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# Preface

**A**s teachers, and teachers of teachers, we spend the bulk of our time focusing on techniques of pedagogy and the substance of our subject matter. We try to teach *how* to teach and *what* to teach. But in the decades of our experience, we have come to learn that there is more to successful teaching than pedagogy and substantive expertise. Good teachers must also be practitioners of ethical propriety. Teacher self-esteem requires that. Effective schools require that. But, most importantly, students require that.

Teachers and school leaders cannot escape the need to cope with ethical challenges. They are simply an inevitable part of the professional lives we lead. No one who works in a school gets through a year without confronting difficult choices between right and wrong, dealing with a colleague or student who has acted irresponsibly, or feeling the temptation to bend the rules or the law for some perceived higher purpose.

But most teachers and school leaders have little formal preparation for these challenges and few reliable navigational aids when they confront them. It was this recognition that led us to write this book. We believe that it fills a significant vacuum in the preparation of teachers and administrators for the real lives they will lead in their schools. And it provides guidance for those already confronting rough seas.

This is not a treatise on ethics or an exercise in theorizing, though we have been blessed in preparing it by the excellent work of those theorists whose inquiries have raised the level of understanding and insight among all students of ethics, including us. Many of them are named in the citations throughout this book.

But our purpose here is more practical. We have drawn from our own experiences and from the much broader range of experiences among scores of teachers and school leaders who have shared with us

the details of incidents in their own lives and their own schools. We suggest some important ethical principles at the outset of this book and we offer some guidelines for how one might think about a difficult ethical dilemma.

But we believe that the best way to heighten one's own ethical sensitivities is through practice. And we have provided dozens of cases, drawn from actual experience, to provide the grist for that kind of activity. What we hope to encourage is discussion. Put yourself in the place of the teachers and school leaders portrayed in these cases. What choices did they confront? What were the potential costs and benefits of each option for action? How would you have acted and why? We offer our own suggestions for some of these cases, though we wrap them in no pretense of perfection. For others, we leave readers to their own devices to assess and respond to the situations we pose.

We provide no "answers" to the questions these cases raise for the simple and important reason that we believe the best answers come from reflection and discussion, not from an answer key at the back of the book. Our fond hope—and our firm belief—is that by thinking and talking about these cases, many of which will strike chords of recognition among experienced teachers, readers will come away with a clearer sense of what constitutes an ethical issue and what sorts of responses are possible and prudent. We hope that we have provided a practical guide to practical learning.

While we take full responsibility for the contents of this book, we could not have done it alone and we did not. Nearly a hundred experienced educators provided invaluable assistance by telling us their own stories of difficult circumstances they faced and choices they had to make. These included graduate students in the Educational Leadership Program at the University of Maine, other teachers and school leaders from around the country, professional colleagues, and our brothers and sisters and their spouses in our large family where teaching is a common and treasured profession. We are deeply grateful to all of them for the time they spent with us in conversation about this project and for their candor, insights, and often, their self-criticism.

We are grateful as well for the support we have received from the universities where we teach, the University of Maine and Colby College, and from our colleagues and the administrations of them both. Directly and indirectly, our thinking about the issues addressed in this book has been shaped and refined by the wisdom we acquired in the daily conversations with those with whom we

work. We happily and gratefully list here the names of those who helped us in preparing this book in the acknowledgments.

We wish as well to thank the good people at Corwin who shared our enthusiasm for this project from the start and who guided it smoothly from an idea to a book. Dan Alpert, our editor, served as midwife at the outset and wise counselor throughout. We also thank Megan Bedell, associate editor, who helped keep the project on track and Tomara Kafka who carefully and thoughtfully copyedited the entire book. Finally, we express our gratitude to our children and their spouses for bearing with us throughout—and for holding their tongues when they doubted that joint authorship of a book was good for a marriage. In fact, it was. And we hope that is yet another important lesson of this project.

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