SOME RANDOM THOUGHTS ON THE ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR OF TEACHER CANDIDATES

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ABSTRACT. Accepting the reality that teaching is not a fully fledged profession like other such societal occupations, student teachers find themselves being orientated into a vocation that is still attempting to carve out its rightful place in an evolving society. Until such time as teacher educators adopt a public and accountable ethical regime for teacher candidates, this quasi-profession of teaching will continue to wallow in uncertainty and misdirection.

RÉSUMÉ. Résignés à la réalité que l'enseignement n'est pas une profession à part entière comme d'autres professions sociales, les professeurs stagiaires se voient invités à embrasser une vocation qui tente encore de prendre la place qui lui revient dans notre société en évolution. Tant et aussi longtemps que les responsables de la formation des maîtres n'adopteront pas un régime éthique public et responsable pour les futurs enseignants, cette quasi-profession continuera de croupir dans son indécision et sa mauvaise orientation.

> *Walking into an ethical dilemma is like entering a thicket. It is not like entering a maze because a maze was constructed by someone so we have the anticipation that there is a clear yet complex way out. Given time and patience we should be able to find it. But a thicket has none of these presumptions of final clarity. It is rather like trying to undo a terribly tangled knot. We have no idea how it got that way. We finger and fiddle until some opening or possibility of progress suggests itself. We must be open to possibilities and probabilities, cautious in devising or demanding parameters.* (Ellos, 1994, pp. 26-27)

An overheard conversation

I don't usually sit in the small claustrophobic cafeteria in the basement of my building. Not only do I find the ventilation inadequate, but the lack of windows sort of takes away from the esthetic enjoyment of a

strong cup of coffee. Additionally, and I guess that this is a sign of age as well as girth, I find that the bolted-to-the-floor steel and plastic tables and chairs are designed for a younger and thinner clientele. Unfortunately, I do not have quite enough comfortable and breathable space between my expanding midriff and the hard and unyielding edges of the tables. In any case, I was tired one particular afternoon, only a few students were in the cafeteria, and so I gently squeezed into a spot in the corner to enjoy a more or less quiet cup of coffee (along with a totally illegal and immoral cinnamon bun!).

A couple of moments after I sat down, a few female students sat at the table behind me and began a lively conversation concerning their just completed student teaching week. While I did not intend to eavesdrop, my physical location made any kind of privacy impossible, and I must admit to some interest in their animated, rapid-fire, vernacular, and up-beat conversational exchanges concerning varying aspects of life in general and, more specifically, academic life in a large contemporary downtown inner-city elementary school. It became quickly apparent that these three were all student teaching in the same school with two of them at the primary level and the other at one of the more senior elementary grades. From an initial voyeur's sense of some pleasure in hearing the laughter, the joy, the excitement, and the animation in the voices as incidents and events were discussed and analyzed, I soon rapidly moved to a sense of personal and professional unease and discomfort as one of the two primary-level teacher candidates discussed in some graphic details her cooperating teacher, a particular elementary pupil, this child's mother, and some aspects of the school situation. Her seat-mates, and anyone else who overheard this conversation for that matter, were a captive audience.

What follows, then, in the tradition of Connelly and Clandinin (1986, 1988, 1990) is my edited narrative reconstruction of this overheard aural event. I have supplied simple pseudonyms and attempted to reconstruct this conversation such that it makes some sense to those who may not be familiar with particular local terminology and 'inside' knowledge. The many interjections and 'side bars' that are so common in free flowing animated speech, as well as those ever-present tangents that refer to other incidents or previous events, have been eliminated so that this particular exchange, with its colourful language, stands starkly alone. Furthermore, although the odd word has been altered so as to indicate tone or emphasis, no serious literary attempt has been made to describe the tone of the conversation in regards to sarcasm or

word emphasis. I leave such artistic endeavours to the imagination of the reader. Additionally, as my back was to these participants for this entire conversation, I have no knowledge in regards to accompanying body language, hand gestures, or facial expressions.

Mary: "Oh, God, did I tell you about that little creep in my class who has the drunken mother?"

Audience: "No, what creep . . . drunk mother in school?"

Mary: "Well, you know that fat kid who has a face like a little shrivelled up rat with a pointed nose, and those funny coloured glasses he got in the States. Anyhow, he was a real pain in the ass on Tuesday and so Mrs. Smith [the cooperating teacher] gave him a recess detention for the next day. He cried and cried . . . what a little baby. . . said that it wasn't his fault . . . always his excuse . . . and his mother said that Mrs. Smith was picking on him . . . so he did not have to attend any more detentions."

Audience: "Did he r-e-a-l-l-y say that his mother said that the teacher was picking on him and that he didn't have to go to any more detentions?"

Mary: "Yep! And Mrs. Smith went ballistic . . .b-a-l-l-i-s-t-i-c. . . I mean she really went out of her head! I have never seen her so angry. She told Robert [the pupil] that he was a little lazy fool and that he was going to fail again if he did not stop acting like a baby every time something didn't go his way. She told him to grow up and said that this was probably why he had no friends in the class."

Audience: "W-O-W!"

Mary: "Wait, it gets better. This all happened on Tuesday during the last period and Robert went off crying ... typical... to the bus. The next morning, Mrs. Martin [the mother] brought Robert to school herself and she and Mrs. Smith got into a real shouting match in the school yard."

Audience: "N-O !"

Mary: "I mean, you know, this was really something. Robert was hiding behind his mother and the two of them were yelling at each other with kids sliding all over the yard and trying to stay out of the way. I mean, you know, what the hell was I to do? I had to stop myself from laughing out loud as it looked so p-a-t-h-e-t-i-c to see these two old biddies yelling at each other. And, I mean, you know, that little rat-faced slob hiding behind his mother."

Audience: "What happened?"

Mary: "Well, the bell rang and all the kids started to line up so the two of them, well you know, they had to sort of stop. Mrs. Martin was yelling that Mrs. Smith was always picking on her little boy . . . it wasn't fair . . . why couldn't Mrs. Smith just do her job and teach her son how to read. She also shouted that Mrs. Smith should mind her own damn business and stop poking into personal things that were not her concern."

Audience: "Oh, God . . . this was happening in front of kids in the school yard?"

Mary: "You know, I thought that Mrs. Smith was going to go ballistic again 'cause she got all red in the face . . . said that she couldn't help Robert if he had screwed up genes . . . that maybe Mrs. Martin should spend less time in the bar and more time at home helping her son with his homework."

Audience: "She said t-h-a-t!"

Mary: "And more! She told Mrs. Martin that Robert had no friends in the class because he was a mean little boy and the other kids didn't like him. She also said that Robert had written many things in his journal and that she had made copies so that Mrs. Martin had better not make any trouble for her. . ."

Audience: [Interrupting with rising voice]"She made copies of the kid's journal. . .?"

Mary: [Rushing] "By this time, the kids were going into school and Mrs. Smith went with them. Mrs. Martin, you know, just stood out there alone in the yard yelling back at the school. And then she suddenly stopped and sort of started to talk to herself. I mean, God, it was sort of funny to see her standing there all alone. I mean, what a loser that drunk mother is. She couldn't raise so much as a mouse and look what she is doing to that screwed up little kid."

Audience: "What happened to Robert?"

Mary: [Pause] ". . . I'm not sure . . . just like that little creep to sneak into school when no one was looking. . ."

Audience: "No . . . No . . . what happened to Robert in class?"

Mary: "You know, what do you expect? How can you teach a kid who has a loser mother like that . . . anyway . . . I mean you know, how the hell do you teach a kid like that? Why should I spend my time with him anyway. . ."

Audience: "OK, OK, but what is going to happen to him?"

Mary: "Mrs. Smith and I discussed Robert later that morning and we decided that we are just going to ignore him the rest of the term."

Audience: [Pause] ". . . um . . . um . . . is that the best thing to do. . .?"

As I walked back to my office, I pondered and attempted to make some personal and professional sense of this overheard conversation. I had actively and not passively listened, left because I was uncomfortable, never looked back at the girls as I exited the cafeteria, and had said nothing to them to challenge their actions; therefore, what was my culpability, however inadvertent, in this unfolding scenario? This experience gelled with others from my past and as I attempted to fit the pieces together, I came to know that a major factor in this ongoing and somewhat secret and internal ethical dilemma is that 'teaching', as a career, job, position, calling, life-long activity, obligation, or vocation, is not considered a 'profession' in the same sense that other such key and recognized societal activities are.

Robert Nash (1991) postulates that as individuals we live in a number of separate and yet intertwined moral worlds. Specifically, Nash identifies three such realms; namely, what he terms, secular pluralist, concrete moral, and phenomenological. To Nash,

> Educators . . . make ethical judgments and decisions by relying somewhat haphazardly on past religious and family training, early schooling, on-the-job trial and error, and vague impressions of what constitutes good moral character. *Unfortunately, this prediscursive decision making is not adequate.* (my emphasis, p. 164).

Roadblocks to professionalism

Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary (1988) defines 'profession' as "one of a limited number of occupations or vocations involving special learning and carrying a certain social prestige, esp. the learned professions: law, medicine and the Church" (p. 798). Hoyle (1980), on the other hand, makes a distinction between what he terms professional*ism*, where the focus is on professional practice; and professional*ization*, where the focus is on the status of the occupation. In a somewhat more satirical vein, Soder (1991) suggests that teaching will never become a profession as long as it continues to define itself in terms of what it *is not*, as opposed to specific terms clearly defining what it *is* [my emphasis].

For possible reasons of overt public status, the Quebec Government, in a similar manner to other individual provincial and state governments,

currently officially recognizes a score or so of different and distinct professions (doctors, nurses, psychologists, dentists, guidance counsellors, physiotherapists, notaries, lawyers, etc.). Each of these recognized professions has special responsibilities and powers in law, for example, in regards to internal governance, licensing, credentials, public and private communication, discipline, negotiations, up-grading or in-service professional development, professional standards, and codes of behaviour. 'Teacher' is not included within this special professional framework and is therefore, in the eyes of this government and this society at least, not a member of this exclusive and special professional club.

While some of us who are indeed certified public school teachers and maybe a few of us who have a hand in preparing new teachers refer to ourselves as 'professionals' , the hard legal reality is that we are, at best, 'non-professionals' – however that may be defined – or, as suggested by Darling-Hammond and Cobb (1996) "quasi-professional" (p. 46). Aspiring to a lofty standard does not in and of itself guarantee such success, and teachers must face the political and societal reality that theirs is not a profession like the others. Such a lack of status is deeply based within our culture and perhaps finds its roots in the *Webster* definition in that there is a general suggestion that elementary and secondary school teaching is not all that difficult, that special skills are really not needed, and that pretty well anyone can tackle this teaching endeavour with some success. While satirist and playwright George Bernard Shaw may have succinctly and negatively defined our vocation when he penned "He who can, does. He who cannot, teaches", he was perhaps only reflecting and reporting on societal attitudes as he observed them.

> A large part of even the educated part of the community is still under the shadow of the old belief that anyone who is in possession of his five senses, and who has himself or herself learned to read, write and figure, knows enough to teach *little* children. . . . (emphasis in original. Dewey, 1925, p. 119)

> Particular damaging . . . is the belief that is abroad in the community that only persons incapable of success in other lines become teachers, that teaching is a failure belt, the refuge of 'unsaleable men and unmarriageable women'. This belief is the more damaging for the truth that is in it. (Waller, 1932, p. 379)

> . . . teacher knowledge is not considered special and . . . people are ambivalent about its value. (Buchmann, 1986, p. 2)

> . . . deep down many leaders believe that teaching is not all that difficult. (Fullan, 1993, p. 104)

> . . . lay people believe they can teach as well as professionals. (Proefriedt, 1994, p. 1)

> Of course, commonsense theories abound. 'Anyone can teach.' 'If you know your subject, you can teach it.' 'Teachers are born not made.' 'Everything you need to know about teaching can be learned on the job'. (Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1996, p. 64)

> . . . many people who have schooling experience presume that having played the role of student, they are possessed of the knowledge needed to produce or direct the play. (Clabaugh & Rozycki, 1996, p. 356)

> The idea that a person needs a particular kind of professional preparation to become a licensed educator has yet to be established in many jurisdictions, and in times of crisis the temptation to appoint ill-qualified persons arises still more frequently. (Simpson & Jackson, 1997, p. 188)

Another difficulty for teachers in this quest for a share of this official 'professional pie' is that teaching lacks ritual, ceremony, and rites of passage. Unlike such recognized professions as engineering, medicine, and law, there are no oaths or codes to which sacred vows are taken. While many may view such ostentatious trappings as somewhat gauche or reminiscent of a pagan past, there is no question that the 'ceremony of the ring' in engineering, and the 'reciting of the Hippocratic Oath' in medicine, as but two powerful examples, serve to bind together and make special the new initiates.

David Blacker (1997) surmises that humans may have an inner desire to 'touch' history and that various rituals and holidays are our weak and ill-defined attempts to maintain a sort of temporal immortality. Noting that "we still have the broken shards of these traditions" (p. 89). Blacker goes on to suggest that:

> We need to recapture these stories, especially the collectively told and enacted kind that have always bound human beings together. We need more old wives' tales. Nowhere is the need greater than in education, where the stories are daily growing shorter and sparser, more hastily told to fewer and fewer. . . . Our stories seem draining down the same sinkhole as our gods and heroes. (p. 90)

Additionally, most other professions usually have a very visible indication that one belongs to a special club and that is the appropriate initials that are proudly displayed after a name on a business card, on letterhead, or following a signature. A medical doctor would not normally have her name appear on letterhead without the initials 'MD', engineers follow signatures with the appropiate corporation letters of

'P. Eng.' or something similar, as do registered and certified nurses with the recognized 'RN', chartered accountants proudly display the 'CA' nomenclature where ever necessary, and Canadian lawyers covet (are they really allowed?) the 'QC' (Queen's Council) accolade and such is proudly and publicly displayed. Even those groups that are relative newcomers to this restricted professional club; such as real estate agents and financial planners, have specific identifying initials and credentials that are proudly displayed and constantly made known to the public.

In a like vein, many professions have 'restricted' and 'exclusive' use over their professional title. Somewhat akin to a copyright, one can only call oneself a nurse, for example, if one is in fact a member in good standing in that corporate professional body. Likewise, one cannot call oneself a medical doctor or a civil engineer or a chartered accountant or a guidance counsellor or a social worker unless one has certain credentials and belongs to the required professional organization. However, anyone can call herself or himself a 'teacher' or an 'educator' – no special training is necessary and the name (and therefore the job and the function) is not protected or restricted to those who meet certain exacting standards.

Darling-Hammond and Cobb (1996) make the telling observation that teachers have historically had little control over their own developing landscape and, therefore, very little practical say in how their titles and duties have evolved. Darling-Hammond and Cobb note that such overt and external influence has "tend(ed) to produce bureaucratic rather than professional controls over the content and structure of the work – that is, controls aimed at standardizing procedures rather than at building knowledge that can be applied differentially depending on the needs of a given child" (p. 20).

Unfortunately, teachers have no such exclusivity, and no ceremony or ritual or identification symbol. New teachers do not swear oaths of standards, do not don cloaks of station, do not acquire a specific professional nomenclature, do not even symbolically aspire to some ancient muse and, regretfully in my view, have no special set of initials, or symbols that indicate professional belonging, competence, responsibility, and accountability.

Just about every other recognized profession demands that one belong to a special club and that such membership is sealed with the only currency that is acceptable in our modern society – that being money. One has to pay to belong to the club! If one should choose not to renew

the professional membership, then all rights to the club are withdrawn and one loses the legal, professional, and personal contacts that are associated with this membership. Additionally, membership is not for life but only until the next dues payment is required – often only one year. While some may view such constant repetition of renewal as tedious and maybe even as somewhat crass, such renewal does indeed force each member on a regular basis to pause and to think about the association, the commitment, and the bonds that exist between members.

Teaching may also be hindered by its sheer mass. Most other professions are relatively small in number with several thousand, at most, members. Public school teachers in the Province of Quebec number around one hundred thousand and professional status would make them, by far, the largest of all the professional groups. Furthermore, the addition of pre-school teachers, day-care educators, and college and university instructors would further greatly swell these already swollen ranks. Politically, would a government want such a large and potentially powerful group running its own affairs and perhaps asserting its will in regards to curriculum design and other pedagogical matters?

Realistically, then, teachers may unfortunately forever be permanently relegated to the rank of 'non-profession' simply as a matter of control and power! John Dewey (1937) noted that if one is constantly excluded from the decision making process and denied a voice in policy formulation, then one will naturally begin to feel distant and disaffected from the process. Dewey suggested that:

> It is still also true that capacity to assume the responsibilities involved in having a voice in shaping policies is bred and increased by conditions in which that responsibility is denied. Habitual exclusion has the effect of reducing a sense of responsibility for what is done and its consequences. (p. 113)

As if these hurdles were not enough to stand in the way of recognized professionalism, teaching is also burdened with another serious defect and that is the commonality and the normalcy of its professional language. Notwithstanding Karl Popper's (1974) observation that one should focus on the facts and the assertions about facts and never "be goaded into taking seriously problems about words and their meanings" (p. 12), Polkinghorne (1988) strikes a more meaningful cord when he suggests that language is much more than a simple decoding vehicle and that "language is both the product and the possession of a community" (p. 23). Additionally, Charles Taylor (1975) goes so far as to suggest that

language "happens in the community" and that "a language. . . is something that can only grow in and be sustained by a community" (p. 182).

Many professional communities have developed over time a special, intricate, and precise language that makes communication between members easier, specifically identifies parts of their profession so that confusion does not arise, and may well help inculcate new folk into the existing professional body. Perhaps the prime examples of such an intricate professional lexicon rest with the cardinal professions of medicine and law; however, a close look at many other recognized professions will indicate that they too have developed that special and 'secret' language that paradoxically binds at the same time as it excludes.

In a similar vein to Noddings (1984) and McLaughlin (1991), Freema Elbaz (1992) offers a language related concern in that she suggests that "to talk about teaching in terms of caring and relationships seems to risk placing in question the professionalism of teaching" (p. 422). Furthermore, Elbaz questions how one can even begin to tease out the moral thoughts of practitioners without using language that appears to be contrite, unscientific, and non-objective. John Dewey (1929) postulated that the profession of education had to develop its own 'scientific' language so that it could evolve and develop.

> Education is autonomous and should be free to determine its own ends. To go outside the education function and to borrow objectives from an external source is to surrender the educational cause. Until educators get the independence and courage to insist that educational aims are to be formed as well as executed within the educative process, they will not come to consciousness of their own function. Others will then have no great respect for educators because educators do not respect their own social place and work. (p.74)

Finally, teachers may never develop beyond their present non-professional status as long as faculties of education and other such training institutions continue to trivialize teacher preparation (Clabaugh & Rozycki, 1996), and to continue to train new initiates as if teaching were simply composed of a set number of technical and observable skills. Bricker (1989), for example, suggests that practitioners seldom have a carefully articulated philosophy of ethical balance and tend to deal with classroom realities via a trial-and-error and ever changing methodology.

If teachers and teacher trainers continue to see the role of practitioners as somewhat akin to a dance instructor whose only concern is a specific dance skill and makes no attempt to place the skill within an historical,

cultural, linguistic, contemporary, and ethical environment (Soder, 1991), then growth into the more complex and messy realms of human interaction and learning are most probably impossible. In other words, as long as teachers broadly see themselves as 'technicians' and refuse to grasp and internalize the wider and far deeper notion of teacher as a re-shaper and re-placer of knowledge within an ethical landscape, then professional growth is stymied.

Additionally, Nasaw (1979) as well as Beyer and his colleagues (1989) may well be correct in their assertion that faculties of education have tended to avoid controversy. In an apparent desire to achieve a place or rank within both the local community as well as the academic community, teacher training facilities have tended to avoid conten-tious issues in this quest for professional acceptance. Beyer (1991) further suggests that as these human and societal controversial issues were eliminated from the educational framework,

> [W]e inherited a system of teacher preparation in which social and political controversy was avoided and a particular conception of professionalism as technical competence was adopted. (p. 206)

Personal position and observations

Notwithstanding what one may think of the above mentioned notions or the reconstructed narrative that commenced this article, my view is that public school elementary and secondary teaching will never evolve above and beyond its present lowly social and political rank, as it critically and importantly does not hold itself publicly accountable to a set of professional standards including a code of ethics. Quite frankly, my experience has led me to believe that many elementary and second-ary teachers as well as school administrators often act in what may be interpreted to be unethical ways. My experiences convince me that they behave in ways that in most other recognized professions would result in severe reprimands or outright loss of professional licenses. In a kind of perverse logic, the young student teachers who chatted in the cafeteria broke no existing professional rules, violated no public behavioral codes, transgressed no standard ethical boundaries, and may therefore be viewed as upstanding examples of the next generation of elementary school teachers.

These young ladies were not discussing the selling of drugs to pupils, they were not chatting about hitting or beating children, they were not planning to steal school property, and they were not sharing ways to

quietly drink alcohol while in the performance of their duties. They were simply talking and sharing real-life stories, and doing so in what they may well have been considered to be an appropriate manner in an appropriate location. Nonetheless, while their actions will not make the six o'clock news, they would be guilty in some eyes of unethical behavior and have potentially created a situation that could be as damaging to their minor aged students as if they had in fact committed a more serious and heinous physical offense. Accepting Lortie's (1975) assertion that teaching is a lonely and isolating vocation, I personally wonder if teachers (and teacher candidates) engage in this kind of overt and borderline chit-chat as a form of personal release or of professional bonding?

Lest one thinks that I am being too hard, let me state here and now that I hold a public school teachers license for grades one through eleven that is currently valid in the Province of Quebec. I am a good standing member in several professional educational organizations, and I have been working with teacher candidates in a full-time capacity since September of 1972. Furthermore, while exact figures would be most difficult to verify, it would be accurate to note that as part of my professorial responsibilities, I have visited elementary and secondary schools on and off the Island of Montreal, Catholic and Protestant, English and French, public and private, secular and religious, pre-school through to grade eleven. Geographically, I have spent significant amounts of time in many far-flung areas of the Province, and have been in schools from the Magdalen Islands in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, to the shores of James Bay and Hudson Bay, and to a myriad of aboriginal communities throughout Northern Quebec. In total, I would estimate that I have seen approximately 1000 teacher candidates 'in action' over this time frame ranging from superficial 'one-shot' individual lessons through to long and somewhat more intimate and intensive eight-month affairs.

Through this quarter century of staff room visitations, classroom observations, hall-way conversations, and office chit-chats, I have been bombarded by young and old teachers and administrators alike with detailed descriptions of problem children, parent-teacher disagreements, inter- and intra-school rivalry, school board vendettas, and community hassles. With two noticeable community exceptions, such divulging of personal, confidential, or hearsay material has been a constant refrain during my professional sojourns. Lest I be misunderstood, in the majority of cases, I believe that I may have been perceived as a kind of neutral-outside-objective-captive professional and, therefore, the in-

tent was to solicit some help, or advice, or suggestion. Conversely, very rarely did I feel that I was involved in a purely 'gossipy' situation. However, regardless of the intent, I was made privy to vast stores of private, confidential, and personal material that, quite honestly, the professional codes of most other helping professions would forbid.

Jeffrey Reiman (1976) maintains that the right to privacy "protects the individual's interest in becoming, being, and remaining a person" (p. 314). A complicating factor in this expanding discussion is that 'minors' (all elementary pupils and most secondary students as well) are heavily involved. Do teachers assume a greater moral and ethical responsibility due to the fact that they are working with those who are less powerful, have no authority, and who are under the age of majority? Do such extenuating conditions make the burden of responsibility greater or less, or perhaps make no difference at all?

> Ideally, a code of ethics should serve as a guide to resolving moral problems that confront the members of the profession that promulgate it, with its primary emphasis on protecting the public that the profession serves. It should be a grand statement of overarching principles that earns the respect of that public by reflecting the profession's moral integrity. Rarely can a profession fully attain this ideal. Realistically, what a code of ethics does is consensually validate the most recent views of a majority of professionals empowered by their colleagues to make decisions about ethical issues. Thus, a code of ethics is, inevitably, anachronistic, ethnocentric, and the product of political compromise. But recognition of that reality should not inhibit the creation of a document that fully realizes and expresses fundamental moral principles. (Bersoff, 1995, p. 1)

Some time ago one of my third-year student teachers came to see me and described what she considered to be an awkward and embarrassing school situation. Briefly, several days previously, she had arrived at her classroom to find an experienced and oft utilized substitute teacher in attendance. This was not a major difficulty as the cooperating teacher had 'clued the sub in' so that the student teacher's classroom activities would progress as planned. What upset this teacher candidate, however, was that for the fifteen or so minutes that the two of them waited for the monitors to deliver the pupils from the school yard, the substitute teacher launched into spontaneous, detailed, and value laden descriptions of some of the pupils in the class. As well as past academic achievement, or lack thereof, many home situations were described and personal judgments rendered. [Note: Pseudonyms used below in all cases.]

"Keep a tight rein on these kids as they are hellions."

"Peter is not very bright, so only give him easy questions."

"Yoni is a jap and you know how good they are in math."

"Mary does not like math so don't ask her any questions."

"No small group work with this class as they all hate group work."

"Kay's father is abusive and an alcoholic so watch for marks."

"I had John B. last year and he is trouble, so watch him."

"Don't ask Mark to read aloud . . . he will just pee his pants."

"A strange religion in that family . . . so watch Mickie . . . [nudge - nudge] . . . ."

"Gerry smells so always keep him separated from the other kids."

"Scott's parents are divorcing, so ... [wink - wink] . . . ."

"Don't give Janet any homework as her mother will just do it."

"Watch Sean . . . he will steal all the snacks . . . he's on welfare."

"Lots of stencils and seat work make the day fly by with this lot."

The arrival of the children from the yard brought this descriptive monologue to a close. Essentially, the student teacher felt very uncomfortable with this new knowledge, did not know if such information was in fact true and current, and was unsure how her attitude towards certain pupils might now be affected. Additionally, she wanted to know what strategies she could use in the future in order to maturely and graciously extradite herself from any similar recurring situations.

Upon sober second thoughts and reflecting on her own practical experiences as well as relevant life episodes, my student teacher felt that the information given to her had been done in a sort of 'underhanded' manner, and that what she had been given would not really help her in her daily interactions with the pupils. Furthermore, some of the information presented to her was directly at odds and contradictory to her own experiences with and knowledge of these same children. Additionally, she felt that the substitute teacher had acted in what she perceived to be an unethical manner and she was also concerned that what she had been exposed to, after discussions with her student teaching peers, was more the norm than the exception.

As a result of my cafeteria experience, my discussions with this third-year student teacher, and based on my own long-term experiences in many relevant communities, it is clear to me that:

• My experience raised questions as to how well my Faculty of Education promotes an effective kind of ethical code to guide these education teacher candidates during their various in-school practical experiences. The University does have an all encompassing and somewhat general code of conduct related to academic and University matters. However, this code is not really applicable to the particular situation of student teachers who are practicing their craft in community public schools; away from the confines of the University milieu; working with minors in often stressful situations; and under the direct day-to-day supervision of elementary and secondary school teachers who themselves are not part of a legally recognized profession.

• These elementary candidates are enrolled in a 120-credit program spread over four years with their course content broken into three main areas; namely, (1) 39 credits of academic or subject background work (English Literature, history, biology, etc.); (2) 75 credits of professional or education courses; including, 19 credits in field work (a total of 700 hours that roughly translates into 125 in-school days), and 8 credits in co-requisite seminars; and (3) 6 credits of what might be termed free electives.

In this multitude of offerings, there is not one compulsory course offering that deals specifically with ethical or moral standards, or professional behaviour. There is a general first-year 'philosophical foundations' course, and some ill-defined and poorly developed notions centered around 'professionalism' that may or may not be expressly dealt with via the co-requisite seminars that accompany the various field experience offerings.

• Education students freely, openly, and without apparent inhibition discuss specific pupils, cooperating teachers, and other school personnel by name as well as describe, analyze, and comment upon all manner of personal and professional incidents arising from their various student teaching experiences. These open discussions occur not only in the cafeteria between friends, but also in the various education and professional courses and, in many cases, at the encouragement of the course instructors who actively solicit such material for the avowed purpose of generating in-class 'realistic' discussions.

• Based on my student teacher's personal experience and my own personal province-wide travels, teacher candidates are generally exposed in their classrooms, the school staff lounges, and the endless hallways to a never-ending barrage of open-ended and value laden comments and recollections relating to pupils, their parents, the administration, the school board, and even fellow teachers.

A number of years ago, a graduate student was brought to one of the senior discipline committees of the University for what was alleged by her department to be a breach of professional standards. Her lawyer successfully argued that the institution could not hold one of its own students accountable to standards of an outside professional organization to which that student had not yet been admitted. Similarly, how can we possibly hold student teachers accountable for ethical standards that they may be genuinely ignorant of. Additionally, how can they alter their behaviour or temper their actions when in fact they have not signed, sworn, agreed, or consented to any such ethical regime or standard?

The art of ethical codes

If Goodlad and his colleagues (1990, 1994) as well as Tom (1984), Soltis (1990), Soder (1991), Jackson *et al.* (1993), Hanson (1995), and Campbell (1997), as examples, are correct in their observations that teaching is fundamentally a moral-ethical activity and that teachers are engaged in a "moral purpose" (Fullan, 1993, p. 10), then it is essential in my view that beginning teacher candidates be exposed to this 'morality', however it may be defined, in a systematic, serious, and 'professional' manner. Perhaps Beyer (1997) best encapsulates this notion when he suggests that teaching is "a field of reflective moral action" (p. 248).

In a similar vein and proclaiming that teaching is "the vocation of vocations", Ayers (1993) suggests that at its heart and soul teaching is "an intellectual and ethical enterprise" (page 127). Perhaps one way to attempt to define this elusive concept of 'morality-ethicalness', as well as its attendant sub-lexicon of charged words and phrases, is to restrict and codify parts or pieces in some kind of acceptable code of behaviour and ethics. Such a task will not come easily and will have to, by necessity, take into consideration a number of points of view and cultural considerations; however, the present state of 'let's pretend that there is no need for a written ethical code for teachers' simply flies in the face of contemporary reality.

Lest one think that ethical rules are not important or somewhat *passé* within our evolving multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi-linguistic society, it is perhaps appropriate to note that the 1996 edition of the American Psychological Association's tome entitled *Professional Conduct and Discipline in Psychology* lists some 100 individual and separate ethical items within eight broad categories (pp. 177

- 208). Very recently for example (July 1997), the Tri-Council Working Group representing the three major research granting agencies in Canada released their working document entitled *Code of Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*. This working document is divided into two broad sections with the first defining a general ethical framework, and the second detailing some 70 individual articles focused on various aspects of ethical behaviour. Notwithstanding Soltis' (1990) pithy comment that "Ethics is ubiquitous" (p. 247), codes of ethics and behaviour and limits of accountability appear to be an ever expanding and evolving 'big business' within professional circles; except it seems, for teachers!

As a group, student teachers are in an awkward situation. They are university students but practicing their craft in far flung places; they are students themselves and yet are acting as surrogate teachers and are thusly exposed to and become involved with all of the secrets of their charges; they have not signed or accepted any kind of code of ethics but are supposedly operating within some kind of a known or unknown school or community framework that may or may not be specifically illuminated by the local community; and finally, they are being supervised by practitioners who themselves do not belong to a recognized profession and who have not sworn or agreed to abide by any kind of ethical code.

Dewey and Tufts (1936) poignantly note that the mark of ethical and responsible citizenry is that they are capable of changed behaviour. This is what may signal the beginnings of a move towards formal teacher professionalism; that is, to modify actions in the light of previous experiences.

> A human being is held accountable in order that he may learn; in order that he may learn not theoretically and academically but in such a way as to modify and – to some extent – remake his prior self. The question of whether he might when he acted have acted differently from the way in which he did act is irrelevant. The question is whether he is capable of acting differently *next* time; the practical importance of effecting changes in human character is what makes responsibility important. (emphasis in original. Dewey & Tufts, 1936, p. 337)

Darling-Hammond (1990) notes that professionalization in general is designed to protect the public which is served by a particular profession. She suggests that three main points are guaranteed or sought by such professionalization; namely, all individuals who practice a particular

designated specialty are qualified to do so and have had the appropriate training; the practitioners will continually seek, as a group and individually, to discover more efficient and more responsible courses of action; and that practitioners 'pledge' that their first and perhaps major responsibility is to the welfare of their particular clients (page 268).

James Covert (1993) forcefully argues that without a specific code of ethics or a recognized set of professional conduct requirements, teachers must rely on the somewhat tenuous articles of "collective agreements, precedents set by arbitration board rulings, and judicial review" (p. 437) to help frame appropriate codes of everyday professional behavior. To Covert, the only logical and reasonable alternative to this somewhat uneven and scattered regime is for teachers to become 'professionals' like the other recognized societies and, thereby, have all of the responsibilities and duties that go with the responsibility of being a self-governing professional body. Similarly, Murray (1996) suggests that education will continue to lag behind other professions as "there is regrettably no accepted view, except in a few extreme instances . . . about what educational practices should not be employed in classrooms" (p. 9).

Hugh Sockett (1993) argues that however teaching is conceived or practiced, "we must try to make the standards of professionalism clear so as to offer a guide to novices" (p. 1). Similarly, Imig (1991) flatly stated that "professionals must define high standards, set rigorous expectations, and then hold peers to these standards and expectations" (p. 14). In a similar vein, Kenneth Strike (1990), while withholding judgment on whether teachers should be organized into professional bodies, does make the telling point that:

> . . . ethical conduct is thought to be largely a product of training. The norms and standards of the profession are supposed to be internalized during the formal education of the professional. (p. 47)

Robert Nash (1991) offers the observation that beginning teachers are often ill-equipped to handle complex ethical and moral dilemmas. He suggests that new teachers simply have not been able to bridge the gap they perceive between the general ethical language that codes are written in and the practical nature of their everyday work. Betty Sichel (1993), on the other hand, suggests that every individual school should establish its own "school ethics committee". In her view, each of these individual school ethics committees "should generate ethical policy and moral codes, plan and offer professional ethics education, and

consult on particularly difficult moral cases" (p. 164). In a two-year study of a secondary school staff room, Kainan (1994) describes how the staff was divided by subject discipline as well as by 'technical' as opposed to 'academic' instructors. Further, she observed how the unwritten rules played against the known rituals such that the values and ethics of the individuals were exhibited, transmitted, and reenforced within the walls of the staff room.

In a powerful extension of his moral and ethical environment, Sidney Hook (1981) commented that shortly before his death, John Dewey "expressed the belief that the only frontier left in America was the moral frontier – one in which all social problems must be considered moral problems, too" (p. xx). As if in support of this Deweyan prophecy, Margaret Somerville, the founding Director of the McGill Centre for Medicine, Ethics and Law, recently (1997) penned:

> We are used to considering ethics in medicine, but we are now exploring, for example, the ethics of politics, politicians and public policy, ethics in sports, the ethics of public accountability and the ethics of research and research funding. The search for ethics can be seen as an end-of-the-20th-century revolution in conscience and consciousness, in the sense of awareness of the need to ask the question, 'Is this right?' in a wide variety of contexts. (p. C-1)

A code for teacher candidates?

John Dewey's pioneering 'Laboratory School' operated out of the University of Chicago for a very brief period of seven years from 1896 until 1903. This was a special place where Dewey, his associates, and selected graduate students attempted to provide an ethical and moral all encompassing framework wherein curriculum could be developed, monitored, and evaluated (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936). It is perhaps not too coincidental that almost immediately after the establishment of this groundbreaking endeavour, Dewey penned his *Ethical Principles Underlying Education* (1897). In this seminal essay, Dewey noted that:

> The child is an organic whole, intellectually, socially, and morally, as well as physically. The ethical aim which determines the work of the school must accordingly be interpreted in the most comprehensive and organic spirit. We must take the child as a member of society in the broadest sense and demand whatever is necessary to enable the child to recognize all his social relations and to carry them out. (p. 58)

If one accepts the underpinning notion that school is an essential social and moral place where all participants (teachers, administrators, sup-

port staff, pupils, and parents) work for a common goal, then it follows that the individuals sent by the universities to train and practice their craft in such locations also exhibit similar or complimentary ethical standards. Strike (1989), for example, postulates that "teachers who lack any serious study of ethics . . . will be unable to formulate the grounds of their practice" (pp. xvi-xvii). More recently, Beyer and Liston (1996) go so far as to suggest that as education is an environment on which financial and political views are played out, it falls to the ethical and moral base to be the central controlling element within this on-going societal struggle. In an earlier view, to Dewey (1897), ethical issues are 'real', not transparent or ethereal, and 'ethicalness' lies at the very heart and soul of that special and unique institution called 'school'.

> The one thing needful is that we recognize that moral principles are real in the same sense in which other forces are real; that they are inherent in community life. . . . The teacher who operates in this faith will find every subject, every method of instruction, every incident of school life pregnant with ethical life. (p. 83)

In a more contemporary but forcefully similar view, Sockett (1993) argues for what he terms a "Code of Practical Guidance". Noting that teaching is a practical and an action orientated endeavor, Sockett suggests that:

> A code of practical guidance is intended to govern action, not belief. Practice is the target. The content will thus describe what practitioners should do in their work. (p. 124)

Elizabeth Campbell (1997) suggests that educational professional ethics can only be lived through and experienced via realistic classroom situations. Campbell further states that "issues of teacher professionalism are fundamentally issues of moral and ethical significance" (p. 256). Furthermore, Campbell – in echoing the views of Sockett (1993) – is even more forceful in staking the role of faculties of education by stating that such ethical and moral instruction "should not be left to chance but developed in a deliberate way through the teaching of ethics to preservice teachers" (p. 257). Deborah Yost (1997), similarly, notes that teacher training facilities must not restrict their preservice programs only to the academic knowledge base. To Yost, "teacher education programs must help preservice teachers learn to reflect critically on student, school, and community issues and make ethical decisions" (p. 281).

When all is said and done, however, the ethical questions for teacher candidates still beg an answer. In order to progress, we must ask ourselves to what ethical or moral or (semi-) professional standard educa-

tion students and student teachers might be held. This is not in any way a lofty academic matter for the rarefied air of academia and the round table of philosophers; this is a rock-hard practical issue that will: (1) help to determine how student teachers act in classrooms; (2) set observable standards to be internalized by the teacher candidates as they are inducted into their new role; and (3) perhaps influence how elementary and secondary students are openly treated, privately discussed, and publicly taught.

The Supreme Court of Canada Justice, the Honourable Mr. G. V. La Forest (1997), noted that the actions of off-duty teachers can sometimes be considered to impact upon their "fiduciary relationship"; that is, that special relationship of trust and responsibility that exists between teacher and pupil (pp. 2 - 3). Notwithstanding any individual's right to privacy, free speech and association, and equal legal status under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, Mr. Justice La Forest forcefully indicated that the consequences of actions of off-duty teachers are open to scrutiny. Specifically, he stated:

> I do not wish to be understood as advocating an approach that subjects the lives of teachers to inordinate scrutiny on the basis of more onerous moral standards of behavior. This could lead to a substantial invasion of the privacy rights and fundamental freedoms of teachers. However, where a 'poisoned' environment within the school system is traceable to the off-duty conduct of a teacher that is likely to produce a corresponding loss of confidence in the teacher and the system as a whole, the off-duty conduct of the teacher is relevant. (pp. 16 - 17)

Mr. Justice La Forest is not the first senior judge to link off-duty teacher behaviour directly with a perceived community role. For example, the British Columbia Court of Appeal (as cited in Black & Lopez, 1996) stated that:

> The reason why off-the-job conduct may amount to misconduct is that a teacher holds a position of trust, confidence and responsibility. (p. 112)

Furthermore, Black and Lopez (1996) summarize that many provincial courts as well as the Supreme Court of Canada

> have imposed very high standards on teachers both on and off duty. In so doing, the Supreme Court of Canada has set out its concern that a teacher's off-duty conduct, although not directly affecting the teacher's work, may nevertheless be likely to produce conflict between the teacher's responsibilities to the education system and the public in general, and his or her personal activities conducted on the teacher's own time. (p. 117)

An interesting conundrum. Normally, one thinks about abhorrent popular press reported off-duty teacher behavior as related to drugs, physical contact, sexual escapades, or similar such obviously illegal actions. However, could not the divulging of private and confidential information in public also be considered an act that could 'poison' the educational environment? Further, without clouding an already perhaps somewhat murky issue, what is the legal status of education teacher candidates while they are operating within the confines of a particular school situated within a particular school board? To a large extent, these preservice education candidates did not select and approve of this school, but they have been arbitrarily assigned to this in-school field placement by some administrative office within the university structure.

Perhaps David Blacker (1997) best combined the ethical, moral, and practical concerns of everyday classroom practitioners when he noted:

> As a teacher, one can be corrupted from many directions: subject, child, and self may center as well as decenter, depending on the situation. One might say that teaching is by nature a perpetually corruptible business, suitable only for those who do not mind getting their hands a little dirty, for those whose moral compass continues to operate well even under conditions of extreme ambiguity, frustration, and 'no-win' situations. Required is the artistry, a sort of Aristotelian phronetic 'sense', not only of how to avoid the extremes, but also how to use them to maintain the sweet spot at the center, adjusting the tension from each end as need be. (p. 16)

Universities are not passive on-lookers or disinterested observers in this societal debate. Occupying the central role of training and retraining people for the teaching ranks, it is incumbent upon the institution to provide leadership and to map out, however broadly, what might be considered an appropriate path. Murray (1996) notes that teaching must overcome formidable obstacles if it is "to become the genuine profession it aspires to be" (p. 8). Therefore, in order to begin the process of eliminating these various obstacles, might it not be sensible for all teacher candidates to ceremoniously swear to abide by a set of guidelines that will respect their charges and, at the same time, offer these neophyte professionals an ethical framework within which they can practice their craft? We could do a lot worse than adopting and adapting the powerful *first principle* of the National Association for the Education of Young Children:

Above all, we shall not harm children. We shall not participate in practices that are disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitative, intimidating, psychologically damaging, or physically harmful to children. **This principle has precedence over all others in this Code**. (emphasis in original. Feeney & Kipnis, 1991, p. 30)

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