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Ethics for Teachers: A Synopsis of Needs,

Goals, Teaching Methods, and Curricular Arrangements

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Abstract

Interest in explicitly incorporating a consideration of ethical issues into teacher education is on the rise. A parallel development has been underway in other areas of professional education, especially medicine and nursing, over the past decade and a half. Borrowing from the field of applied and professional ethics generally, this paper addresses the four central issues of needs, goals, teaching methods, and curricular arrangements as they apply to ethics for teachers. Several anticipated misconceptions and sources of resistance are discussed, and suggestions are offered regarding the shape that ethics for teachers curricula should take.

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Introduction

The recent appearance of texts such as Tom's Teaching as a Moral Craft
(1984) and Strike's and Soltis' The Ethics of Teaching (1985) indicates a
growing interest in incorporating ethical issues explicitly into teacher
education. A parallel development has been underway in other areas of
professional education, especially medicine and nursing, for the past two
decades (The Hastings Center, 1980). It is reasonable to believe that this
emerging interest within teacher education can benefit from attention to the
manner in which central issues about ethics teaching have emerged and unfolded
in applied ethics more generally. Presuming important similarities exist
between teacher education and other areas of professional education, this paper
analyzes four central issues that confront the development of ethics for
teachers curricula: needs, goals, teaching methods, and curricular
arrangements.

Needs

The Hastings Center (1980) surveyed American universities and professional
schools and compiled the following list of areas in the field applied ethics
which are new within the last two decades: medicine, nursing, law, business,
engineering, social science, journalism, and public policy. Notably absent from
the list is ethics for teachers (at any level).

In addition, little evidence exists to show that ethics is adequately
treated within teacher education by means other than applied ethics. The
fundamental question of ethics is: "What, all things considered, ought to be
done under a given set of circumstances" (Benjamin and Curtis, 1980, p. 9).
Answering this question in a given situation requires determining not only the
means to be employed in accomplishing ends; it also requires determining what
ends are worth aiming for. Frequently, however, a preoccupation with

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perfecting means precludes questioning ends (e.g., MacIntyre, 1981). In this connection, several uses of moral psychology within teacher education are likely to be confused with ethics teaching and thus mistakenly believed to obviate the need for any special attention to ethics.

For example, teacher education frequently incorporates instruction in moral psychology (typically Kohlberg's theory, e.g., Paolitto, 1977) to provide teachers-to-be with the psychological knowledge they need to become moral educators. Although it is certainly worthwhile to include moral psychology in teacher education, moral psychology does not replace ethics or allow ethics to take care of itself, because teaching moral psychology does not engage students in a critical examination of ends. Instead, it provides a tool, a means, that they may apply (often uncritically) in their future teaching.

Likewise, "teacher development" is no substitute for explicit training in ethics. That is, using psychological theory (e.g., Witherell and Erikson, 1978) or other techniques, such as values clarification, to facilitate the personal development of future teachers is not ethics teaching. "Teacher development" is closer to a model of therapy--in which teacher educators apply theories and techniques to teachers--than it is to a model of ethical inquiry--in which teacher educators engage in a critical examination of ethical issues with teachers.

In contrast to the above two applied psychology approaches, teaching the liberal arts and the social foundations of education are closely related to teaching ethics because each emphasizes a critical analysis of ends. As Maxine Greene urges,

> I am asking for a return to the posing of questions, the complex
>
> and searching questions that have permeated our history over the
>
> years . . . If those we teach--the teachers-to-be, the
>
> administrators, the curriculum designers, the supervisors--are

not to become mere trainers and technicians, they need to be
initiated into such questioning (1981, p 32).

Depending on social foundations and the liberal arts for ethics
teaching, however, has two significant drawbacks. First, because liberal
arts teaching seeks to promote the general liberal education of teachers,
it does not sufficiently focus on ethics. Second, the liberal arts
themselves receive little emphasis within teacher education. Bartos and
Souter (1982) solicited the syllabi for social foundations courses (where
one would expect ethics and liberal arts issues to be taught within teacher
education) from 168 institutions that offer teacher education programs.
Roughly half (81) of the teacher education programs responded and not one
mentioned ethics as a topic in their social foundations courses. Follow up
questionnaires revealed that 73% did include the related topics of
"social/cultural" and "philosophy", but these areas together accounted for
less than 25% of the time spent in social foundations courses.

Several commentators proffer explanations of why liberal arts, and hence
ethics, are so under-represented in teacher education curricula. Tom (1984),
for example, blames the influence of behaviorist-inspired "teacher
effectiveness" research that results in teaching being construed as value free
"applied social science". Smith and Traver (1983) provide a diagnosis similar
to Tom's, stressing that teacher education has become pre-occupied with
dir nsing the means of achieving educational outccomes while losing sight of
th ed to critically evaluate educational ends. Finally, Arnstine (1973)
provides three concrete hypotheses for why the liberal arts (and ethics by
implication) are neglected in teacher education programs, each having to do
with the nature of teacher education faculty: teacher educators are taught the
applied science model of teaching, they are suspicious of theory (with which
liberal arts is identified), and they are subject to ideological forces that

work against training teachers to be critical of educational institutions and practices.

Teacher education is not alone in eschewing ethics teaching; the general trend within 20th century higher education away from ethics in the curriculum gives further plausibility to the claims made by Tom and others.

According to Sloan (1980), 20th century American higher education in general has seen a splintering of the curriculum into specialized disciplines. Ethics ("moral philosophy") was dislodged in the process from the central and integrative role it enjoyed in the 19th century curriculum and placed in philosophy departments along side other elective courses. Students were no longer required to take any ethics whatsoever; those who elected courses were likely to receive an experience out-of-step with the rest of their education due to the effects of specialization generally and within philosophy itself.

A concomitant development of specialization was the emergence of the putatively value free social sciences as disciplines in their own right not falling under the umbrella of "moral philosophy". Under the influence of positivism--in its heyday in the first half of the 20th century--the new sciences of behavior not only viewed moral issues as outside their purview. The then prominent theoretical underpinnings entailed that moral issues were, by their very nature, excluded from the arena of rationality and science. Thus, the study of human behavior--once fertile ground for considering moral issues--became hostile to instruction in something as "unscientific" as ethics.

According to Parr (1980), the same process occurred in the non-philosophy humanities curriculum. She contends that current undergraduate students have inadequate preparation in literature and history to engage in meaningful discussions of ethical issues: "It is nearly an academic cliche that large numbers of college students have little, if any, knowledge of Western culture" (p. 194). Citing a 1979

Chronicle_of_Higher_Education survey, she notes that today's students are, in addition to being ill-prepared, also ill-disposed to consider questions of ethics (for instance, the survey found that more than two-thirds of undergraduates believe that ethics is moot because laws should be obeyed independent of moral considerations). She observes more generally that

Although undergraduates and graduate students from across the country currently are flocking to applied-ethics courses, faculty from a wide variety of institutions and disciplines report that many of their undergraduate students seem either indifferent or resistant to ethical issues, particularly when such issues are raised in the context of nonethics classes. In other words, many students see ethical concerns as separate from educational ones (p. 192)

Parr also notes significant resistance among humanities instructors to incorporating ethical issues into their teaching: "Many faculty members express genuine alarm a. the prospect of any consideration of ethical issues in regular courses" (p. 196). The same value freedom which so forcefully influenced the social sciences also permeates the humanities. And worse, according to Parr, "even those [faculty] who wish to incorporate a focus on ethics may well avoid doing so because of a fear that any veering away from more conventional pursuits of their disciplines might be a form of career suicide" (p. 202).

If this is the state of the humanities, it should not be surprising that te. ʻr education--with its affinity to applied social science--neglects e'   teaching. Furthermore, the present state of humanities and social sc   ːe curricula strongly suggests that, in addition to not receiving eᴠ   s instruction within teacher education programs, teacher education students are not receiving ethics instruction outside their teacher

education programs either.

In summary, although ethical questions permeate the practice of teaching, there is little reason to believe that the practice of systematically and critically entertaining these questions is widespread, either inside or outside teacher education programs.

Goals

The past influence of positivism helps explain why ethics teaching disappeared from university curricula; its continued influence (Scriven, 1983; MacIntyre, 1981) poses an obstacle to reintroducing ethics teaching. Getting a discussion of the goals of ethics in teaching off the ground thus requires the preliminary step of responding to a positivistic argument implicit in much of the resistance to ethics teaching.

The argument takes the form of a dilemma that may be sketched as follows: Either ethics for teachers must aim to influence behavior, in which case it is morally objectionable; or it must not aim to influence behavior, in which case it is irrelevant to the practical concerns of teacher education. Therefore, ethics for teachers is either precluded on moral grounds or is pointless. This dilemma presupposes the following positivist-inspired argument: (1) values lie outside the arena of rational argumentation, (2) values that individuals adopt are the result of conditioning, and (3) therefore, any attempt to influence values (and hence moral behavior) is inherently manipulative, biased, and indocrinating.

I have urged elsewhere (Howe, in press) that the positivistic fact-value distinction is merely a corollary of positivism's other epistemological tenets, and that it may be repudiated along with postivistic epistemology. For purposes of this paper, it is sufficient to observe that the general positivist-inspired objection to teaching ethics is self-defeating. That is, if all value judgments

are non-rational and are the result soley of conditioning, then no grounds exist for criticizing the attempt to influence values, for the value judgment "It is good to influence values" must itself be non-rational and therefore immune from criticism. More specifically, value judgments implicit in the positivist argument--manipulation, bias, and indoctrination are bad--cannot be justified if the premises of the argument are true. Consequently, adherents to the positivist-behaviorist argument have no grounds for criticizing the attempt to influence values. It follows that the dilemma falls apart because its first horn--if ethics teaching aims to influence behavior, it is morally objectionable--may be rejected.

Setting the positivistic objection aside and, with it, the notion that ethics teaching may be a priori ruled out of court, what goals should ethics for teachers curricula adopt? Below is a proposed set of six characteristics that individuals must possess to be "morally educated" (Wilson, 1967). After these characteristics are illustrated by way of an example, a derivative set of six goals will be advanced.

Consider the following ethical dilemma posed by a practicing teacher.

Case Description. Marilyn Henderson is a 5th grade language arts teacher at Willoughby Elementary in South Lake, a medium sized city with a population of roughly 150,000. Marilyn is troubled to learn that Connie Severns, a 5th grade social studies teacher, whom Marilyn worked with previously in another school in the South Lake system, will soon be transferred to Willoughby. Marilyn believes Connie to be incompetent and is uncomfortable with this knowledge, especially in light of the fact that her students will be platooning through Connie's class. As Marilyn recalls Connie, "She didn't teach anything; she couldn't teach anything". Others in the district share

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Marilyn's assessment of Connie as a teacher and apparently with good reason. Connie seems to totally lack control. Children cry and complain about the chaos, some steal things from her purse, and on one occasion another teacher discovered a child chasing Connie around the room.

Marilyn had previously tried to do something about Connie's incompetence but met with little success. The teachers' union advised her that they would have to stand behind a tenured teacher, and the school administration claimed to have to follow procedures (which could take years according to Marilyn). At this point in time (prior to Connie's transfer), the principal of Willoughby called the affected teachers together. He too was concerned about Connie's transfer and proposed that they discretely and surrepticiously "write things down" to build a case which they could use to have Connie fired. Marilyn is asked to be a part of this. Should she go along?

To work her way through this dilemma, Marilyn would need to exhibit six characteristics.

1. Appreciation_for_Moral_Deliberation. Marilyn would have to recognize that there are individuals whose interests might conflict (hers, Connie's, the principal's, and the students', to name the most salient ones), that each of these individuals' interests carries the same initial weight, and that careful deliberation is required to arrive at some justified course of action. Without such Appreciation, Marilyn simply would not recognize that a moral problem existed or, if she did, would have no idea of what to do about it.

2. Empathy. The ability to assume the viewpoints and imagine the feelings

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of others is one of the hallmarks of moral deliberation. In the present example, Marilyn would need to assess how Connie will feel if she learns that her co-workers have been going along with the Principal's scheme and how Connie will feel about losing her job. She also needs to consider the feelings of students exposed to Connie's teaching. And so on.

3. Interpersonal Skills. The capacity to sensitively and humanely interact with others is especially important regarding ethical problems. Interpersonal skills could be employed by Marilyn in several ways. Perhaps a sensitive and tactful discussion with Connie might help reduce her hurt feelings, even if she is ultimately fired. Or perhaps tactfully approaching the principal might result in an open approach to the situation that would avoid deceiving Connie.

4. Knowledge. Marilyn would have to possess knowledge that would allow her to formulate reasonable strategies and anticipate their consequences. Would approaching Connie do more harm than good? What formal procedures are in place to deal with incompetent teachers? What moral principles are at issue? Does Connie's teaching really harm students? Can teachers with Connie's management problems improve in this regard?

5. Reasoning. Marilyn would have to be able to draw conclusions on the basis of the preceding characterisitics in order to derive some rule of conduct to apply in this case or to recognize the situation as an instance of one of her previously derived moral principles. In short, she would have to do some reasoning. For example, suppose Marilyn endorsed the following rule: Persons should not be deceived unless there are compelling reasons for doing so (e.g., to protect a family of Jews in Nazi Germany). Suppose in addition that she does not believe the reasons for deceiving Connie are compelling. If so, she should draw the conclusion that some alternative to the principal's suggestion should be pursued.

6. Courage. Finally, Marilyn would have to have the courage to follow

through on the conclusion of her deliberations. Pursuing the matter entails certain risks. On the one hand, her co-workers, the principal, and others might be quite unreceptive to her rocking the boat. On the other hand, dealing directly with Connie could be an emotionally trying experience.

The operation of these six characteristics may be summarized as follows: Appreciation for Moral Deliberation is the fundamental presupposition of moral behavior and decision-making. Empathy and Interpersonal Skills are required to ferret out and articulate the interests and feelings of others. The results of the operation of these characteristics informs beliefs about individuals and is combined with more general Knowledge. Information from all these sources is then used to Reason through to a conclusion. Finally, Courage is required to convert conclusions to actions where difficult circumstances are involved.

These six characteristics may serve as the basis for six parallel goals of ethics for teachers.

1. Instilling_Appreciation_for_Moral_Deliberation--instilling appreciation for the need to consider the interests of one's self, students, the public, and other teachers and for the value of collaborative inquiry in resolving real or potential conflicts in these interests.

2. Enhancing_Empathy--enhancing students' capacity to assume the viewpoints and imagine the feelings of others.

3. Enhancing_Interpersonal_Skills--enhancing students' ability to effectively but sensitively interact with students, parents, and co-workers.

4. Imparting_Knowledge--imparting the facts, concepts, and positions that are especially pertinent to moral problems in teaching.

5. Improving_Reasoning--improving students' ability to recognize ethical issues and formulate them in terms of the relevant issues; to engage in conceptual analysis; to distinguish among factual, legal, and ethical issues; to formulate clear, consistent and logically correct arguments; to identify

alternative positions and presuppositions associated with them; and to anticipate and address difficulties in one's own view.

6. Promoting Courage--promoting steadfastness in one's ethical views, including the willingness to voice one's opinion and to follow through under difficult circumstances; discouraging unreflective acceptance of what is merely conventional.

These six goals differ in complex ways that make it inappropriate to hold ethics teaching equally responsible for each of them (Howe, 1985). Briefly, Imparting Knowledge and Improving Reasoning are straightforward cognitive goals that roughly parallel imparting factual knowledge and improving problem solving skills. General approaches to teaching and measuring success in this domain are relatively secure, and higher education emphasizes cognitive goals generally speaking. By contrast, less is known about how to teach and measure success with respect to affective/attitudinal characteristics like empathy, interpersonal skills, and courage. Accordingly, affective/attitudinal goals receive considerably less emphasis and are rarely explicitly used to evaluate instruction or student performance. Finally, and to complicate matters, Instilling Appreciation is an exception. Although it is largely affective/attitudinal in nature, it is a customary educational goal--probably because it has a substantial cognitive component, is not a direct object of teaching, is not used to evaluate students, and can be easily measured with evaluation forms.

Teaching Methods

In the early stages of the recent surge in applied ethics teaching, instructors and texts typically introduced traditional normative ethical theories (i.e., Kantianism and utilitarianism), discussed their relative strengths and weaknesses, and then used them to frame discussions of actual

moral problems. This method has fallen into disfavor because professionals and students charge that such an approach is too abstract and largely irrelevant to their concerns. The majority of applied ethics instructors now agree that stressing ethical theory is inappropriate. For instance, Caplan (1983) abusively refers to the method of first explicating and then applying ethical theory as the "engineering model"; Putnam (1983) contends that traditional ethical theories "prove too much" and therfore prove nothing; and Bok contends that

> A system of moral philosophy put to such uses is like a
> magician's hat--almost anything can be pulled out of it,
> wafted about, let fly. No one can be quite sure it was not
> there in the hat all along (1978, p. 57).

Currently, applied ethics teaching typically uses cases to address the actual moral problems that confront individual practitioners and assigns a secondary role to ethical theory, raising abstract issues only to the extent that they bear on actual ethical puzzles. Teacher educators would be wise to take advantage of the lessons learned by others and to also develop ethics teaching around ethical issues that teachers can anticipate confronting (the method endorsed by Strike and Soltis, 1984, in The_Ethics_of_Teaching). The following is a tentative list of ethical issues that might be represented in cases and serve as the core content of ethics for teachers curricula: distribution of educational resources, the obligation to be a moral educator, moral dimensions of behavior modification, school prayer, reporting suspected child abuse, effects of labeling, grading, confidentiality, incompetent co-workers, merit pay, tracking, corporal punishment, students' rights, and parents' rights.

Ethics for teachers based on the case study approach would seek to promote the two kinds of goals specified earlier--cognitive and

affective/attitudinal--in the following way. The process begins with the consideration of a particular case, one which is relevant to and captures students' interest. Plausible solutions are hammered out in a collegial fashion, and from these solutions general principles and concepts are derived. A new case is presented. The principles and concepts derived from previous experience are applied as appropriate, modified as needed, and new ones are derived. A new case is presented. The loop is repeated. As a result of this iterative process, students develop a larger and larger stock of concepts and principles that renders things both simpler and more complex. They gain the ability to intelligently discuss more and more cases and to easily dispense with the relatively straightforward ones. At the same time, the process of developing an the ever increasing stock of concepts and principles instills in them appreciation for complexity, awareness of and respect for the well-considered views of others, and skill in constructively interacting with their classmates and instructors. The instructors serve to facilitate the general process with well-placed Socratic torpedoes and ideally become less necessary--or more collegial--as the process begins to run under its own steam.

Curricular Arrangements

Teacher education, like medical and nursing education, has both classroom course work and apprenticeship field work experience. This basic curricular design entails several choices about how to incorporate ethics teaching: (1) ethical issues may be incorporated throughout, and considered whenever they naturally arise; (2) ethical issues may be the focus of separate courses; or (3) ethical issues may be the focus of separate courses and also considered throughout the curriculum. In addition to the choice among methods of how to incorporate ethics into teacher education curricula, there is also a choice regarding staffing. In particular, should teacher educators incorporate and

teach ethics by themselves, or should they enlist the advise and participation of specially trained "ethicists" (typically philosophers)?

The evaluation of the three-year "Ethics in the Core Curriculum" project (Howe, Tomlinson, and Brody, 1984; Howe, Tomlinson, and Jones, in press) provides empirical evidence that may be used to inform these two choices. The original goals of the project were to thoroughly integrate ethical issues throughout the curricula of Michigan State's two colleges of medicine and college of nursing, using philosophers as advisers and curriculum developers while relying on clinical faculty to do the teaching. As the implementation of the project proceded, it quickly became apparent that the original strategy had to be revised. Because the combination of interest, motivation, skill, knowledge, experience, and available time necessary for effective ethics teaching was rare among clinical faculty, the project philosophers assumed a primary role in teaching. In addition, several separate courses in ethics were developed. Results of the evaluation of the project indicated that a model incorpating (1) seperate classroom ethics courses followed up with more limited experiences in other contexts (especially in apprenticeship field experience) and (2) the active participation of philosphers at all levels was effective and feasible. Furthermore, this model was preferred by faculty and students. Given the similarity between medical and nursing education (especially the latter) and teacher education, the same general approach is the most promising way of incorporating ethics into teacher education.

Conclusion

Ethics for teachers curricula on the model proposed in this paper, like medical and nursing ethics curricula, will likely encounter marked resistance. In addition to two sources of resistance already discussed, positivist-inspired "value phobia" (Scriven, 1983) and claims that ethics teaching is implicit in

teacher education and therefore requires no special attention, many teacher educators are likely to recoil at the suggestion that the input and participation of philosophers is required for ethics teaching to be effective. This response, common among medical and nursing faculty, seems to be based on belief that philosophers are out to rescue practitioners from their unethical behavior (a pediatric resident once told me this point blank).

The response is based on two related misconceptions. First, few if any philosophers claim to have any special expertise in making individuals into "good persons", where being a good person is identified with the affective/attitudinal goals described earlier. Indeed, philosophers often go too far in denying the relevance of the affective/attitudinal aspects of ethics teaching. Second, few moral philosophers claim to possess any special, "acontextual" (Nobel, 1982) moral reasoning faculty. Instead, moral philosophers (at least those in the "applied ethics" movement, e.g., Beauchamp, 1982; Singer, 1982; Wikler, 1982) claim a much more modest expertise: familiarity with the important concepts, principles, theories, and arguments that underlie contemporary moral controversies, and the experience and intellectual dispositions required to orchestrate the kind of critical but open-ended investigation that characterizes effective ethical inquiry.

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