

TEACHER- AS AN AGENT TO INVOKE MORAL ETHICS

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Morals are caught, not taught. They take shape not through precept, but rather through the uncountable ordinary and informal contacts teachers and parents have with children. No single event or deed "causes" children to become patient or impatient, attentive or inattentive to others. Rather, these dispositions emerge unevenly through mutual interaction with the environments such as the home, the school and the community. Moreover, the process can work both ways, regardless of which way the process goes. However, the point is that it cannot be forced. It cannot be preset according to a timetable or schedule. Character and personal disposition materialize over time. They take form through potential contacts an individual has with other people. (Hansen, 1995)

The teacher's moral agency is an inevitable state of being that is revealed whenever the teacher, as a moral person, conducts him or herself in schools with honesty, a sense of fairness, integrity, compassion, patience, respect, impartiality, care, dedication, and other such core virtues. It is also demonstrated when the teacher, as a moral educator, invokes students to appreciate such similar virtues and to conduct themselves in ways that honour them. Teachers may reflect this dual concept of moral agency formally or informally, consciously and intentionally or not, and frequently or rarely. It is far more challenging to disentangle the ethics of teaching from the very process, practice, and intent of teaching as "the teacher's conduct, at all times and in all ways, is a moral matter" (Fenstermacher 1990, p. 133).

As Carr (1993) claims, "The knowledge and understanding which should properly inform the professional consciousness of the competent teacher is...a kind of moral wisdom or judgment which is rooted in rational reflection about educational policies and practices and what is ethically, as well as instrumentally, appropriate to achieve them" (p. 265).

Not surprisingly, teachers cannot be ever cognizant of the moral and ethical implications of everything they do in the course of a day. Teaching is enormously demanding, frequently frustrating, occasionally overwhelming, and always an eclectic mix of planned formality and spontaneous serendipity. As Buzzelli and Johnston (2002) point out, teachers do have "blind spots in (their) ability to perceive the moral in situations" (p. 125). Nevertheless, their actions transmit moral messages which the students may borrow at receiver's end. (Sizer and Sizer 1999)

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Consequently, the teacher's role as a moral exemplar and educator extends from this. Teachers are answerable, individually and collectively, for the choices they make in the classroom, the motivations that drive them, the actions they take, and the words they use, regardless of whether the direct effect they may or may not have on students can be empirically proven. As a matter of professionalism, the measure of ethical teaching relies on the intentions of teachers, as much as on their influence. Their awareness of such intentions and their deliberative attention to the specificities of their daily practice, as filtered through the lens of virtues and moral principles, attest to their ethical knowledge. And, ultimately, it is this ethical knowledge that is a defining characteristic of professionalism in teaching.

In conclusion, moral agency may be broadly conceived in terms of not only what teachers teach students by direct curricular means, but also more significantly what teachers do themselves as ethical professionals in classrooms and the virtues and moral principles they reflect and, hence, model to students on a daily basis. As Nash (2005) claims: 'The place we call school is an environment of moral interaction and sometimes moral struggle. Children's ability to expand moral sensitivity and ethical reasoning skills will very much depend upon how adults around them model ethical behavior and ethical reasoning. Essentially, a teacher's conduct, at all times and in all ways, is a moral matter. (p. 4)

According to Theodore Roosevelt, "to educate a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society." In the earliest days of schools, moral ethics were taught through discipline, the teacher's example, and the daily school curriculum. Quality moral education helps schools create a safe, caring, and inclusive learning environment for every student and supports academic development. It fosters qualities that will help students be successful as citizens, in the workplace, and with the academic curriculum. It lays the foundation to help students be successful in all of the endeavors of the public schools. In order to establish good moral character, each teacher needs to:

- Act as a caregiver, model, and mentor
- Create a moral community
- Practice moral discipline
- Create a democratic classroom environment
- Teach values through the curriculum
- Use cooperative learning
- Develop the "conscience of craft"
- Encourage moral reflection
- Teach conflict resolution

Although teachers might not have much input into basic curricula, they usually control emphasis and presentation. Teachers can model morality by their actions—even, or perhaps especially, in such seemingly small ways such as

presenting well-planned, enthusiastically taught classes, showing consideration for others (e.g., cleaning the board for the next teacher who will use the room), or going the extra mile for a struggling student. In these ways and many more, a teacher can be an example of ethical conduct and moral values. Teachers can model democratic principles of justice, rationality, equality, and responsibility. Moral gestures and civic actions of teachers register with students more than platitudes and preachiness in the classroom. Being a moral model means giving diligent attention to teaching and to the demands of professional life made by students, co-workers, administrators, parents, and staff. The way individuals relate to each other could also be considered moral action if one examines the way people interact. In the microcosm of the classroom, Lickona (1992) observes that students have two kinds of relationships: teacher and peers. He suggests three ways relationships with teachers can affect a student's moral understanding:

1. Teachers can serve as effective caregivers—loving and respecting their students, helping them succeed in school, building self-esteem, and enabling them to experience what morality is by having the teacher treat them in a moral way;
2. Teachers can serve as models—ethical persons who demonstrate a high level of respect and responsibility both inside and outside the classroom. Teachers can also model moral concern and moral reasoning by their reactions to morally significant events in the life of the school and in the world at large;
3. Teachers serve as ethical mentors—providing moral instruction and guidance through explanation, classroom discussion, storytelling, personal encouragement, and corrective feedback when students hurt others or themselves. (p. 80)

Everyday classroom life is saturated with moral meaning. Even the most routine aspects of teaching convey moral messages to students. Those affairs can strongly influence students' character and personal disposition. Teachers, through their everyday conduct and practice, can create environments in which students can "catch" positive ways of regarding and treating other people and their efforts.

Every little piece of interaction between the teacher and the taught can infuse moral ethics in the students. The various ways in which a teacher begins a lesson; handles the need for involving more students in the class discussion by turn-taking among students; his typical style of working; contributes to the learning environment that eventually emerges in the classroom. These activities are not usually thought of as having moral meaning. They are normally described as issues of classroom management, curricular focus, instructional method, and so forth. However, in actual practice, they embody ongoing moral lessons about how to treat other people, how to treat oneself, and how to regard the process of education.

The way any class gets started may embody moral rather than mere functional meaning. The classroom has more than just physical presence. The kind gestures the teacher makes, his style, voice modulations, good natured smiles, comments and encouragements given to students all have a far reaching influence

on the students. Through his manners the teacher may convey to his subjects the values of punctuality, respect for others, time utilization, cooperativeness, patience etc.

Hand-raising is surely one of the most familiar and ordinary sights in classrooms. Students raise their hands to answer questions, to offer comments, to signal that they have completed or are ready to begin an activity. They do so to ask permission to leave the room, or to perform a service for the teacher or class like looking a word up in a dictionary. During this simple classroom behavior, the teacher can exercise his discretion by giving attention to each student who is raising the hand and by taking turns to provide chance to even those students who occasionally raise their hands. In this way the teacher may transmit lessons in democracy, fairness and being considerate to respect everyone's views. Such acts involve a judgment of students' circumstances, capacities, needs, and purposes, as well as mindfulness of the particular contexts in which the later are expressed. Classrooms are crowded and busy environments. Not only must teachers constantly appraise their students' doings, but students themselves must deal with the reality that they cannot all have the floor at once. Consequently, different student may react to the situation in a different manner. They can be patient, confrontational, or resigned. Those postures imply very different educational and personal outcomes. Patience is a virtue, and it differs markedly from confrontation and resignation. Patience describes the capacity to persevere and to remain self-possessed in the face of delay and obstacle. To be patient means to be prepared to accept the occasional costs of participating in a community. In the classroom, it means being prepared to wait, to attend to others, to forgo sometimes the opportunity to contribute. As teachers can affirm, for students who wish to take part, who have ideas and views they want to make known, these costs can be keenly felt. Were students to be denied time and again the chance to participate meaningfully, it would not be surprising to see them give up on the classroom -- to see their patience revert to resignation and passivity. In turn, those postures may imply giving up on formal education itself. This possibility underscores the moral significance of otherwise routine practices such as hand-raising in the classroom. Through them, teachers are often unknowingly influencing students to take on certain dispositions and attitudes toward themselves, toward others, and toward learning.

Style encompasses gestures, facial expressions, tones of voice, and more. These habits, or elements of style, reflect more than personality or conventional behavior. They express the degree of interest in teaching and in students, as well as the expectations, that underlie the teacher's efforts. Moreover, a close look at a teacher's style reveals how it provides students over the course of a school year with an ongoing model of conduct, and this for better or for worse.

Every teacher leaves a personal imprint or signature on all of his or her

classroom doings, so that what students are being exposed to is not just subject matter but also an outlook on life itself. Without necessarily intending to do so, every teacher fashions a classroom environment which either enables or hinders moral growth and flourishing. Dewey wrote that "Just as physical life cannot exist without the support of a physical environment, so moral life cannot go on without the support of a moral environment." The environment is itself influential in inviting persons to act in certain ways rather than others -- and, thereby, to move in the direction of becoming certain kinds of persons rather than others. This is as true of the moral environment in classrooms as it is of other settings such as the home and the workplace. A teacher who is well-prepared, attentive to students, and confident of the importance of education, is more likely than not to cultivate an environment that offers students moral lessons worth "catching".

In this respect all teachers are role models, regardless of whether they choose to embrace this stance or not. All teachers model a version of how to conduct oneself as a person.

Conclusion:

Moral education can also be seen as an ongoing, inherent dimension of classroom life. The everyday business of the classroom is potentially as rich in moral lessons as are the most ambitious curricula. The lessons that person conveys through his or her everyday teaching can be as morally influential on students as the most explicit curricular efforts. A patient, attentive teacher is more likely than not to develop an environment that invites students to "catch" those same virtues. Thus, teachers should be cognizant of not just their curricula and instructional methods, but also of their very outlooks on life itself.

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