

Hurricanes, Schools, and the Ethics of Care and Community

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This narrative study described how professional ethics were reflected in the practices of school leaders supervising community disaster shelters in Central Florida during Hurricane Irma. The study applied two frameworks, Ethic of Community and Ethic of Care, to understand how values shaped these leaders' experiences. Researchers interviewed principals, plant managers, and food service managers to gain a better understanding of the ways that school leaders applied ethics in responding to the needs of those within their care. This study provides insight into ways that school leaders extend their leadership and care into the community beyond the specific school shareholders.

INTRODUCTION

On September 9, 2017, Hurricane Irma assaulted the state of Florida, causing thousands to flee their homes before the storm arrived. Central Florida's landscape consists of thousands of mobile homes that may not withstand hurricane-force winds. Flooding is one phenomenon of hurricanes that is potentially as damaging as winds, and many homes are built in low areas that are susceptible to flooding. Many of those residents are elderly, infirmed, and impoverished with few resources on which to draw. The potential storm devastation required thousands of community residents to seek refuge in state-designated hurricane shelters.

The primary sources for hurricane shelters in Florida are public schools, built to withstand the assault of winds and rain and stocked with generators and emergency food (Solochek, 2017). Many unsung heroes help ensure the safety of victims of hurricane disasters. Certainly, law enforcement and fire rescue officers play a dominant role. A group often overlooked, however, are school personnel who leave their homes and families to command schools established as storm shelters.

Much research on school and community describes the function of a school as a learning community based on the strength of personal relationships (Furman, 2004). Research describing the function of schools regarding hurricanes and other natural disasters has focused on the ways school personnel have served children and families in the weeks and months following the crises (Barron-Ausbrooks, Barrett, & Martinez-Cosio, 2009; Bava, Coffey, Weingarten, & Becker, 2010; Dostal, 2015; Fillmore, Ramirez, Roth, Robertson, Atchison, & Peek-asa, 2011; Geale, 2012; Homer, Ozguven, Marceline, & Kocatepe, 2018; Mezinska, Kakuk, Mijaljica, Waligora, & Mathuna, 2016; Mutch, & Marlowe, 2013; VanGigch, 2008; and Wildes, K. W. 2015). Little information exists, however, on the function of schools and personnel before, during, and immediately after such disasters.

The use of public schools as shelters extends the moral and ethical work of school leaders in serving their communities. It also shows the vital contributions that public schools make to democracy. Finally, the use of schools in a natural disaster furthers the work of social justice, in that those served by shelters are often the most vulnerable. We interviewed school leaders who helped manage a storm school shelter during Hurricane Irma in order to understand and describe their stories of public service. We believe such sharing is an important way to advance the moral imperative of school leadership and to advance the purpose of public schooling within a democracy.

It is important to note that Hurricane Irma, the storm at the center of this study, was not as devastating as had been feared. Hurricane Irma never approached the level of intensity and mass destruction inflicted by earlier storms like Katrina, that ransacked New Orleans, or later storms like Michael that leveled the Florida Panhandle town of Mexico Beach. This analysis is not meant to compare the experiences of the participants in this study to those supervising shelters in areas of catastrophic mass destruction. We do believe, however, that the perceptions of the participants in this study provide insights into the phenomenon of the ethical operation of shelters during such an emergency.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the study was to describe ways that school leaders applied personal and professional ethics as they cared for disaster victims within school hurricane shelters. By describing and analyzing their experiences, we have sought to gain a better understanding of the ways that school leaders apply their own sense of ethics in responding to the needs of those within their care. This study may provide insight into ways that school leaders extend their leadership and care into the community beyond the specific school shareholders. This understanding may enable current and future school administrators to anticipate the reach of their school and service beyond the defined borders of their school. By doing so, school administrators may better understand their responses to catastrophic events, and therefore to be more effective in their work and better serve their community.

RESEARCHERS

We are a team of five researchers. Two of us have experience in supervising Florida school hurricane shelters, one as an assistant principal and one as both an assistant principal and principal. We recognize that our experiences may have created a process that Saldana and Omasta (2018) describe as filtering the data through our own beliefs, values, and life experiences. To temper that, we depended on our other team members to be the primary coders and interpreters of data. One team member is a teacher who lives in a Southeastern coastal city but has no experience with hurricane shelters. Another is a retired educator living in the Midwest with no hurricane experience. A third is a government administrator outside education, living in the upper Midwest. Together, these researchers proved to be helpful validators of our interpretations.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

We began our study by applying five domains of moral educational leadership as a conceptual framework. Starratt (2006, p. 125) offers to describe practitioners' actions: Responsibility as a human being; responsibility as a citizen and public servant; responsibility as an educator; responsibility as an educational administrator; and responsibility as an educational leader. We added two concepts we expected to find in the data, expressions of the ethics of care and community. We briefly discuss these concepts below.

Starratt presents what he describes as five "proactive responsibilities" (2005, p. 124) central to educational leadership. As a human being, a school leader considers the humanly ethical thing to do, taking into account the "intrinsic dignity and inviolability of the other person" (p. 125). As a citizen and public servant, a leader "seeks the common good first, before their own benefit or the benefit of one person at the expense of others" (p. 126). As an administrator, the leader ensures that organizational infrastructure "promote(s) the integrity of the school's core work" (p. 128). As an educational leader, one "sees the potential of the people in the school to make something special, something wonderful, something exceptional" (p. 130). As an educator, the leader must be familiar with the curriculum and effective pedagogy. Our analysis did not find evidence for this domain within the actions of our participants during their work as managers of school hurricane shelters, and so we did not apply it in our analysis.

To Starratt's domains, we added two additional concepts, the ethics of care and community. Key researchers who discuss this ethic include Starratt (1994, 2012), Noddings (2012), Strike (2007), Begley & Johansson (2003), and Shapiro & Stefkovich (2011). We applied Starratt's interpretation, that through the ethic of care, leaders focus their actions on the needs of individuals within their charge. Furman (2005) describes the ethic of community as a concept that stresses the communal over the individual, the processes of ethical practice, and the values and ethics of the school leaders themselves.

While we began our analysis thinking of these ethics as framing data at the same level as Starratt's domains, they soon emerged as two overarching themes, more common and concomitant than the individual domains. Researchers often describe the two ethical concepts as intertwined, and our analysis supports that view. Dewey (1909) describes schooling as essentially a moral practice, and Sergiovanni (2004) perceives schools as moral communities. In this view of school as a community, the locus of leadership moves from specific individuals to the organization as a moral agent. Although leadership style was not the locus of this study, we found ample evidence of leadership as distributed, constructivist, and communal. When operating as hurricane shelters, schools and school staff expanded their moral role and purpose to serve the community. As individual leaders worked with others, their authority became distributed across roles. We found that functioning as a disaster shelter extended the work of the school as a democratic institution by serving all factions of the community. We capture our vision of the ways these domains and ethics interact in the following graphic:

FIGURE 1



None of these concepts was proposed by their designers to describe the operation of schools during a crisis such as that described here. Applying Saldana’s view that contextual frames can be “context-specific” (2016, p. 2), however, we felt each was useful to help us understand and describe the ways that school leaders applied their job skills and personal and professional values during a community crisis. Starratt offers his domains to describe traditional school leaders, generally considered principals or assistant principals. We have extended this application of school leaders to include food service managers and plant managers, all of whom are key leaders when the school is operating as a crisis shelter.

QUALITATIVE NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

In this study, we attempted to answer the following research questions:

(RQ1) What were significant experiences of school leaders in supervising community disaster shelters during hurricanes?

(RQ2) How were professional ethics reflected in the practices and experiences of school leaders while supervising community disaster shelters during a hurricane?

To answer these questions, we applied a qualitative methodology of narrative inquiry through which we asked our participants to reconstruct significant formative experiences (Bruner 2002), tapping into their “continuing interpretation and reinterpretation” of their experience (Bruner, 1987, p. 12). The process of learning, sharing, and analyzing personal stories has been described by several qualitative researchers (Bochner, 2014; Riessman, 2008; Clandinen, 2013; Chase, 2018, Cole & Knowles, 2001). We have attempted to understand and describe the contexts of time and space in which the experiences occurred and to understand and share the ongoing implications of those events (Clandinen & Connelly, 2000; Caine, et al, 2013).

We utilized two instruments. The first was a preliminary survey designed to gather basic demographic information from potential study participants. This included gender, race, school level (e.g., elementary, middle, high), and years of experience.

The second instrument was a list of semi-structured, open-ended questions used to guide in-depth telephone interviews with our participants. The questions were designed to elicit significant experiences of our school leaders as they helped supervise a community disaster shelter during Hurricane Irma. We created interview transcripts from our recordings and notes. While we began by using a conceptual framework to deductively code our data, we utilized an NVivo process described by Saldana (2015, 2018) to inductively identify codes signaled by keywords representing values and emotions (Saldana 2018). Our process included recursive readings of the transcripts collectively and individually. We captured our thoughts by writing analytic memos that we referenced in a dialectic process to refine our application of the framework.

STUDY SETTING

The study area was defined as those schools serving residents in a Florida school district affected by Hurricane Irma in September 2017. We received formal permission from the district, as well as IRB approval, to conduct the study and talk with school employees. To protect the identities of the participants and their schools, we have not named the school district nor its specific geographic location. The participants represented four schools that served as shelters for local residents who evacuated their homes because of the threat of the storm. While the schools did not collect demographic data on their participants, we gained some insight into the populations served through the student data of the schools. The percentage of students identified as “economically disadvantaged” by the U.S. Department of Education was above 75% for three of the schools and below 50% for the fourth school. The percentage of students identified as “white” ranged between 40% and 60%. Two of the schools are in areas heavily populated by elderly citizens, many of whom live in mobile homes. Each shelter housed between 800 and 1100 people before, during, and after the storm.

PARTICIPANTS

To identify potential participants, we first sent a preliminary survey to the principals, plant managers, and food service managers who served at hurricane shelter sites in district schools. From those who responded to the surveys, we applied purposive sampling to select one principal, two assistant principals, three plant managers, and three food service managers to participate in the study. Seven of the nine participants were former colleagues of the lead researcher and were selected because of their experience in supervising shelters and their interest in sharing their stories. We reached saturation of concepts and themes after interviewing three participants in each role group.

The Florida Emergency Management Agency in each county identifies schools that are structurally sound enough to survive hurricane-force winds and rain. More often those are middle and high schools since they have facilities such as gymnasiums, locker rooms, commons areas, larger cafeterias, and more classrooms that can accommodate large numbers of people. In the district site of this study, schools designated as potential shelters are equipped with gasoline-fueled electric generators. The generators are structured to power some freezer or refrigerator units, selected emergency lighting, and selected power outlets throughout the facility. They do not power any air conditioning units, most classroom lighting, or most electrical outlets.

Contracted food service managers and assistants, plant managers and assistants, and principals and assistants were required to work at a school hurricane shelter during the period shelters are in operation. Those whose schools are designated as shelters are responsible for the primary operation of those facilities and for scheduling support staff. Leaders whose buildings are not opened as shelters are assigned to work at a designated school shelter as scheduled by the supervisors of that facility. For Hurricane Irma, school shelters opened the day before the storm was projected to impact the area and closed two days

following the storm. Leaders were responsible for scheduling adequate support from the pool of workers assigned to the school. Support staff within each role group were scheduled in eight-hour shifts over the course of the shelter operation.

While managers and assistants are contractually required to work at least one of three eight hour shifts in rotation, they are not required to live at the shelter during its operation. Despite that, seven of nine participants chose to live at their respective shelters during the periods they were open. Of those who stayed, six housed their families at the shelter as well. Below, we briefly describe each participant and their job description during regular school operations, as well as shelter operations duties.

The food service managers are tasked with scheduling and serving meals to the student and adult population of the school. Duties include maintaining adequate food supplies and hiring and supervising staff. During the shelter operation, they are responsible for the same duties. While food and bottled water were supplied by both district and community sources, food managers were responsible for ensuring the supply was adequate and for rationing that supply over the course of shelter operation.

All three foodservice participants were Caucasian women. Tara had been a manager for 12 years, Andrea for 2 years, and Alice for 20 years. Unlike Andrea, Both Tara and Alice had experience with supervising a hurricane shelter. Tara and Alice lived at the shelter with their families while Andrea went home between shifts.

As their title implies, plant managers Sam, Tom, and Louis, are responsible for the maintenance of their school's physical plant which includes structure, grounds, electrical, and plumbing. They also hire and supervise custodial staff. Sam had served as plant manager at his school for eighteen years and helped supervise three school hurricane shelters. Louis had worked as a plant manager at his school for twenty years and also supervised his school plant during three hurricanes. Tom had worked as a plant manager for four years. This was his first experience in supervising a shelter. All three lived at the shelter during its operation.

The principal is the leader in charge of all operations of the school. During a shelter operation, he or she must supervise the scheduling of all school staff, both contracted and volunteers. He or she must also supervise the placement of shelter guests and ensure their relative comfort and well-being. Phil had been a principal for ten years at three different schools. This was his third experience in supervising a school shelter.

Although assistant principals are not the primary school administrator, they share supervision with the principal and often take responsibility for key duties. Rosa and William were both assistant principals. William had served as assistant principal of three different schools. This was his second experience as a shelter manager. Rosa had also served as an assistant principal at three different schools. This was her third experience as a shelter manager. Both lived at the shelter for three days with their families. We included them as participants because of their rich experiences in supervising this and previous school hurricane shelters and their willingness to share their stories.

RESULTS

Domains

As a conceptual framework, we applied four domains central to "moral educational leadership" proposed by Starratt (2006, p. 124). He explains his use of the word *domain* as describing "a constructed cluster of ethical concerns around common themes or issues that can be found in educational leaders' work" (p. 125). We found this explanation compatible with Saldana's discussion of what he calls *categories* that subsume several codes (2016, p. 14). The ethics of care and community emerged as overarching themes. We provide a discussion of the application of each concept below.

Educational Administrator

Starratt identifies an educational leader's ethical responsibility as an administrator to ensure that organizational processes and structures "promote the integrity of the school's core work" (2006, p. 128). When operating as a disaster shelter, the core work of the school is first to ensure the relative safety and

comfort of its inhabitants. We found that all of our participants approached their administrative tasks with an ethical responsibility to care for and protect the guests under their charge.

The food service managers applied their regular duties in service to their guests. Preparation included ensuring adequate food and staffing for expected guests. Strategies included serving perishable foods like fresh fruits and vegetables first. Before and after the storm, shelter guests walked to the cafeteria to eat. When mealtime occurred during the storm, the shelter guests were confined to their rooms, and the managers devised strategies to deliver food to the guests. In one school, food workers set up tables of food in enclosed hallways.

Tara described the challenges. “My number one job is to be in the cafeteria and ensure stuff gets done. When we opened, I thought no big deal, but they just kept coming. Every couple of hours the number would go up 50 – 100.” Alice explained, “For the shelter, it’s a lot more challenging, because of where the food is placed and the people are far apart. The cafeteria is a long way from where the people are staying, and the buildings are not connected.” She noted, “Another challenge was special diets. Some are diabetic or allergic to foods. With so many people you can not worry about that.” Each manager gleaned sometimes amusing insights. Tara observed, “How do you coordinate the crowd? We learned you don’t give them coffee all night long. Then they run out of toilet paper and they are up all night long.” Interestingly, even when people could leave after the storm, they stayed. Alice remembered, “We told them they could go home, but after the storm, we then served about 700 breakfast. They stayed to eat because they didn’t know what they would find at home.”

The plant managers and crew were charged with building maintenance and supplies. Sam noted, “We found out what we didn’t have. We had to take lamps out of science rooms to plug into emergency plugs so some rooms would have lights.” Describing leadership challenges, Louis noted, “As the shelter manager for facilities, you really need to give some of the duties to others because it is very hard to open a shelter, run a shelter, and close a shelter single-handedly. You need someone else there to give you time to eat, shower, or get in a corner and be quiet for a while—just to rest.”

Louis summarized the duties after the storm: “After the personnel is off campus, it is time to turn the school back to an educational facility. You have to clean in a different manner, so all needs to be sanitized. All the property gets examined for damage. What we are doing is looking at when we can have this facility ready for school.”

One of the more shocking preparation tasks was to designate a morgue. Louis explained, “There were some single bathroom stalls that we could secure. We put Visqueen on the floor, and there were some bags for the deceased.” Fortunately, no one died in any of the shelters. Another challenge came in allocating space for registered sexual offenders. Sam noted, “They just come discreetly in and there is a sign in. There is a space for them that is comfortable. “They just have to be housed in a different space.” Other challenges came in finding areas for police and military personnel, as well as locked storage areas for them to secure their firearms.

Another interesting challenge that most participants discussed came in setting up space as an animal shelter. Although none of the schools had been designated as an animal shelter, that soon changed as more citizens sought shelter. Louis remembered, “The answer is no, we were not a pet shelter, but at the height of the storm, you have to accept everyone.” All schools housed their animal shelters in the gym locker rooms. Sam explained, “Because space could be cleaned, we have the equipment that we do on a daily basis anyway - gross removal, scrub, and rinse it down the drain like after football practice.” Phil remembered, “Of course at the height of the storm, no one was able to pick up their dogs and walk them, so after the storm, the locker room smelled bad and the floors were a mess.”

Tom described the thorough planning involved in setting up for the storm. “We made sure things were ready for people coming and signing in. We had maybe six meetings during the week as the principal and I monitored the storm.” Tom summarized a coping strategy for all the plant managers: “We had a chain of command – people doing custodial, maintenance, talking to people to make sure they were comfortable and OK. To me, it went pretty smoothly. We all work together and get along. If someone needs to pick it up, they can.”

William noted, “I was responsible for assigning other staff members to cover. I put together the schedules, shifts, equipment, and documents. The preparedness, making sure we were ready to go, was my responsibility. The management part of being a school leader also came afterward. For example, how to manage large numbers of people in an orderly fashion.” Rosa agreed, “We applied our best problem-solving skills. We dealt with problems and put out fires every day.”

Phil described another common dilemma. “It got warm pretty quickly. Do you open doors for fresh air or keep them shut?” That was especially problematic because many residents were elderly. Leaders turned to National Guard troops to stagger opening windows. Phil summarized an effective administrative strategy: “It re-emphasized my belief that if you create strong systems with good people who are knowledgeable, you can overcome most situations.”

Educational Leader

Starratt describes the domain of educational leader as the leader calling on those in his or her charge “to reach for a higher ideal” (2005, p. 130). We believe that our participants reflected that philosophy. We, therefore, thought it important to include a discussion of the domain of educational leader as a category, even though we saw it reflected less often than the other domains. We do not perceive this to mean that the school leaders in our study did not value those characteristics or demonstrate them in their traditional roles as school administrators. Rather, we believe that by definition of their job roles, they represent their schools as educational leaders and that self-perception is embedded in many of their actions. In addition, we believe the domain may also be reflected under the categories of Public Servant. Following are results we believe capture perceptions of their roles as educational leaders.

Tara, one of the foodservice managers, summarized a humorous approach to leadership, noting, “My work as a school leader stayed the same. I do the same thing in the shelter that I would do in the school—only without sleeping and showering.” In a specific example of an educational leader, Tara shared an instance in which a pre-teen girl was anxious about the impending storm. To distract her and relieve her anxiety, Tara brought her into the kitchen to help wash oranges to serve.

The school administrators were more philosophical about their roles as educational leaders. William observed, “I honestly think school leaders, especially in public schools, are the most prepared to deal with people who are going through crisis en masse. Being a school leader means being able to work with people when they are emotional. Our jobs prepared us for that.” Phil, the school principal, noted, “As leaders, it is our responsibility to create systems that work. I had to consider the emotional stability of staff and kids as we transitioned back to normal and school was back in session.” Rosa summarized, “We faced a very challenging time – we have some very good people. The experience reinforced as a school leader how important that is.”

Citizen and Public Servant

Starratt explains that as citizens, educators “act for the good of fellow citizens. They seek the common good first, before their own benefit or the benefit of one person at the expense of others. ... Public servants who work in schools ... provide a public service to fellow citizens” (2005, p. 126). Although we acknowledge that his description applies to the normal functioning of schools, we believe his description extends to the operation of schools as hurricane shelters.

The job of the food service managers was to supply meals and snacks to the shelter guests. Some guests wanted to take more food than allotted for a particular meal. Others were upset at the food choices, much of which was pre-packaged and non-perishable.

The serving of coffee emerged as a humorous code. In Tara’s school, the cafeteria was without power. “People were upset about the coffee situation with no electricity. I said, ‘I can’t perk coffee with no power.’” She observed that when it was available, some parents were giving their children coffee, which limited the supply for the adults. Alice remembered, “We learned you don’t give them coffee all night long.”

Other incidents were more amusing. Tara remembered, “Because of the overflow, people were in the hallways. On the other side, there was a man snoring through the walls and we couldn’t sleep. He apologized the next day. It was an experience.”

Louis expressed his view of acting as a public servant in this way: “The people who work there, you are the customer service person and it is a service that you’re doing for the adults and students.” He described his approach to setting up elderly citizens in his shelter. “We hand-carried items or assisted the elderly with getting into the building and comforting them. Some had difficulty opening their medication bottles. We made sure that everyone was as comfortable as possible.” He observed, “All workers were ready to do their duty. I don’t think we had any naysayers about it. You worry about your own property and family, but they did their duty without showing that.” Sam described the efforts of his staff similarly. “It made me proud, the way they handled everything. I thought it was a reflection on me, too. It let me know I’m doing a good job.”

Tom, one of the plant managers, noted, “In an emergency, it’s never by the book. It’s by the seat of your pants. To fill their needs, everyone is different.” In one traumatic incident, a guest in Tom’s school suffered a seizure. Fortunately, they were able to transport the person by ambulance to the hospital before the storm. In a more entertaining incident, Tom presided over the birth of a litter of puppies. “I got a call on the radio – the storm had just turned north, and we got a rush of people. I got a call that there was a delivery about to happen in the parking lot. I thought I was going to be delivering a baby. It was pretty cool. I took a deep breath when I realized who my patient was. They got a big laugh out of that.” Tom summarized, “My hat’s off to everyone who worked it. They did an amazing job.”

William recalled, “Due to losing the power and having an elderly community, we had colostomy bags, bandages – there was definitely a smell in the buildings and wafting through after. It was a unique situation. It opened your eyes.”

One way that volunteers fulfilled their role as public servants came in the supervision of pet shelters. At each school, volunteers from the community or staff supervised the shelters. In Rosa’s school, “staff – school employees – agreed to run the pet shelter. They had six animals of their own.” In another example of volunteer staff service, she remembered, “One of them also agreed to help with activities with little kids. They got some art supplies from rooms and ran activities before the storm. They were just superstars.”

Phil summarized, “The shelter workers put the community and needs of people above themselves. Workers had to leave their homes and their families. This shows the character of people.” Rosa reflected, “Compassion is the whole thing. You do what you have to do. You say, ‘Yes, of course, we are going to help you,’ although we had no idea. You are scared to death and you don’t know what is going to happen.”

Rosa reflected specifically on her experiences during the storm. “There was no sleeping, even if you could or wanted to because we were always on call. There was so much responsibility on you for the lives of these people – for their medical problems, and mental health. Going through that with colleagues, it changed our team. All our families were here – children, parents, spouses – they supported us. It gave them a view of what expectations there are for us when having to accommodate people coming to us for refuge and solace. A lot of good came out of it.”

Human Being

Starratt argues that “the first and foremost domain of ethical responsibility is as a human being” (2005, p. 125). In this category, he notes, “an educational leader considers the humanly ethical thing to do, taking into account the intrinsic dignity and inviolability of the other person” (2005, p. 125). He continues, “There is a basic level of respect and dignity with which humans deserve to be treated. To violate that respect – to deny people their dignity – is to violate their humanity, which is an ethical violation” (p. 125). We indeed found that our participants’ personal and professional values as human beings drove their decisions in extending compassion to others. We follow with specific applications of the domain.

Again, the application of the domain was filtered through job roles. Andrea observed the reciprocity between workers and shelter guests. “They were very thankful. Everybody just came together to make sure that everybody was safe and had a nice place to sleep. The one thing that really did change is not realizing how many people needed that type of support in our area and did not have a home safe enough to withstand that. They were excited to get a hot meal, but they feared not having anywhere to go home to.”

In another coffee reference, one of Tara’s guests did not drink caffeinated coffee. “So while the roads were clear, and a few stores were still open, I went to get him some decaffeinated coffee.” She also described a moving action by another resident. “Families with multiple children were stationed upstairs. During mealtime, some parents did not want to bring all the kids down, so one gentleman would take a cart to families, so they didn’t have to come down. Sometimes the bad comes out in people, but sometimes the good does, too.”

Describing personal exhaustion, plant manager Sam remembered, “Getting a break or rest was one of the challenges. We just rested when we could – took three hours sleep and then right back at it.” In another seemingly mundane but important task, “We ran out of toilet paper, and we tried to get in as fast as we could. People started to get angry. With the women, it was hard for them to get in there. We finally got it stocked up.” Alice and others sent food to elderly guests so they wouldn’t have to walk to the cafeteria.

In another incident, smokers wanted to go outside to smoke. “We did have designated smoking areas outside to accommodate them, but during the storm when we were locked down, there was no smoking, and that was probably the hardest to deal with, Tom recalled. The school is a smoke-free facility. Guys would sneak into the bathroom and smoke a cigarette and would set off the smoke alarms.”

Alice remembered, “The biggest thing was that once the storm starts, you can’t open a door or window, so it gets really hot. They had to call an ambulance four times to take elderly residents to the hospital because it was so hot.” In another example, someone propped open the door to the animal shelter because of the heat, and some animals escaped.

In an action we thought especially empathetic, Alice delivered water to guests during the storm. “I took a cooler down there (to the residents’ hallway) at 1:00 a.m. in the height of the storm because people were passing out from the heat. This is because the generator doesn’t run the air conditioner. That’s a big deal.” In another incident, Tom described, “One guy had PTSD. The National Guard actually gave him jobs to do to help out. They had compassion for him and took him out instead of leaving him in a room locked with a bunch of people. I thought that was pretty amazing.” Alice observed, “My employees were amazed. It opened their eyes to the needs of so many different people. They had compassion for them.”

Tom remembered, “We went down to a group of kids and we played games Simon says and other games to take their minds off the storm. There was an elderly man who would tell me a joke every time I walked by.”

William noted, “Relational leadership and servant leadership are always at the forefront of everything I do. Through that, people learn to trust you. Just like in school, you have to demonstrate the ability to problem share, plan, and decide which groups will get along well. Being able to build relationships was important.” He observed humorously, “We also had sleep deprivation. In 48 hours, I had 2 or 3 hours of sleep, but being a dad prepared me for that.” William provided an effective summary of his experience through the domain of human beings. “As much as it was a sacrifice for me and my family, it definitely reinforced what I believe to be the most important thing about being a leader – I got joy out of helping other people.”

We found personal values to be important. Phil reflected, “To be a school leader you have to have values. Mine is guided by my faith.” He described his impression of many guests. “You look in their face and see their fear. My goal was to give them a level of comfort and let them know, ‘You are going to be OK.’”

Rosa related the post poignant story among those of our participants. “I was in the gym, and a lady came up to me crying. She said all shelters had turned her away. ‘My son is in the van in a hospital bed, hooked to a trach. Do you have any way to help us?’ We moved her whole family, eight children, into one

room with a power plug.” Rosa observed the swath of humanity in her shelter. “It was sad yet eye-opening. In the shelter, we had a mixture of everyday people: my family, middle and upper-class families, and multiple income leveled families. Everyone mingled together, at times packed in rooms like sardines. You thought this could be you. What if a category 5 storm came in and leveled everything? This is where you would live. Your life could be changed on a dime just like others – everything could be gone.”

OVERARCHING THEMES: THE ETHICS OF CARE AND COMMUNITY

We saw two themes to be so universal that they were embedded in virtually every action of our participants. We found them to be driven by an overarching ethic of care that motivated them to serve their community beyond the traditional school walls. We discuss those results below.

Ethics of Care

Starratt says of the ethic of care, “Care is so fundamental that without it, humans would cease to be human. ... Without being cared for, without being connected to significant others in mutual expressions of caring, the prospects for existing as what we recognize as human beings seem impossible” (2012, p.). He explains, “This ethic places human persons in relationships of absolute value; each other enjoys an intrinsic dignity and worth.” Rather than another domain, Care emerged an overarching theme that was reflected in virtually every decision. Community emerged as another dominant theme since all decisions were centered on helping those in the shelters.

We especially saw connections between the domains of public servant, human being, and the ethic of care. Andrea noted, “When they come to school, it’s a safe place, and we love them. I spend a lot of time trying to explain that we are always here.” Louis often expressed an ethic of care. “They just need someone to help change a bandage because they are right-handed, and they can’t put some type of ointment on with their left side, or their other hand just don’t work like it used to. You can’t give a 70-year-old person a milk carton and expect them to open it.” Tom summarized, “For me it was easy. I like caring for people.” William remembered, “I did a lot of visiting and listening. You could walk through, and they would tell you stories about where they grew up and their grandkids. They needed that normalcy and it worked. We didn’t have a lot of upset people.” Rosa reflected, “The most important concept is being compassionate, understanding, and asking how I can meet their needs. They trust me and see that I am genuine with them, and that has worked for me.”

Ethic of Community

Furman explains the ethic of community as a process. “Administrators, teachers, school staff, students, parents, and other community members... commit to being morally responsible to engage in communal processes” (2003, p. 2). Community coding focused on those from outside the school system helping or being involved in the care of others.

Several common elements related to the interaction of the school and community emerged. Emergency supplies were provided by the school district and some local grocery stores. These included pre-packaged meals from the National Guard, and pallets of bottled water, tubs of flashlights, ponchos, cranking flashlights from the school district, and more. No cots were available, however, which surprised many guests who were left sleeping on the floor. Conversely, however, each school was staffed with a group of five to seven National Guard troops. While they performed no specific function, participants reported a feeling of security with their presence. Several participants described ways that the Guardsmen interacted positively with the guests and even carried luggage and performed other tasks. In addition, each school was staffed with one or more local law enforcement officers. In one school, workers from the local power company set up, so that they could begin work promptly after the storm. While these groups required leaders to find additional space to house them, study participants agreed their presence provided a sense of security and was worth the extra effort.

Another community code was that shelter guests pitched in to help others. Tara noted, “All in all, people helped where they could. A couple of ladies helped us prepare and serve food.” Louis observed the

care he gave to guests, “They are a part of your community. Those are the things we did to make sure people were comfortable.” Alice remembered, “Some people had carriers for their animals and other owners put laundry baskets together and zip tied them together to create carriers. We had birds, rabbits, all kinds of stuff. “The Humane Society also helped by contributing large bags of dog and cat food. At Tom’s school, the county animal shelter provided 200 cages.

Several participants noted that shelter guests were very grateful for the help they received from the school staff. Alice noted, “Some wanted to donate to us. I told them they can donate to a hardship fund for students which take care of students who don’t have lunch money.” She reflected, “I think it changed the way the community looked at the school system. They had no idea that we would come in and feed them and make sure the trash was empty and put our families up just to make them feel comfortable. I think it changed their opinion on what we actually do.”

Tom reflected, “It was nice to interact with the people in the community. I don’t live in the community, so it was nice to be able to interact with the people where my school is. It changed my view of the community, to be honest. It brought me closer to the people in the area.” William noted, “It was interesting because the demographics drove what we did. I forget what’s outside the school walls. It definitely puts you back in touch with the community.”

The volunteer teachers who assisted in the shelters were especially helpful because of their knowledge of the school grounds and the families who were shelter guests. William observed, “That was part of us being a community school. Teachers are there because they love the school and those kids and the community. I was impressed. They didn’t have to be there.” Phil observed, “By us showing them compassion, the people continued to rally around us. They felt supported and safe, but also closer to each other.” About shelter guests, Phil said, “You don’t know who they are. Shelter guests assisted with trash pick-up and left notes of gratitude to the shelter staff. Nothing was taken or missing when the guest left the shelter. Everyone did their part and helped out. The community now sees us not only for kids but a place they can come for safety. It broadened my eyes to the impact the school had on the community.” Rosa reflected, “The school became a refuge not only for the community but my family. I didn’t expect that.”

DISCUSSION

We had many discussions among our team about how to interpret and apply Starratt’s domains. We were at first surprised at the number of administrative, transactional tasks performed by participants in their respective roles. Because our study focused on ethical motivations, we wondered if those tasks somehow undercut our premise that the operation of schools as community hurricane shelters is a moral enterprise. We came to understand, first, that these tasks were vital to the effective operation of the shelters. Behind the transactional acts such as setting up food service protocols and assigning different sections of the school to different groups, however, we saw motivations to serve the shelter guests and meet their needs as much as possible. That came in separating single adults, families with children, elderly, and even sex offenders. In one example, Rosa found a room with an emergency power outlet for a patient who required special breathing equipment. In another example, Phil set up rooms so that adults and children could watch separate programming. Alice set up stations of water throughout the hallways during the storm to help compensate for the heat in closed rooms without air conditioning. Tara delivered food to elderly guests in their rooms. Louis carried equipment to set up elderly guests in their quarters. Even though our participants were required by contract to work the shelters, we believe these actions do represent moral acts. Most stayed through the operation of the shelters, and some even brought their families. We felt these acts went beyond simple administrative tasks and extended the ethics of care and community.

We also wondered whether there was a difference in ethical motivation and philosophy between the foodservice and plant managers, so-called “blue-collar” workers, and the school administrators, “white collar” professionals trained to lead schools. We did see some more articulated philosophical statements from our administrators. William spoke of his motivations through servant leadership. Phil talked of

being motivated by his values and faith to do the best for every child and member of his school. Rosa viewed the diversity of humanity the storm had delivered to her door and realized how disasters could become great social levelers and affect her own family. We did find philosophical motivations among the managers as well, although perhaps more specifically tied to their jobs. Alice, Andrea, and Tara all talked of accommodating individual food needs as much as possible. Before the storm, Tara purchased decaffeinated coffee for one guest. She also enlisted the help of a girl who needed a comforting distraction. Tom joked with an elderly man and played games with the children. Louis compared the reception he wanted his guests to have with the impression he feels when he travels to attractions and resorts. Throughout, we found that the application of seemingly mundane and transactional tasks showed a willingness of people to go above and beyond their designated duties and focus on the neediest groups.

Seven of our nine participants slept at their shelter for between three and five days. During that time, they were constantly on call and got little sleep. The two who went home worked double shifts and were in constant phone contact. We don't make any interpretation of commitment by that. Rotation schedules are set in advance. One's shift may or may not occur when the storm hits. We do believe, however, that living at the shelter provides a more immersive experience.

We also saw overlaps in our participants' responses between the domains of Public Servant and Human Being and worked to establish differences between them. We decided that the domain of Public Servant involves those who work in the system applying their knowledge, skills, and access to help those in the shelters. We see those operating within the Public Servant domain as more active, in doing something proactive for others. We found that those actions within the domain of Human Being may reflect more empathy. The domains are closely related, and the acts of the public servant are based on one's orientation within the ethical domain of Human Being. We found the actions coded within the domain of Human Being to reflect those universal characteristics representative to all of us. These are those traits that transcend individual idiosyncrasies like race, gender, income, social caste. We also struggled with codes of physical and mental exhaustion, frustration, and pain, as well as satisfaction and pride. Although these were emotionally powerful, we decided these are universal characteristics of human beings, so we coded those responses within that domain.

As we discussed earlier, we also deleted Starratt's educator domain from our analysis. While one can certainly argue that educators are always teaching in some way, education was not a focus of their work within the shelter. We did, however, maintain the Educational Leader domain, believing that each leader acted as a representative of the school to the community. We saw similarities among the domains of Public Servant, Human Being, and the Ethic of Care. We decided that because this ethic was pervasive among all domains, it was appropriate to identify it as one of our two central themes driving the actions of our participants.

As with the Ethic of Care, we felt that the Ethic of Community was a driving force that permeated the actions of these school leaders. Their goals consistently were both to serve the individuals in their care with an awareness that during the storm, the school and community were one force. We especially focused on community coding to include those from outside the school system who helped or provided care. At Rosa's school, a medical doctor and two nurse practitioners who were shelter guests volunteered their expertise. At Phil's school, teachers volunteered to serve as guides and comforters to those in the shelter. There were similar stories at each school of community members who volunteered their expertise and good will to help others. The presence of National Guard troops and police officers was also seen as a merging of school and community resources at each school. Furman notes that an ethic of community "suggests a practice of moral leadership that is clearly distributed and based first and foremost in interpersonal and group skills, such as listening with respect, striving for knowing and understanding others" (2004, p. 4). Although leadership style was not specifically a focus of this study, we did find that in the shelters, leadership was necessarily distributed communally across the school among managers, and even with support staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Our goal in this study was not to create a shelter preparedness manual. In fact, all participants reported working in post-storm meetings to gather thoughts on better ways to prepare. Understanding that, we did feel obligated to report some of the strongest recommendations that emerged.

All participants felt that they could have used more personnel and medical help.

An unexpected recommendation was to provide counselors for shelter workers to talk with before and after the disaster. This indicated the unexpected trauma brought by dealing with so many people in such proximity for several days. Reflecting on the emotional impact of the experience, Tom observed, “I would like to see counselors or someone to talk to staff after the shelter was closed. When I came back to work, it was hard for me to walk down the hall. I kept seeing people spread wall to wall. I wasn’t the only one. It was a game-changer. It was a stressful time. It would have been nice to have someone to talk to afterward.” Rosa echoed that theme. “I was traumatized. They had another set of administrators come in to clean up because we all had post-traumatic stress disorder – it was that stressful. You had to decompress.”

Another recommendation is to educate communities on the significant services public schools provide during natural disasters and the sacrifices the staff makes to serve their fellow citizens. This seems more important than ever in an increasingly polarized society in which it seems more common to attack the institutions of public schools and discard the ways that these schools serve a democratic republic.

Finally, we believe asking school leaders to reflect on their own personal and professional ethics may help them serve as better school and community leaders. Such reflection could be effectively applied in both pre-service and in-service professional training.

As we conclude this article, the 2020 hurricane season has begun while the United States is in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The idea of grouping people together in circumstances described in this discussion would seem to pose significant challenges beyond the scope of this piece. That would seem to provide fertile ground for a follow-up study.

CONCLUSION

By describing and analyzing the experiences, perceptions, and insights of key school leaders, we hope we have gained a better understanding of the ways that school leaders apply their own sense of ethics in responding to the needs of those within their care. This may provide insight into ways that school leaders extend their leadership and care into the community beyond the specific school shareholders. This understanding may enable current and future school administrators to anticipate the reach of their school and their service beyond the defined borders of their school, to better understand their responses to those events, and therefore to be more effective in their work, better serving their community.

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