a good understanding of what a good educational community really is.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to discussing the goals of education. Strike argues that there should be four broad goals: students should become economically competent, students should become good citizens and moral people, students should be capable of examining their life, as well
as discovering ideas, activities, and relationships that enrich their lives. Strike states, “these goals are big-tented and can serve as the goals of public schools” (p. 19). The scenario offered in this chapter is an extension of the scenario offered in chapter 1. Arguably, Strike does this intentionally so that the reader can continue to get a feel for such issues.

Also in this chapter Strike introduces what he believes are the four central goals of education: human capital development, the capacity for an examined life, citizenship, and the development of those capacities that enhance experience. He addresses questions directly related to these four central goals such as “What kind of curriculum does this require?” and “What kind of teaching does this require?” This is followed by three conclusions that can be drawn from this discussion. The first is that education should emphasize cognitive development. Strike states that “Our children should grow in their capacity to reason, assess evidence, deliberate with others about common goals, appreciate what is genuinely worthwhile, and understand and appreciate the views and cultures of others” (p. 40). Strike contends that cognitive development is a kind of intersection where all these goals meet.

The second conclusion focuses directly on the education that we offer our young people and how it should be consistent with pluralism and individual variability. It is a fact that people come from different cultures and have different capacities. What Strike is suggesting here is that in education there is no such thing as one-size-fits-all and that this approach would not provide variability that would need to be required in order to enable people to discern the life that is best for them. Strike states, “a good education provides the opportunity to explore a range of human practices: art, music, sport, and craft need to be there along with academic subjects” (p. 41). This statement coincides with Strike’s idea that basic knowledge and skills are developed as students start to form an understanding of the direction they want to go in life and he feels there should be an opportunity for them to take these different paths after they develop this direction.

The third and last conclusion in this chapter lends itself to the thought that cultural opportunities, in which public
schools offer, need to be big-tented enough to accommodate the diversity reflective of our diverse society. Strike uses Music as an example. He contends that students need to be able to learn to appreciate the music of their own cultures and that of others. Strike offers three basic guidelines using the example of Music. The first is that while the music that is taught may reflect who is in a given school, students in any particular school should not experience the music curriculum as an act of cultural or religious domination. Secondly, the goal should be to learn and appreciate what is best in a variety of musical traditions being explored, not simply focused on just reinforcing the preferences that students already bring with them to school.

Lastly, he suggests that students should learn to come to appreciate the traditions of others as well as their own traditions. Strike concludes the chapter by making several comments on the implications of these ideas while respecting the two major themes of this book as well as community and accountability, and suggests three items we should be careful to avoid as we continue to strive to make schools accountable. These three items are:

- Seek a way to make schools accountable for cognitive development
- Seek a way to make schools accountable for implementing a broad and flexible education for all
- Seek a way to make schools accountable for avoiding cultural dominance while remaining big-tented

Strike contends that if your school is to be a good school, you must view the test results as a measure but not as the meaning of education. What this means for educators is that our school and our school community must interpret the meaning of test results, and to do that effectively, we need a defensible conception of the kind of education we wish to provide. The four goals Strike discusses in this chapter are a perfect example of what type of framework is needed for such a conception.

Chapter 3, *Constitutional Essentials* Part I, focuses on the discussion of two essential freedoms: intellectual and religious liberty. In this chapter Strike discusses both intellectual and religious liberty and their role in creating good educational communities. He argues that the goals
of education that are described within the chapter require that we create intellectual communities in our schools and contends that free and open debate should be both cherished and protected. Strike also supports the idea that “we must give provisional authority to certain ideas because they are essential tools of thought” (p. 19). In this chapter there is a deliberate emphasis on the current debate about creationism and intelligent design. He discusses the freedoms of conscience and religious liberty and shows why religious ideas cannot be given provisional authority in the public school sector. He begins the chapter by developing what he calls constitutional essentials, in which he also calls ‘the core convictions of any political community’. What Strike is implying here is that these essentials are the political community’s most basic answers to the reoccurring question, ‘How shall we live together?’ The main task of chapter 3 (and the next two chapters) is to help create a way of understanding these constitutional essentials in which Strike states, “are appropriate for an educational community and that serve the broad educational goals discussed in Chapter 2” (p. 44). He believes that in order to develop your school into a strong and healthy educational community, a thorough understanding of these constitutional essentials is the crucial element.

Finally, Chapter 3 argues two main central ideas. The first is that inquiry, discussion, and debate should be characterized within the classroom and how many educators in recent years have argued that American schools are (or should be) characterized by what is called academic press. This stems from the idea that we should recognize that academic achievement is the central purpose of schooling and furthermore that all schools should be setting high expectations for student achievement. This should be implemented along with the thought in mind that no conception of academic press that does not include a central place for the debate of important ideas is worthy of American democracy. After all, it is the ideas that are vigorously tested and contested that are fundamental to the goals of an excellent education. Strike adds, “However, the classroom must also recognize the authority of those ideas that function as the tools of thought and inquiry in various domains and that are essential if free and open debate is to be a means for the pursuit of truth rather than a babble of self-assertion” (p.
63). Strike feels that these intellectual tools should be central in what we expect our children to know. Secondly, Strike argues that religious ideas are ideas. He believes that they should be distinguished from other ideas for the simple fact that free societies whose members tend to come from diverse religious traditions may be able to avoid violations of conscience and sectarian strife only by requiring that public institutions be religiously neutral. According to Strike, this means that public schools may not endorse religious ideas, and it means that although public schools may discuss religion in areas such as history or literature, they may not give religious ideas authority in the classroom. Chapter 3 reminds the reader that school leaders are expected to be accountable and while most of this accountability lies with content standards and high stake tests that test mastery of academic content measures, they do not measure what is defined by most as a good education and furthermore the results may be pursued in mis-educative ways. Chapter 3 also contends that as a school leader, one must ensure that teaching and learning are within the service of a reasonable conception of education. Strike writes, “the best way to do this is to create a learning organization in your school wherein a praiseworthy vision of education is debated and prized” (p. 63).

Chapter 4, *Constitutional Essentials* Part II, discusses equality and opportunity, resource allocation, and multicultural community. Within this chapter Strike argues that we are more likely to achieve equality of opportunity if school leaders promote a school environment in which all stakeholders have the sense that they are a community and have the viewpoint that “we are all in this together,” where the success of each stakeholder involved contributes to the betterment of all, and where the weakest and most vulnerable are cared for. Strike explores three major discussions within this chapter while the focus is on one of the constitutional essentials in that liberal democracy is equality, and how equality applies to schooling.

The first argument made by Strike is that equal opportunity should be viewed as a theory of fair competition in which children have a fair chance to succeed that does not depend on background characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, or
socioeconomic status. Secondly, Strike discusses the ethics surrounding resource allocation with an emphasis on how we should treat high-needs students. His contention is that we should approach resource allocation with the thought in mind that each student is entitled to the resources that are required to enable a child to achieve any given set of capacities that are within his or her reach while letting that generate and facilitate a life of dignity within the community. In the third and last discussion within the chapter, Strike suggests that we need to create educational communities and that these communities should be characterized by a sense that ‘we are all in it together’. Strike states, “I argue that such communities enable a number of educational goals, including the development of good citizens and the pursuit of the examined life” (p. 66). He believes that this type of community also generates an appropriate conception of multiculturalism which also makes it a lot easier to achieve equal opportunity.

Also within the chapter Strike gives an excellent introduction to the background surrounding equality in education. It should be noted that Strike examines Brown v. Board of Education and its aftermath, while also examining other cases that were directly affected by the case. At the end of the chapter, the author promotes three big ideas in regards to equality, the limitations of test scores, and the importance of building a sense of community. Strike believes that in order for a school leader to promote an equal education in an age of accountability, he/she should approach the task with these three big ideas in mind.

The first big idea is that educational outcomes and the life prospects that are contingent on them should not depend on morally arbitrary characteristics such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and/or gender. If such a commitment is properly understood, it most definitely will lead to a commitment that schools, insofar as they are able, should eliminate the effects of these characteristics on achievement.

The second idea is that although test scores that measure achievement in selected areas are a useful measure to the extent to which equal opportunity has been achieved, they do not necessarily exhaust its meaning. Strike contends
that educators and school leaders must make a commitment to realizing the larger conception of the education and the role it plays in the lives of their students. This larger conception should consider such elements as citizenship, the examined life, and the acquisition of capacities that help enable students to appreciate experience, all have weight. Strike observes, “It is this conception of education that must be equalized. We may not reduce the education made available to minority or disadvantaged students so as to focus more exclusively on raising test scores” (p. 90).

Thirdly, school leaders must understand that community is important. Creating the sense within the community that ‘we are all in this together’, will make many educational goals become more attainable as well as promoting equal opportunity and multiculturalism. When relationships among students and their families are shaped by values such as loyalty and belonging, it is much easier to create and achieve an environment in which students learn from one another and adequate resources are made readily available to meet the needs of the community’s most vulnerable members.

Chapter 5 examines the connections between the concepts of democracy, community, and accountability. Strike gives special attention to the conflict between different norms of legitimate authority and also how these generate role conflicts for leaders with regards to accountability. He argues, “accountability is not merely a matter of raising test scores. Leaders are accountable to professional standards and ideas and to members of the local community as well” (p. 19). Throughout chapter 5 Strike argues that democracy is not only a way of effectively making decisions; it is also a way of legitimating them. He reasons, “Members of democratic societies would be unlikely to accept the decisions of a monarch even if those decisions were routinely wise and produced good outcomes” (p. 92). He argues that even if the decisions made legitimately, the community would view them as illegitimate because they were not properly made, in other words they were made without the consent and participation of the community, and therefore such decisions would be considered undemocratic regardless if they were wise decisions. Since school leaders often have the challenge of creating democratic communities while
also acting as democratic leaders, they must also obey the decisions, of democratically elected legislatures, school boards, and state legislatures. Strike uses the scenario presented in Chapter 1, but now adding two letters for the reader to consider: one is from teachers, and the other is from a group of parents. In the letters, it is apparent that both the parents and teachers are unhappy with how you as a school leader have handled the task of aligning the curriculum in your school with the state standards. Again, Strike does an excellent job of giving real life scenarios that school leaders commonly face and the text helps the reader understand the norms found in the two letters, while also keeping a reasonable view of community and accountability. Throughout the chapter Strike examines many different provisional definitions of democracy and how democratic decisions are made. He offers that democratic decisions are made in the following two criteria’s.

- Decisions are made democratically when the interests of all citizens of the polity are fairly considered
- Decisions are made democratically when all citizens of the polity have a fair chance to influence decisions via voice and/or authority

It is here (p. 95) that Strike examines several adequate ways of defining democracy from Abraham Lincoln’s definition, to America’s definition, and to his own. This ultimately helps shape a broader term of democracy in which many views are applied. Strike also discusses the weaknesses of representative democracy and how they meet the requirements of democracy imperfectly. He argues that in capitalist society, there is always risk that the government will become plutocracy. Many times in larger political communities, influence and voice are proportionately reduced and when voice depends on monies, the rich may dominate or wield disproportionate influence. All of these are vices of representative democracy.

The arguments made in chapter 5 are generated around two broad ideas in that there are multiple norms of legitimate authority in our society and that schools as well as school leaders should be informed by a vision of accountability in which it takes into account all of these such multiple norms. School leaders must respect the sovereignty of the
legislature, as must individual results. Strike notes that expertise must be respected as well as stating, “The voices of those most immediately affected by our institutions and practices must be heard and considered” (p. 110). School leaders must be community builders and serve as the intermediaries of the school. Strike gives great definitions of each, which will benefit the reader, especially if they currently are, or have aspirations to become a school leader. He concludes the chapter with what he believes to be the best definition of democratic leadership in that “it consists of the will and ability to do these things” (p. 110), he writes this with regards to a school leader having the ability to build community as well as being an intermediary.

Chapter 6 focuses on the ethics of decision-making. Chapter 5 also touched on this in some aspects in that legitimate decision-making was the main focus as well as who had authority over decisions. Chapter 6 is more devoted to the other aspects of decision-making. Strike argues that importance should be placed on the distinction between data-driven and evidence-driven decision making. Throughout a good part of chapter 6, Strike argues for evidence-driven decision making. He also promotes “that a core idea for good educational organizations is that they need to institutionalize evidence-driven decision making in a way that makes it an ongoing collective responsibility” (p. 19).

Also in the chapter, Strike connects the idea of due process to the idea of evidence-based decision making. Since leaders are generally urged to employ data-driven decision making, Strike argues that school leaders should not think of decisions as data-driven and rather they should think of them as evidence-driven. His contention is that we need to recognize a much broader range of what counts as evidence-driven decision making while encouraging professional community. Since due process concerns the proper use of evidence, Strike argues we should think of the rules of due process as a kind of institutionalized rationality. He connects this evidence-driven decision making to due process by using two connected scenarios. Strike uses the scenario from the first chapter but asks the reader to pretend that the school is now a high school, and you are its principal. Perhaps one of the highlights of chapter 6 is Strikes section titled ‘The Anatomy of Ethical
Decision Making’ in which he contends that ‘a good
decision is one that has four characteristics’ (p. 113). They
are as follows:

- The decision is supported by evidence. This
evidence supports the claim that acting on this
decision is more likely to achieve desired ends at an
appropriate cost than other courses of action that
might be taken.
- The ends aimed at by the decision are the ends that
ought to be aimed at.
- The decision can be implemented morally.
- The decision has been legitimately achieved.

In this section Strike refers to these four characteristics as
‘Parts 1, 2, and 3’. Strike argues that Part 1 and 2 suggest
that at its core, the decision making process does involve
‘ends-means reasoning’. Part 1 suggests the ends desired
along with the most efficient or most cost-effective means
of pursuing these ends. Part 2 of Strikes definition
suggests that we must justify the ends we aim at as well as
the by what means we choose to achieve them. Thus the
ends we aim at are the ones in which we ought to aim at,
while they most definitely need to be worthy and
legitimate ends. Part 3 requires us to consider the means
we choose not just in regards to efficiency, but also with
regard to moral. In other words, we need to justify the
means in which we choose by showing they do in fact
have worthy ends. Although Strike does not specifically
discuss the legal requirements of due process, he does
however suggest several ideas about what due process
requires as it relates to ethical decision making in a more
broad sense while illustrating most of such cases in
another scenario. Here Strike adds:

Ethical decisions must be made for relevant
reasons. A relevant reason is one that serves the
legitimate goals of the organization. Schools
exist for the benefit of students, particularly to
educate them. Hence, making decisions for
relevant reasons, in educational contexts, means
that decisions are justified primarily in terms of
their beneficial effects for students. (p. 124)

Chapter 6 reminds the school leader that it is their job to
institutionalize the rule of reason in your school. As a
school leader it is your job to make good ethical decisions
in regards to several items including educational programs,
personnel decisions, and discipline. These decisions should be made fairly and this means there must be procedures in place for gathering and weighing evidence, which in a sense, is the essence of due process.

Chapter 7 is entitled “Professional Community and the Ethics of Accountability.” The chapter focuses primarily on the ethics of accountability. Strike argues that accountability has the potential to do both good and to do harm. His contention is that accountability, in a school that can be collectively reflective about what it means to have a good education as well as how to provide it, will be able to not only succeed, but also effectively employ those accountability measures needed to improve. Schools that are not able to be collectively reflective are likely to suffer from the certain potential evils of accountability such as gaming, goal erosion, and motivational displacement.

Strike contends that educators should be accountable because accountability programs in some ways provide educators with incentives to perform in a public system where there is almost no existence (or few incentives) for job performance. With a successful incentive system in place, we as educators can devise valid and reliable measures of everything we wish to accomplish as well as a way to devise incentives that adequately motivate educators to succeed on such measures. Educators also need not to provide incentives for undesirable measures. Although Strike, admittedly is doubtful that in the world of education, either of these things can be implemented adequately. Here he states, “If we fail, then we open up public education to three vices of accountability. I will call these goal displacement, motivational displacement, and gaming. Given that accountability is a fact of life, we need an antidote for these ills. The antidote is professional community” (p. 131). Strike argues that the cure for these vices is professional community in which he defines that as the basic idea that educators are to be accountable and what they need to be accountable for is providing their students with an excellent education.

Strike lends a great bulk of literature within chapter 7 to those three vices and how they relate to No Child Left Behind, Standards, (AYP) Benchmarks, and Test Scores. In an age when school leaders are accountable to legislature for raising test scores, standards based accountability, and reaching benchmarks, Strike does an excellent job exploring the limitations to such
accountability as well as the limitations of excessive reliance on those benchmarks and incentives. He reminds us, “this conception of standards is essential to any adequate conception of good education” (p. 141). Strike is not saying that we should reject standards-based education or benchmarks, he is implying that the cooption of the term standards by the standards as benchmarks meaning, will cause us to miss something educationally important. He also makes several points about standards as criteria of excellence. They are:

- Standards are employed to judge the excellence of performances
- Standards are things to be internalized
- Standards can be recognized only by those with sufficient expertise
- Standards connect learning to belonging
- Standards of this sort are transformative
- The mastery of standards enhances the quality of experience

Strike argues that school leaders must find a way to balance all the different forms of accountability and different norms of legitimate authority. “The school leader must be able to respect the sovereignty of the legislature and its need to monitor and motivate achievement through test-based accountability while also creating and maintaining strong professional cultures” (p. 146). Although he admits this is a difficult role that comes along with conflicting norms and expectations, Strike is confident that capable and dedicated leaders are up to the challenge. The author ends chapter 7 with several helpful sections titled Good School Communities, Good Leaders of Good Communities, and Good Leaders and Accountability. Here he reiterates the importance of community as it relates to the success of the school and how good school leaders create a school community in which people live well together. School leaders “must also find ways to honor these mandates and benchmarks while serving a praiseworthy conception of education and creating a professional, democratic, and deliberative culture in your school” (p. 148). Strike reminds us that as school leaders and educators, we must serve the legislature and resist the spirit of the age. We must find ways to meet benchmarks but also honor a higher standard of a good education. Ethical school leaders effectively create community in a world that Strike contends wants hierarchy. The author
notes that these are by no means easy tasks, but they are in fact the tasks you must accept in order to become and ethical leader.

Educators everywhere, aspiring school leaders, and active school leaders such as assistant principals, principals, and superintendents, should read this book. This book would be an excellent read for graduate students, masters students, and doctoral students, in the area of educational leadership. This text would also be beneficial to the general public in that it offers a look into the challenge that school leaders face in their attempt to create a sense of community in an environment of accountability. The scenarios offered in each chapter that deal with many different aspects of ethical dilemmas, would benefit school leaders everywhere as they face similar situations in their daily jobs. This book would also be useful in coursework preparing aspiring school leaders such as within an Educational Administrative program, Principal Licensure program, or in general, an Educational Leadership program. The author does an excellent job using scenarios throughout the text to enhance the capacity of school leaders. Since school leaders face many ethical dilemmas for which there are seldom-easy answers, these scenarios help present possible dilemmas a school leader might face, while offering possible solutions to such dilemmas. It is no wonder that this book is considered to be a major addition to the series as part of the Leadership for Learning initiative of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) (http://www.aasa.org/).

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