

Just Caring? Supervisors Talk About Working With Incompetent Teachers

Warren Phillips

Chinook's Edge Regional Division #5

Innisfail, Alberta

and

Beth Young

University of Alberta

The administrative strategy of inducing the exits of teachers whose performance has been judged incompetent has received little scholarly attention. Because of the complex moral issues involved, we view situations in which induced exits are the means to removing incompetent teachers from classrooms as a crucible for ethical questions about the enactment of caring and just administrative leadership in education. We take as the framework for our analysis the contention of some scholars that there is a necessary complementarity between – or integration of – caring and justice in both theory and practice. Drawing on data, particularly interviews, from a recent study that explored the supervisory processes leading to forced resignations, our purpose is to show how some supervisors' accounts suggested a blend of caring and justice while others did not. We hope this analysis invites reflection on what constitutes ethical supervisory practice in a difficult and morally perplexing area of administrative leadership.

La stratégie administrative qui consiste à induire l'exclusion des enseignants dont la performance a été jugée incompétente a reçu peu d'attention académiquement. Du fait des considérations morales complexes impliquées, nous percevons les situations dans lesquelles les exclusions induites constituent le moyen d'écartier de la salle de classe les professeurs incompétents comme un creuset pour le questionnement déontologique quant à la promulgation de la bienveillance et du leadership administratif en éducation. Nous prenons comme cadre à notre analyse l'affirmation de quelques spécialistes pour lesquels il y a nécessairement une complémentarité entre – ou une intégration de – la bienveillance et la justice autant dans la théorie que dans la pratique. A partir des données, particulièrement d'interviews, issues d'une étude récente qui explorait les

processus de supervision conduisant à des résignations forcées, notre but est de montrer comment certains rapports de superviseurs suggèrent une présence commune de bienveillance et de justice alors que d'autres ne le font pas. Nous espérons que cette analyse invite à la réflexion à propos de ce qui constitue une pratique de supervision déontologique dans un domaine difficile et moralement complexe du leadership administratif.

For those who acknowledge the moral nature of administrative leadership in education, the discussions over the past decade or more about the content of and relation between caring and justice have great pertinence. Although there has been considerable emphasis on the elaboration of caring and justice as separate moral orientations or as distinct but complementary virtues, some scholars have argued instead that caring and justice cannot be dichotomized. As Callan (1992) puts it, "neither the caring nor the justice worth having" (p. 430) exists independently of the other. A recent study undertaken by one of us, Warren Phillips, provides an opportunity to explore and, we think, demonstrate Callan's point.

Warren's research explored the little-discussed administrative strategy of forcing the resignations of teachers whose performance has been judged incompetent – or otherwise inducing their exits, often through early retirement. The very idea of forced resignations is repugnant to many of us and therefore, like incompetence itself, may be glossed over with silence. Indeed, Bridges (1992) suggests that administrators will, if they can, avoid dealing with incompetent teachers because of the ethical dilemmas involved. Such situations – where induced exits are the most likely way of removing incompetent teachers from classrooms – might be viewed as a crucible for issues related to the enactment of caring and just administrative leadership in education.

Our purpose here is to show how, in such situations, some supervisory relations appear to blend caring and justice while others do not. We hope that this analysis might invite a slightly different way of reflecting on what might constitute ethical supervisory practice in a difficult and morally perplexing area of administrative leadership.

Context

The notion of administrators using "induced exits" (Bridges, 1992) or forced resignations as a means of dealing with teachers who have been judged incompetent is a controversial one, for good reasons. The controversy arises from a number of sources. One source of difficulty is the related issues of

defining *incompetence* and of identifying incompetent performance, given "ambiguous criteria for incompetence" (Bridges, 1992, p. 5). Another source is the weight of moral and legal responsibility that an administrator must bear if she or he is the one who attempts to address, rather than ignore, a teacher's inadequate performance (Bridges, 1992; French, 1994). That is particularly problematic when the teacher is a veteran with tenure, either one who may once have been a competent teacher (Poole, 1994) or one who has a long history of incompetence that has been ignored or condoned by a succession of administrators (Brieschke, 1986; Bridges, 1992; French, 1994). French's study suggests that the lack of organizational support for administrators who undertake summative evaluation that leads to a forced resignation or formal termination proceedings is a significant disincentive to administrative action. For various reasons, then, administrators/ supervisors have often tended to avoid rather than address issues of marginal or incompetent performance among teachers.

Nonetheless, in many school districts, there is a small number of teachers whose "state of performance collapse" (Bridges, 1992, p. 6) is widely acknowledged by colleagues, parents, and students. Administrators acknowledge that those teachers take up a lot of administrative and supervisory time and often cause harm to students (Bridges, 1992; Phillips, 1994). In such cases some administrator faces, sooner or later, the necessity of removing the teacher from the classroom. During financially expansive times and in large school districts, administrators were often able to provide nonteaching assignments for such teachers. However, as the funds available to public schools have decreased, and the public pressures for accountability and responsiveness to parental concerns have increased, the practice of finding or creating nonteaching positions for those who are judged incompetent has generally ceased to be a viable option (Bridges, 1992).

Administrators then face a choice between proceeding to a formal dismissal or persuading a teacher to resign. There has been little scholarly examination of school administrators' experiences of and reflections on either of those processes.

The Study

The data we draw on for this paper come from a study investigating the supervisory processes that eventually led to the forced resignation of teachers whose performance had been judged incompetent. Designing and carrying out a study that would get past superficial cliches and claims was difficult.

The study involved the use of several data collection strategies, including a survey questionnaire, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews. School superintendents in Alberta were surveyed regarding the frequency of involuntary exits and the nature of inducements used to encourage teachers to leave their positions. To acquire additional information about the supervisory processes that had occurred, the files from the provincial teachers' association and the available legal judgements related to the involuntary exit of teachers for reasons of incompetence were also reviewed.

The focus of the study, however, was the semi-structured interviews of supervisors (school/district administrators) who had taken responsibility for bringing about the involuntary exits of teachers whose performance was judged to be unsatisfactory and of selected teachers who had made an involuntary exit from their teaching position. Twelve supervisory officers (school principals or central office administrators) from as many school districts were interviewed. Ten of these 12 administrators had responded to a general invitation to participate that was distributed through the Conference of Alberta School Superintendents. As well, two superintendents who refuse to engage in the practice of forced resignations were interviewed to obtain a different point of view. For ethical and practical reasons, it was not possible to interview the teachers whose resignations were forced by the administrator-participants in this study. Instead, four teachers who had experienced involuntary termination or induced exit proceedings were contacted through the provincial teachers' association and agreed to be interviewed. Both the administrators and the teachers willingly related their stories.

The goal of the interviews was to gain "an increased understanding of the ideas, feelings, motives, and beliefs" (Stainback & Stainback, 1988, p. 4) of these administrators and teachers. Since the interview data are self-reports, we cannot make claims about the behaviours of the interview participants; we deal only with their words. Indeed, the concerns and actions reported by the administrators suggest a more just and caring approach than was typical of the supervisory behaviour described in either the teachers' stories or the cases documented in the files of the provincial teachers' association. However, the administrators who participated in the study were a self-selected group, individuals with a particular interest in talking about and reflecting on this topic. They are unlikely to be administrators whose own *supervisory* performance was less than competent.

Given the limited research that has been done on the topic, an exploratory, open-ended approach was both appropriate and necessary. The

issues of caring and justice were not addressed directly during the interviews; rather, they became apparent as themes during the data analysis. Both the administrators and the teachers who participated in the study provided detailed narrative accounts of their experiences and perspectives, in spite (or perhaps because) of the pain and difficulty they had encountered. It is in these details that we find the material for this analysis and reflection.

Caring and Justice

We take as the framework for our discussion the contention by some scholars that there exists, in theory and practice, a necessary complementarity between – or even an integration of – caring and justice (e.g., Baier, 1995; Callan 1992; Deveaux, 1995; Flanagan & Jackson, 1987; Friedman, 1993; Narayan, 1995; Shogan, 1988; Starratt, 1991; Young, Staszenski, McIntyre & Joly, 1993). Our analysis follows, in particular, on Callan's argument that caring and justice "blend into a common voice" (1992, p. 430), that justice and caring form a powerful coalition.

A just perspective recognizes that persons have worth and are entitled to be respected as persons, exclusive of the relationship between the people involved. Justice entails respecting each person as a "bearer of rights" (p. 434) but not, Callan argues, in a purely abstract way. To respect a person is to want that person to "flourish," for example, to be free to make independent choices about significant life issues, to learn and to develop one's abilities, to enjoy "human intimacy and solidarity" (p. 436). We cannot, therefore, respect – that is, act justly toward – a person without taking into account the particulars of the person and the situation. That attention to particularities has often been described as characteristic of a caring orientation (e.g., Noddings, 1984). However, Callan is arguing that true justice, like caring, is particularistic and contextualized. This position is supported by Watkinson's (1993-1994) analysis of *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* jurisprudence, as demonstrated in judgments handed down by the Supreme Court of Canada.

Caring focuses on relationship – the interaction between people, their responsiveness to one another – and on the people in the relationship (Friedman, 1993; Noddings, 1984). Furthermore, people who are committed to an ethic of care generally attempt to make all relationships into caring relationships, where the primary concern is the relationship itself – how people feel and respond to each other and to the actions under consideration (Noddings, 1988, p. 219). Friedman (1993, p. 270) notes that "recognition of, and commitment to, persons in their particularity" is strongly emphasized

in an ethic of caring. A caring orientation is concerned with maintaining positive, supportive (in the sense of nurturing) relations between persons (Starratt, 1991) as the enactment of regard for an other. That particularistic attentiveness (Noddings, 1984) to the other may be enriched by a sense of respect for that other's legitimate rights as a person (Callan, 1992; Friedman, 1993; Narayan, 1995).

Without the element of respect, Callan (and others) suggests that unselfish caring may be degrading, while caring combined with a sense of respect is the foundation for community. It is the notion of community – that our welfare is intertwined with the welfare of others – that can help us to respect another's rights even when they conflict with our own or those of the persons we identify most closely with. In community, we "respond to the crises and triumphs in each other's lives" (Callan, 1992, p. 440) with acts of celebration, support, and assistance.

However, as Friedman points out, there is also "the potential for violence and harm in human relationships and human community" (1993, p. 267). It is our sense of justice as well as of caring that impels us to prevent or remedy harm to ourselves and others (Narayan, 1995). Depending on the situation, either caring or justice may be more pertinent or dominant than the other, but they also enrich or balance one another (Callan, 1992; Friedman, 1993). Narayan, for example, conceptualizes caring and justice as providing "enabling conditions" for one another (1995, p. 139). By combining justice and caring, we can take into account more – although not all (Baier, 1995; Flanagan & Jackson, 1993; Narayan, 1995; Starratt, 1991) dimensions of complex moral concerns.

Framing the Issues

Not surprisingly, the supervisors (superintendents and principals) in this study repeatedly stated as a core value their commitment to meeting the educational needs of students through public education. They felt that this commitment guided many of their actions, including their work with incompetent teachers. In that work, they were weighing and sometimes trying to balance an attitude of caring and justice for their students with caring and justice for an individual teacher whom they regarded as incapable of meeting students' educational needs. Three themes, in particular, illustrate both the difficulty and the desirability of blending caring and justice in supervisory work with teachers. Those themes are related to the importance of providing candid performance assessments; how a supervisor arrived at a decision to

induce a teacher's exit; and the question of who benefits from various actions and inactions.

The importance of providing candid assessments. Most supervisors began by emphasizing the importance of what they regarded as *just* treatment for teachers who were experiencing difficulties. That is, these supervisors spoke of fair procedures and impartiality as guides for their actions. They also identified another aspect of creating a just situation, and that was their responsibility to ensure that teachers received honest and timely feedback on the quality of their performance. They asserted that supervisors must also ensure that teachers were not only aware of, but understood, the judgements of their performance and their rights to respond to those judgments. All of these comments seem to reflect primarily a concern for narrowly legalistic interpretations of justice as much as a genuine concern to respect the rights of individual teachers.

Many supervisors also regarded the provision of feedback on performance as one way of fulfilling their obligation to help promote and facilitate the growth of all teachers on staff. This orientation goes beyond the procedural notions of justice to suggest an enhanced notion of justice that empowers another to flourish as a professional regardless of any personal relationship.

One superintendent articulated this understanding of justice, enriched by caring, as a stance that opposed the use of forced resignations or induced exits at any time. He was known to enact this philosophy during his lengthy tenure with one school district. He believes that if teachers are expected to treat all students with respect, if teachers are expected to care for all students – including those whose performance is unsatisfactory – then he must treat all teachers in a similar manner:

Whatever we are doing in education as educational leaders – we need to look at the model of what happens in the classroom There are some fundamental principles regarding what a good teacher does in working with students So what is it that we do then? Well, I guess the one thing that a good teacher really can't afford to do is to give up on any students I would take that analogy and apply it to what we are doing with teachers ... that those who are on the team were good enough to make it. And if they're not playing as well as you want them to be, or they're affecting the performance of the team, then you've got to do all you can to help them When I say that we spend time helping individuals – we also indicate what we expect them to be doing, too. That's part of helping It seems that when we spend some time

with the teacher, things get going and it might be six months, or a year, and things are really going, and then slips back again. So other people might say, "Well, how many chances do you give a person?" That's a difficult one ... it may mean that we are going to have to be in that pattern of working with that person on an on-going basis, and we may have to accept that. Just like a teacher may have a certain student that always going to take that extra time. So this is a "high needs" teacher.

The analogy between a "high needs" student and a "high needs" teacher is an interesting one, but it does not hold up well under close examination. In North America, students are required to attend school for a designated period of their lives, and are generally regarded as having some (legal) right to expect an educational schooling experience in return for their mandatory attendance. Teachers, on the other hand, attend school voluntarily and are paid to do so. In return, they are expected to render competent service by providing an appropriate schooling experience for their students. Individual teachers may spend double or triple the number of years their individual students spend in schools.

The superintendent we quote above does have a point, though. He saw working with a teacher whose performance was unsatisfactory as an opportunity to reinforce the basic organizational culture of caring – part of an on-going effort to establish and maintain relationships between and among the members of the organization that emphasized the need for people to learn and grow together.

However, it is unlikely that growth will be fostered unless there is consistent feedback over some period of time. The point is especially important, given reports from some of the teachers in the study, that the feedback they received from their supervisors was not very specific and therefore not helpful in fostering their professional growth. Thus, in our view, those teachers were treated not only in an uncaring manner, but also unjustly. One supervisor captured a number of issues in this description:

They had, in fact, protected this teacher over the years – the school and the school district – in not giving this particular teacher [courses for which there were province-wide examination] so that there wasn't the check on achievement and that kind of thing Why was this not addressed in the first 20 years of this man's career? It's just sad that he was allowed to carry on Here's a man who taught for this district for 20 years. And if he wasn't provided with assistance to do the job that we wanted to be done – there's some responsibility on our part – over 20 years. There is

something wrong with what we have been doing as a district

Kids were dropping out of his classes, no one ever told him why

The parents ... would phone the principal. Things were changed quietly. I think no one was ever up-front with the guy. It's not fair.

This is a situation that many educators will recognize and one that is, in every sense, "not fair." Previous supervisors had denied the teacher in question his rights to the sort of procedural justice that many of the administrators in this study emphasized. Beyond that, he was denied any hope of being enabled to develop as a professional or even, when faced with negative evidence about his performance, to make a dignified choice to leave the profession at a time when he had fewer years invested in it. Finally, this sort of treatment over years denied the teacher the sort of respect and caring which would have wished for him an enjoyment of "human ... solidarity" (Callan, 1992, p. 436) – he was excluded from any sense of participation in a professional community, as that was defined and enacted by colleagues, students, and teachers. Indeed, even the supervisor we have quoted seems to feel only compassion (or caring), but no respect, for this teacher. Meanwhile, this teacher was allowed – for 20 years – to deprive students of their rights to a classroom environment in which they could learn and develop. This supervisor has grounds for his sense of outrage against other supervisors in his own organization.

It is not surprising that some of the supervisors interviewed found it difficult to confront teachers about poor performance when that level of performance had been accepted for a long period of time by other supervisors. Indeed, several complained that their predecessors had protected teachers who did not provide adequate service, an observation that supports the findings in other studies on this subject (Brieschke, 1986; Bridges, 1992; French, 1994). In such cases, where the degree of culpability that could be attributed to the teacher was rather low, the supervisors tended to try approaches such as remediation, leave of absence, or coaching.

These supervisors were very aware that the manner in which they worked with marginal teachers provided others in their district with a clear signal about their commitment to caring and justice in organizational life. Thus, only where the teacher was seen to be responsible for incompetent or deteriorating performance in spite of feedback about the situation, did the supervisors in this study take a directive approach.

Making the decision to "induce" a teacher's exit. What induces administrators to embark on the path of inducing the exit of certain teachers, given the many considerations that inhibit such decisions and processes? Of

the relatively few (about 100 in the year studied) forced resignations, induced exits or involuntary terminations for reasons of unsatisfactory performance in Alberta, Warren found that cases which had reached that point were generally extreme examples of problematic situations that had existed over a long period of time. These findings are congruent with Bridges' (1992) studies in California. Warren found that the decision to move toward forcing a teacher's resignation was most often affected by three considerations: a) the overall effectiveness of the teacher, b) the level of caring and concern the teacher demonstrated for the students, and c) the degree of culpability or blame that could be attached to the teacher.

Even so, the impetus for supervisory action was most often some form of outside pressure, rather than routine teacher evaluation processes. Both the supervisors and the teachers Warren interviewed admitted that the catalyst for termination proceedings was complaints from parents and from teachers (often voicing concerns on behalf of students). The complaints seemed to provide the additional external reinforcement to supervisors, who could then publicly defend action that they privately felt was already warranted on moral grounds. Although Alberta has legislation mandating extensive, systematic teacher evaluation, there was little evidence that the incentive for action arose out of regular teacher evaluation. Administrators who were new to a supervisory relationship with the teacher were also more likely to respond to pressure for action: that is, either they or the teacher had been transferred in to a setting where, subsequently, complaints were being voiced. Administrators in these situations inherited a controversy or conflict that had existed for some time before their involvement. That, in a sense, limited their degree of culpability for the actions or inactions of the past and opened a space for their own decisions and initiatives.

In the face of political pressure, supervisors followed up with formal summative evaluations. In most instances, supervisors observed the teaching performance, the behaviour of the students and the relationship between the teacher and students. They frequently considered factors which could be observed directly and which have been linked in the research to teacher effectiveness. The less effective the teacher, the greater the motivation for supervisory action.

The moral grounds on which these supervisors spoke of justifying termination proceedings of one sort or another related to the rights and welfare of students. In the view of the supervisors, either the teachers seemed unconcerned about the welfare or education of the students entrusted to them or, in spite of their concern, the teachers were unable to provide even a

minimally appropriate learning environment in their classrooms. In either case, the rights of students were being contravened. Thus, the decision to proceed with termination had as its strongest argument the notion that justice must sometimes include action to contain or remedy harm, and also to prevent further harm (Friedman, 1993) that was being done to students.

One supervisor described this situation of conflict between the rights of students and the attitudes and behaviours of a teacher who was transferred into a school where he was the principal:

Well, I, to this day, maintain that the reason we are there is for the kids. He [the teacher] wasn't there for them It was tough because bringing in the parents and the students to meet with the teacher and sitting down with the different parties to try to resolve something – it didn't work. He would blow up The kids had to be almost automatons in order for them to survive in his classes. He was very, very rough on the kids The man certainly had talents as far as his subject went, but he was not a good teacher because teaching is a 'people' profession and he didn't have the people skills required.

According to this description, the teacher in question failed to treat students justly, not according them even an emotionally detached or a procedural form of respect.

After a year of attempted mediation, the school administrator began documenting, incident by incident, the teacher's inappropriate behaviour: he had decided to begin the lengthy process of working toward the termination of the teacher's contract. He commented that, another time, he would handle the situation differently:

I think that I would be on it a lot sooner. I wouldn't piddle around and try to fix things The whole of my time was spent figuring out how to keep a lid on things – to keep things from blowing up ... perhaps the best thing that could have happened was that right at the beginning of the second year when it became obvious that there were going to be problems – somebody didn't stand up to the man and say, "Listen, that's not the way we do things."

Such a reaction might have been more caring of the teacher as well as more just. Direct confrontation could potentially have been less isolating for the teacher than the administrator's frustrated withdrawal and detachment after failed attempts at mediation. Certainly, an emphasis on "the way we do things" would have been an attempt to convey a notion of professional community based on specific standards of conduct, an opportunity to participate or, at least, to engage in a dialogue about appropriate behaviour.

And, of course, more direct confrontation might have contained the harm being done to the students in his classes, if only by speeding up a termination process.

Who benefits? The supervisors cited above experienced the conflict between commitment to just treatment for incompetent teachers and concern for the educational well-being of the students of those teachers. Because they were trying to be fair to the teachers whose competence was in question, the two supervisors we have cited did provide them with considerable assistance, feedback, and time to improve their performance. As a consequence, long periods of time elapsed between even that administrator's initial perceptions of unsatisfactory performance by a teacher and the resolution of the concerns. Given the tendency of many administrators to avoid potentially difficult issues of this sort by transferring problem teachers, and given the existence of legislative and quasi-legal checks and balances, including appeal procedures and disability leaves available to teachers whose performance is being closely scrutinized, the teachers described – and others like them – seem to receive at least some of the benefits of employment for a very long time.

One study participant stated that in order to be fair, he must ensure that emotions were kept out of the entire process. He felt that he was emphasizing impartiality as a condition of fairness:

Once I personally came to terms with a procedure that seemed to be fair and just in terms of how you deal with the individual, and you felt confident that this procedure was the way to go in order to be sensitive to people, and yet also help them face up to reality, once you felt that it was a good system to use, it was fairly straightforward. And you didn't find yourself really getting all tensed up or stressed in terms of how you going to approach this. You saw it as a process which you work through in a systematic way. This process should facilitate you not getting emotionally involved. It was a straightforward procedure and you found yourself explaining the process to the people you were working with so they could see where you were going with all of this. Everything was on the table.

This supervisor's description reads like a popular version of the Scientific Method. That is, if he (distanced as "you") has a set procedure, that will permit emotional detachment; therefore, it must be impartial (or "objective," as some would say), and therefore it must be just. In other words, the method guarantees the validity of the results. If the procedure is clear to the teacher whose performance is being scrutinized, and if it helps them face up to reality, then it may be more just than the treatment some

teachers in this study experienced. But it is that profoundly alienating – and, Callan would say, inadequate – concept of justice that treats a fellow human being as “an anonymous bearer of rights” (Callan, 1992, p. 434). If there is any caring combined with this attempt at procedural justice, who is this supervisor caring for? Himself? It would seem so, if he values “not getting all tensed up or stressed,” but fails to mention the effects of this process on the teacher who is involved in it.

Ironically, although the supervisors in Warren's study viewed the well-being of students as their paramount concern, their reported actions suggest that, overall, the demands of procedural justice honored the rights of the teachers over the rights and welfare of their students. Where the teacher was thought to be physically, psychologically, or emotionally abusive to students, the supervisors often moved decisively to induce the teacher's exit. But, when a teacher seemed to demonstrate caring and concern for students, the supervisors tried to assist that teacher to remediate the observed deficiencies. These efforts may have had the ironic effect of privileging concern for the teacher over concern for the students that teacher exhibited concern for. The teachers described in the preceding section may understandably feel that whatever justice they were accorded was much better than no justice at all. However, the protracted nature of the tensions and conflicts described does raise this question: By the time an administrator acts to induce the exit of an incompetent teacher, does anyone in the situation receive a blend of caring and justice that is “worth having” (Callan, 1992, p. 430)?

Blending Care and Justice

A number of supervisors provided examples that did – in our view – blend caring and justice in their work with incompetent teachers. In such cases, the supervisor had a strongly held conviction that it was possible and desirable to be both caring and just, remaining in relationship with the teacher as part of doing so. Many said that they found it difficult to maintain connection, since part of the process of working with such [marginal] teachers was to confront them with their shortcomings. This was often a very painful experience for both the administrator and the teacher.

Most other supervisors felt it would be less stressful for them if they disengaged emotionally from the process, if personal relationships could be severed – but they refused to do that. Maintaining caring relations with teachers whose exits they were inducing meant that the supervisors had to face the question, “What are they [the teachers] going to do with their life afterwards?” By the very act of asking themselves that question, the

supervisors opened the possibility of blending caring and justice in their subsequent relations with the teachers. These supervisors were attending to the teachers as individuals with particular strengths and weaknesses, not simply as anonymous bearers of rights. Listen to this supervisor:

I really encouraged this man – that was at the time when [the provincial] correspondence school was expanding ... and I really encouraged him to make that contact. I saw some possibilities there, because I saw no problem with subject knowledge. The man could work at a desk, be OK on the telephone, talking to kids and that kind of thing.

By suggesting an alternative future that might be suitable, the supervisor demonstrated a concrete concern for that teacher's good, a desire that this person be enabled to flourish, in a more appropriate context. The specific suggestion was only possible, however, because the supervisor knew the individual teacher's particularities, and used that knowledge to respond to a question that he had posed to himself about the teacher's future.

Many supervisors articulated the view that life as a teacher becomes almost unendurable when things are not going well in the classroom. As one participant expressed it, "There is no worse job in the world than having twenty-five 14 year old kids in your classroom who are out of control." It's easy to be critical of such an obvious "for your own good" rationalization, one that reeks of a "paternalistic caring" (Narayan, 1995) which may well offer more comfort to the supervisor than to the teacher who is being forced out. A life-changing judgement is, in effect, being made for someone else. On the other hand, anyone who knows what life is like in classrooms and schools can appreciate the possibility at least that this supervisor is right, that the statement could be made out of respect and concern for another's welfare.

Helping a teacher to identify or acknowledge the impact that such trying circumstances were having on him or her was, according to several study participants, an important part of the supervisory process. Often, health problems and poor performance seemed to interact with one another (see also Bridges, 1992). Because of a continuing personal connection with one teacher, this supervisor felt able to broach the subject with considerable candour:

So then we got to talking about "how did you feel during the time you were off on your medical leave?" And he said "the best I've ever felt – the most relaxed." and I said "how long do you want to keep kicking yourself in the head?" Or something to that effect. And through that kind of discussion – we talked for a long time – the teacher went back, and he was going to think about resigning.

Another supervisor asked questions that pushed an individual to consider the effect his poor health might be having on his performance, and the impact his poor performance might be having on his health:

He was having some health problems at the same time – perhaps they were stress related. Knowing that as well, and working through these processes, we came to the point where we were simply asking him if he feels comfortable coming to work in the morning? Is this how he wants to spend his time? Does he feel that he is going to get on top of the situation? How far does he expect us to support and help him?

The approach described here, of raising questions – and listening closely to the responses – rather than simply making assertions seems to us to blend caring and justice by avoiding “paternalistic caring” (Narayan, 1995). The questions are attentive to an other's needs and wants while naming important issues with an expectation that they will be discussed. The questions are respectful of another's right to state a viewpoint and make judgements regarding the issues raised. And an appropriate but face-saving alternative role may be proposed but not imposed without consultation.

A supervisory attitude that integrates caring and justice opens up the possibility of candid discussions about the various options that may be available to the teacher and the supervisor, and the consequences of each option. It is then more possible for the supervisor to be supportive of the teacher, while helping that person to realize or acknowledge that teaching is not a viable occupation at that time or in those circumstances. The effort involved in maintaining connection throughout this difficult process reinforces a notion of “human solidarity” (Callan, 1992, p. 434), or community, that itself blends caring and justice.

A Case for Just Caring?

The examples of blended caring and justice that we have offered for consideration may seem too commonplace and obvious to merit attention. But it may be in these rather mundane aspects of practice and discourse, more than in policy, that some administrators blend care and justice. And, that blend may not be so commonplace, nor so easy to accomplish in many contexts.

The teachers who participated in this study wanted their supervisors to treat them fairly but, at the same time, they did not want to be treated in an impartial, detached sort of way. Rather, they wanted to be respected as whole people, each with a unique history, with their own needs, hopes, and fears. Yet, they related incident after incident that showed how easily some of their

supervisors had, through words and actions, stripped these teachers of their dignity and denied even their modest claims to professional achievements as educators. According to their own accounts (and supported by the documentary evidence in three of four cases), these teachers were not accorded respect or attention to their needs. On the other hand, this research as well as related studies (Bridges, 1992; Brieschke, 1986; French, 1994) indicate that administrators often receive very little support for their efforts to integrate caring and justice in trying supervisory circumstances.

To accord all members of our school communities the caring and justice worth having is a complex matter, an ideal that can be more fully enacted under some conditions than others. But we believe that leadership, including supervisory leadership, is a "moral art" (Hodgkinson, 1991) and that the school organization is a "moral order ... made apparent in action" (Greenfield, 1984, p. 166). The power of supervisors as a moral force and the consequences of both supervisory action and inaction are substantial in the sorts of situations that we have described. We hope that our analysis will promote reflection about what actions and attitudes might, on a case by case basis, offer a blend of caring and justice that is worth having.

REFERENCES

Baier, A.C. (1995). A note on justice, care, and immigration policy. *Hypatia*, 10 (2), 150-152.

Bridges, E.M. (1992). *The incompetent teacher: Managerial responses*. Washington, DC: The Falmer Press.

Brieschke, P.A. (1986). The administrative role in teacher competency. *Urban Review*, 18, 237- 251.

Callan, E. (1992). Finding a common voice. *Educational Theory*, 42(4), 429-441.

Deveaux, M. (1995). Shifting paradigms: Theorizing care and justice in political theory. *Hypatia*, 10(2), 115-119.

Flanagan, O. & Jackson, K. (1987, April). Justice, care, and gender: The Kohlberg-Gilligan debate revisited. *Ethics*, 97, 622-637.

French, L.C. (1994). Principals' experiences of working with teachers-at-risk. Unpublished M.Ed. project report, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB.

Friedman, M. (1993). Beyond caring: The de-moralization of gender. In M.J. Larrabee (Ed.), *An ethic of care: Feminist and interdisciplinary perspectives* (pp. 258-273). New York: Routledge.

Greenfield, T. (1984). Leaders and schools: Willfulness and nonnatural order in organizations. In T.J. Sergiovanni & J.E. Corbally (Eds.), *Leadership and organizational culture* (pp. 142-169). Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press.

Hodgkinson, C. (1991). *Educational leadership: The moral art*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Narayan, U. (1995). Colonialism and its others: Considerations on rights and care discourses. *Hypatia*, 10(2), 133-140.

Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Noddings, N. (1988). An ethic of caring and its implications for instructional arrangements. *American Journal of Education*, 44(2), 215-229.

Phillips, W. (1994). The forced resignation of teachers. Unpublished PhD.dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB.

Poole, W.L. (1994). Removing the "super" from supervision. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, 9(3), 284-309.

Shogan, D. (1988). *Care and moral motivation*. Toronto: OISE Press.

Stainback, S. & Stainback, W. (1988). *Understanding and conducting qualitative research*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

Starratt, R.J. (1991). Building an ethical school: A theory for practice in educational leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 27(2), 185-202.

Watkinson, A.M. (1993-1994). Equality, empathy and the administration of education. *Education and Law Journal*, 5, 273-304.

Young, B., Staszenski, D., McIntyre, S., & Joly, L. (1993). Care and justice in educational leadership. *The Canadian Administrator*, 33(2), 1-8.

Warren Phillips completed his M.Ed. and Ph.D. at the University of Alberta. He is currently an assistant superintendent with Chinook's Edge Regional Division #5 where he is responsible for personnel and working with teachers at risk. He believes that one of the greatest challenges facing public education is to find ways to enhance caring and just relations between teachers and students, among students, and among teachers.

Beth Young is an associate professor in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta. Her specialization is gender issues in education administration and leadership. Her interest in the applied ethics of caring and justice was grounded initially in the feminist scholarship on ethics of caring.

