Becoming a Reflective Educator
Second Edition
How to Build a Culture of Inquiry in the Schools

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2. Inquiry is a dynamic rather than a static process and always takes place in a social and cultural context.
3. The individual characteristics necessary for inquiry to take place are intellectual curiosity, motivation, openness in inquiry, and openness to challenge.
4. Classroom-based inquiry should begin with a problem or puzzle that is of real concern and interest to the teacher to ensure that the teacher has ownership of the research study.
5. A school that exemplifies a culture of inquiry entails not merely teachers engaged in inquiry but also teachers and others collaboratively and collegially seeking better to understand and thus improve aspects of the schooling experience. This requires an ongoing commitment to valuing curiosity, mutual respect and support among teachers and between teachers and administrators, a willingness to try new ideas and practices, and the ability to remain open to the unforeseen and the unexpected.

VALUES, ETHICS, AND REFLECTIVE TEACHING

Always do right. This will gratify some people and astonish the rest.

Attributed to Mark Twain

Ethics is everybody’s concern. Scientific problems and scientific theories may from time to time intrigue or arrest all of us, but they are of immediate, practical importance only to a few. Everyone, on the other hand, is faced with moral problems—problems about which, after more or less reflection, a decision must be reached. So everybody talks about values.

Stephen Toulmin (1968, p. 1)

ETHICAL DILEMMAS AND THE PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR: FOUR CASE STUDIES

Horace Mann High School is a medium-sized, urban school with a predominantly African American and Puerto Rican population. Although nearly 90% of the students enrolled at Horace Mann are young people of color, all but 3 of the 32 teachers at the school are white, as is the principal, John Anderson. The school has a generally
good reputation in the community, and Mr. Anderson has sought to encourage the teachers at Horace Mann to become more reflective about their teaching. During the school year, individual teachers in the school have, as always, been faced with a variety of ethical dilemmas and have resolved these dilemmas in different ways. Four cases in particular demonstrate the role and place of reflection in ethical decision making, and we turn now to an examination of these cases.

The Case of Maria Sanchez

James Rafferty has been a mathematics teacher at Horace Mann High School for 6 years. He enjoys teaching and has a reputation for having high expectations of his students but also for being fair and fun in class. Early in October, one sophomore, Maria Sanchez, came up to him at the end of class and asked to speak with him privately about something. James hadn’t noticed any problems with Maria’s work, although she had seemed a bit absentminded recently, and he gladly agreed to meet her later that day, during his free period. He hoped he might be able to give Maria some advice about whatever was distracting her and thus improve her classroom performance. Maria came to his office at the agreed-on time and told him she had been upset recently because another teacher, Mr. DeFazio, who taught social studies at Horace Mann, had been trying to get her to go out with him, and she didn’t want to. James was surprised by what Maria told him because he knew Ed DeFazio very well and couldn’t imagine him behaving in such an unprofessional way. He told Maria that he needed some time to think about what she had told him and asked her to come to his office before classes started the next day.

The more James thought about what he had heard, the more he doubted Maria’s version of events. On the one hand, Maria might easily have misunderstood something that Ed said or could even be fabricating the whole matter to make up for her own poor academic performance. On the other hand, he was concerned that if he didn’t pass on what Maria had told him to the appropriate school authorities, he could himself get into trouble later on. Still, Ed was his friend, and he thought this ought to count for a great deal in a case like this one. He certainly believed that a person was innocent until proven guilty and was afraid that if a claim of this sort were pursued, it could fairly quickly turn into a “witch hunt” that would hurt Ed unjustly.

Finally, James stopped by Ed DeFazio’s classroom and asked to meet for a drink after school to discuss something. This wasn’t at all unusual, and Ed happily agreed to meet James at a local bar about 4 o’clock. When they met, James told his friend what Maria had told him. Ed denied the whole story vehemently and asked James to talk with Maria again and challenge her veracity. He suggested that if a bit of pressure was put on Maria, she would “stop all of this nonsense before it all gets out of hand.” Although he had some reservations about the wisdom of taking such action, James agreed to do as Ed asked.

James met with Maria the next morning as they had arranged. He indicated that he had some doubts about what she had told him, informed her that he knew Ed DeFazio very well and couldn’t imagine him asking a student for a date, and told her that if she was making up all of this, she could get into a lot of trouble. Tears welled up in Maria’s eyes, but she brushed them away, said that she understood and would keep quiet, and left the room. About a week later, James received word that Maria had dropped out of school. He continued to wonder whether he had done the right thing but felt confident that Maria had probably been lying, and he was glad that his friend’s reputation was safe.

The Case of Glenda Griffin

Glenda Griffin was an experienced foreign language teacher who had taught French and Spanish at Horace Mann for almost 20 years. This year, as in many years past, she had agreed to take on a student teacher during the fall semester. The student teacher was Freda VanDyke, a student at Western College, who was majoring in Spanish with minors in both French and German. An excellent student with outstanding letters of recommendation, Freda was in her second week of student teaching. Thus far, all that she had done was observe Glenda teaching and give a single quiz in one of the first-year French classes. On the Thursday of the second week of student teaching, Glenda pulled her aside and told Freda that she had a doctor’s appointment across town during third period. She had forgotten to request a substitute and wanted Freda to cover the third- and fourth-period classes while she was gone. Freda felt a bit uncomfortable about this but agreed because she wanted to be helpful and also because Glenda would be one of the people assigning her grade for
student teaching. When Glenda got back at the start of fifth period, she made a point of reminding Freda that they needed to keep what they had done just between the two of them.

That night, as she began writing in her journal, Freda puzzled over whether to write about what had really happened in class. She didn’t want to get her cooperating teacher in trouble, but at the same time, she thought her supervisor should know what had taken place. It would be difficult to write the journal entry without mentioning the best part of the day—that she had had two really good classes during Glenda’s absence. She finally called a friend, who was student teaching in a nearby elementary school, to discuss what had happened. Her friend clearly envied her having had control of a class all by herself but was also concerned that maybe Freda could get into trouble if she didn’t report what had happened. Finally, after they discussed it for almost an hour, Freda decided to call her supervisor at home. She explained what had happened and stressed that she wasn’t complaining or unhappy. Her supervisor was clearly not happy with what had taken place but said she’d let it go this time. She also told Freda that she was not, under any circumstances, to take charge of a class while Glenda was out of the building, and she also reminded Freda that she was not yet a certified teacher. Although Freda hadn’t kept her word to Glenda to be quiet about what had taken place, she felt better now that her supervisor knew about it.

A Case of Cheating

Lenny Epstein was a new teacher at Horace Mann. He had taught at another local high school for 2 years, but this was his first at Horace Mann, and he wanted to make a good impression on his colleagues and superiors. Lenny had been a good student and very much wanted to be a good science teacher, although he knew that the students thought he was far too difficult. He believed, though, that he was just maintaining high standards and that if half (or more) of his students failed each grading period, it was because they weren’t studying hard enough. Just before winter break, Lenny gave his earth science students, who had been studying geology all year, an especially difficult midterm examination. During second period, Lenny noticed that Frank Evans, one of Horace Mann’s outstanding football players, kept fidgeting in his seat. Lenny walked over to where Frank was sitting and saw that Frank had hidden notes up his shirt sleeve. Lenny picked up his test paper and told him that he was done and should go to the school office and wait for him there. Frank, looking very depressed, did as he was told.

After class, Lenny went directly to the office and asked to speak with Mr. Anderson. He quickly filled Mr. Anderson on what had taken place in his class and expected him to be pleased with the vigilance. Instead, Mr. Anderson chastised him for “making such a big issue out of all of this,” reminded Lenny that Frank was “a good kid” who was probably just out of his league in Lenny’s class anyway, indicated that Lenny’s standards were probably too high, reminded Lenny that Frank’s only chance of getting into college was on an athletic scholarship, and that a failing grade could jeopardize such a scholarship. Then he asked Lenny whether he had any problems working with black students. Lenny was very surprised at Mr. Anderson’s reaction and said that he’d have to think about what the principal had said. As he left the principal’s office, he told Frank to go ahead to his next class.

Lenny then went to Ernie Smart’s classroom. Ernie was the Science Department chairperson, and Lenny thought that no matter what happened now, Ernie had better be involved. He quickly told Ernie, and Ernie agreed to meet him at the end of the school day in the cafeteria. Ernie was fairly supportive, to Lenny’s relief, and had brought with him a copy of the National Education Association’s (NEA) “Code of Ethics for the Education Profession.” He pointed out one passage in particular to Lenny: “The educator shall not on the basis of race, color, creed, sex, national origin, marital status, political or religious beliefs, family, social or cultural background, or sexual orientation, unfairly grant any advantage to any student.” Ernie told Lenny that he had behaved appropriately in his class and that it would be unreasonable for him to do anything except what he would do for any other student. Given his past behaviors in the classroom, Lenny would have to fail Frank for the grading period. Ernie promised to support him in the matter.

That night, Lenny went over in his head his own teaching behavior, his attitudes about athletes, about black students, and about both Frank and Mr. Anderson. The more he thought, the less sure he was that he was completely free from biased or prejudiced behavior or attitudes in his classes. At the same time, Frank had been cheating, and in any other case, he would fail the student. Finally, Lenny decided that Ernie was right and that he would have to accept
the consequences of giving Frank a failing grade for the grading period.

The Case of Andrew McLaughlin

Jane Heugh has taught at Horace Mann for 5 years and is generally acknowledged to be one of the better teachers in the English Department. She is popular with both the students and her colleagues and cares deeply about what happens to the students at Horace Mann. Although Jane has a great deal of respect for many of her colleagues, the teacher with whom she has worked the most during the past 5 years has been Andrew McLaughlin. Andrew has been a public school English teacher for 37 years and believes himself still to be in his prime. Although he no longer bothers with lesson plans and uses the same handouts and tests he was using when Jane started teaching, Andrew has repeatedly told Jane that he is as up-to-date and hardworking as he was when he began teaching. Unfortunately, Jane has begun to have more and more doubts about Andrew’s competence. From her perspective, Jane believes that Andrew has simply decided to “retire in place” and has long since ceased to offer his students the quality of instruction to which Jane believes they are entitled.

Because of departmental politics, Jane has thus far kept her opinions to herself. After all, she has argued, she is not the person responsible for evaluating Andrew’s performance, nor has she actually seen him teach. She thinks that Andrew is outdated and out of touch; she very much doubts that students in his classes learn very much, but she isn’t sure that this gives her the right (let alone the duty) to make an issue of his competence. Despite her silence, Jane has become aware of a growing barrier between Andrew and herself and suspects that he must be cognizant of her concerns. She has discussed the situation with friends who teach at other schools but has not mentioned her feelings to anyone at Horace Mann. Her friends at other schools have been sympathetic and have talked about similar situations in their own schools, but they have advised her simply to wait out Andrew’s retirement, which will, after all, come within the next few years. So, although she is bothered and annoyed by the situation, Jane has continued to keep her reservations to herself and to avoid any direct confrontation with Andrew. She isn’t happy with this solution but can’t think of any viable alternatives.

Values, Ethics, and Reflective Teaching

Analysis and Discussion. In each of these four cases, an individual is presented with an ethical dilemma. The dilemmas are very different in terms of their subjects, their relative importance, and the ways they are resolved. Further, the ethical decisions made by the four individuals involved vary considerably with regard to the quality of the judgments made. All four cases share some common features as well, however, and we begin by discussing these common features.

First, in each case a real dilemma is present. Very often, people talk about moral or ethical “dilemmas” in situations in which most of us would have no problem at all deciding what to do. These are not actually dilemmas in any meaningful sense. A dilemma is an instance in which we do not wish to accept any of the possible options. In other words, a true dilemma exists only when we are choosing among undesirable choices. There are, in short, no “good” solutions or “right” answers; rather, there are only more or less “good” or “right” solutions. James Rafferty is torn between his obligations toward a student who may have been sexually harassed by a teacher and his feelings for his friend and colleague Ed DeFazio. Similarly, Freda VanDyke is torn between what she sees as both personal and professional obligations and a promise she made to her cooperating teacher. Lenny Epstein is torn between his own professional standards (as well as the NEA “Code of Ethics for the Education Profession”) and pressure from his principal. Finally, Jane Heugh is torn between her concerns about a colleague she believes to be no longer competent and her belief that his problems are really not her business. In other words, in each case presented here the central figure feels torn by conflicting obligations, desires, or beliefs.

Second, in each of these four cases each person attempts to discuss his or her ethical dilemma with another person to help clarify and resolve it. Further, with the exception of James Rafferty, each of the educators involved has turned to one or more individuals outside the actual dilemma itself. Thus, Freda VanDyke turned first to a friend and then to her university supervisor. Lenny Epstein, after his problematic meeting with the principal, went to his department chairperson, Ernie Smart, for advice. Jane Heugh discussed her concerns with friends who teach at other schools. By discussing the dilemma that faces them with a presumably neutral third party, each of these three individuals increased the likelihood of making a sound ethical judgment. In contrast, James Rafferty discussed his dilemma only with Ed DeFazio—the key figure, in many ways, in the dilemma. As a
consequence, he ended up making a judgment that most of us would consider highly questionable at best and, more probably, downright unethical.

Third, in each of the four cases we have examined, the individual involved did not rush to make a decision, but rather attempted to take a reasonable amount of time to make a sound and well-informed decision. Even though one may have reservations or even objections to the decisions that each of the four people made (as we ourselves do), it is clear that each one did agonize about his or her dilemma and that each did try to resolve the dilemma in the best way he or she could. In other words, all four individuals did actually engage, to some extent, in reflection about their ethical dilemmas. This is an important point because it reminds us that reflection, whatever its many benefits (and it does have many benefits, we believe), does not and cannot guarantee that our decisions and judgments will always be the right ones.

Last, these four cases make evident a claim offered some years ago by Richard Peters (1966), a British philosopher of education, who argued this:

[T]here are no set systems of teaching and no agreed aims of education; there is constant controversy about the curriculum and a welter of disagreement about how children ought to be treated. In more settled times only the very reflective teacher was led to probe behind the tradition for a rationale for what [she or he] ought to do; nowadays it is only the lazy or dogmatic teacher who can avoid such probing. Neither can the modern teacher find in the appeal to authority much more than a temporary resting place; for authorities disagree, and on what grounds is the advice of one rather than another to be heeded? The unpalatable truth is that the modern teacher has no alternative to thinking out these matters for [herself or himself]. Teachers can no longer be merely trained; they have also to be educated. (p. 22)

Ethics and ethical decision making, in short, is simply a part of teaching, and the classroom teacher could no more ignore or avoid ethical and moral dilemmas than he or she could avoid curricular or methodological decisions. In each of the four cases presented, the ethical dilemma that occurs is brought about by factors largely beyond the individual's control and yet must be addressed by the individual.

With these four cases in mind as background, we turn now to a discussion of the relationship of opinions, preferences, and value judgments as these affect moral and ethical decision making.

OPINIONS, PREFERENCES, AND VALUE JUDGMENTS

A very common view today voiced by educators and others in our society is that all opinions are of equal weight, are equally valid, and should be equally respected. Such a view is certainly tolerant and no doubt well intentioned, but it is also, plain and simply, wrong. If you think about this claim in the context of medicine, for instance, you will see how absurd it really is. If I am suffering from a particular illness, my grandmother, the mechanic who services my car, and my physician may well all have opinions about what ails me and what should be done about the ailment. Although I love my grandmother dearly, and although I both respect and trust my mechanic, on medical matters it would not seem to be at all reasonable for me to trust either of them instead of or in place of my physician. Now, this does not mean that in a particular case one of them might not be more correct than the physician, but the odds (as well as human reason) would still suggest that I am better off to go with the expert. As one humorous old saying goes, “The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, but that’s the way to bet.” The same, of course, would apply to the building of a house, the repair of a car, or the teaching of a particular topic in the classroom. In each instance, some individuals will have greater expertise, competence, and skill than others, and it is only reasonable and appropriate to favor their opinions somewhat disproportionately. This does not mean that once we have identified the experts in a particular field, we automatically empower them to make decisions. The actual responsibility for the decision making rests with us; it is my health, my car, my house, about which I must make decisions. The same is true when we move from the arena of personal problems to social problems. As John Dewey (1927) explained:

Inquiry, indeed, is a work which devolves upon experts. But their expertise is not shown in framing and executing policies,
but in discovering and making known the facts upon which the former depend. They are technical experts in the sense that scientific investigators and artists manifest expertise. It is not necessary that the many should have the knowledge and skill to carry on the needed investigations; what is required is that they have the ability to judge the bearing of the knowledge supplied by others upon common concerns. (pp. 208-209)

When we turn to the area of ethical decisions and decision making, of course, the problem is in locating the relevant experts. In fact, when we evaluate ethical or moral judgments and decisions, we do so, not on the basis of expert opinion at all, but rather on the basis of the quality of the reasoning and evidence that underlie the judgment or decision (see Becker, 1973). Thus, in the case of James Rafferty, we might be very critical of both the evidentiary base on which his decision was made (which consisted of Maria's word against Ed's word), as well as on the quality of the decision-making process itself, which allowed James to establish himself as both judge and jury in a case in which he had, to some extent, a vested interest. Another important aspect involved in evaluating ethical and moral judgments and decisions has to do with the type of claim actually being offered, and it is to a discussion of the differences between preference claims and value judgments that we now turn.

Very often in conversation and discussion, we make two different types of claims that relate to ethical issues: preference claims and value judgments. Although both types of claims can be concerned with questions of right and wrong, proper and improper conduct, and so on, their logical status is quite different, and the two types of claims should not be used interchangeably. Preference claims are claims about what an individual speaker believes, prefers, wishes, and so forth. Thus, if I say, "I love chocolate," or "I don't believe that extramarital sex is moral," I am merely reporting on my own feelings about these matters. Such information may be interesting or even important for others to know and may help explain my own behavior. Because these are reports of my own personal preferences, however, I am under no obligation to defend them, nor do I have to offer evidence or arguments on their behalf. If my friend Midori were to announce that she did not like broccoli, she would be reporting on a personal preference. In such a context, judgments or claims of right and wrong are simply misguided. Midori is neither right nor wrong to dislike broccoli; she simply doesn't like it, and that is all there is to the matter. Finally, the only way preference claims can be judged is in terms of how well they appear to reflect the reality of the individual speaker's preferences (see Riegle, Rhodes, & Nelson, 1990, p. 18; Wilson, 1967, pp. 56-74). In other words, given that Midori has announced her dislike of broccoli, it is reasonable to assume that she would not go out of her way to order broccoli in restaurants, nor would she be likely to serve it frequently in her own home. If, on examination, we discover that she has specifically ordered broccoli on numerous occasions and, further, that she often serves herself an especially generous helping, we would have reason to doubt the claim that she dislikes the vegetable (although there are, of course, other possible explanations as well).

Value judgments also report on ethical and moral (as well as aesthetic) matters, but unlike preference claims, they are public statements that seek to suggest that others ought to agree. Thus, a claim like, "Abortion is always, under all circumstances, wrong," is not a preference claim; rather, it is a value statement that entails the implicit claim that others ought to agree with the position the speaker is advocating. Because value statements are public in nature, evidence and arguments must be offered to support them, and they can (and should) be debated in the realm of public discourse and debate. Value judgments, in short, must be justified in some manner (see Riegle et al., 1990, p. 18; Wilson, 1967, pp. 56-74). It is important to note here, however, that although value judgments must be justified, this does not mean that we will always be able to reach agreement about them. As John Wilson (1967), the British philosopher of education, has quite correctly observed, "Unfortunately we do not always agree about the criteria of method of verification appropriate to our value statements" (p. 66).

In the area of educational policy, many controversial matters are debated and argued in various forums. For example, school prayer, school choice, sex education, merit pay for teachers, and a host of other curricular, methodological, and financial matters are all current topics of dispute that entail, at least in part, ethical and moral disagreements. In such debates and disputes, value judgments play a central role, as well they should. The underlying issues are often issues of value, and it is important that we, as a community, identify and debate these issues, recognizing from the outset that not everyone will agree with the final outcome. What we can do, however, is to distinguish among personal preferences, value judgments, and
empirical claims and respond to each type of claim appropriately. For instance, although personal preferences may well guide our individual feelings about these topics, we cannot in good conscience expect others to honor preference claims because these are not public in nature. About value judgments, we can expect debate and sometimes disagreement among reasonable people. Finally, when we can reduce a debate to empirical claims (e.g., “the distribution of condoms in secondary schools will result in a decrease in teen pregnancy”), then our debate moves from one of values to one in which resolution can be achieved without necessarily reaching an agreement on values. In short, the distinction between preference claims and value judgments, though a very significant one, is often glossed over or missed entirely in actual policy debates, and this may be one reason why policies are often less clear, cogent, and reasonable than we might wish.

COMPETING ETHICAL THEORIES AND THE EDUCATOR

Another way ethical decision making can be approached is by examining the various ethical theories that have been proposed, defended, and critiqued historically by moral philosophers and ethicists. Among the most common ethical theories are utilitarianism, egoism, relativism, and deontological theories (see Garner & Rosen, 1967; Rieg& et al., 1990, pp. 55-57; Rosen, 1978). Although the study of such ethical theories is both fascinating and worthwhile, a detailed treatment of each of these different approaches to ethical decision making is not possible here. Instead, all these different ethical theories can be grouped together into two broad, general approaches—consequentialist ethical theories and nonconsequentialist ethical theories—and we limit our discussion to these two broad categories of ethical thought (see Strike, Haller, & Soltis, 1988; Strike & Soltis, 1992).

Consequentialist ethical theories focus on the results of our actions in determining their rightness or wrongness. Thus, any particular action is neither intrinsically good nor bad; rather, it is good or bad only in some context. On such an account, telling a lie might, in some cases, be the ethically correct course of action. For example, if you have a child in your class for whom you feel a certain antipathy (which, as a committed educator, you have naturally tried to control), and the child comes up to you one day and says, “You really don’t like me, do you?” many teachers would agree that, in this case, telling a lie might be preferable to telling the truth. From a consequentialist perspective, one would be obligated to consider the results of one’s actions, rather than to look at the actions in a context-free manner. Further, from a consequentialist perspective, “motives are not relevant to the rightness of actions but only to the goodness of persons” (Rosen, 1978, p. 99).

The best-known example of a consequentialist ethical theory is utilitarianism, which basically advocates that one should seek those policies and actions that will result in the “greatest good for the greatest number.” Although such an approach has initial plausibility and appeal, be aware that, in practice, it can sometimes lead us to very strange and morally problematic outcomes. It is possible, for instance, to describe a situation in which a utilitarian approach would require us to argue that the establishment of a society based on human slavery might be an ethical option—an outcome with which most of us would have very serious problems. Similarly, as Strike and Soltis (1992) describe, a utilitarian approach might lead us to agree that torture might be morally acceptable:

Let us imagine that a dozen sadistic people have had the good fortune to have captured a potential victim. They are debating whether or not it would be right to spend a pleasant evening torturing their captive. One of the group argues in the following way: “We must admit that by torturing this person we will cause a certain amount of pain. But think how much pleasure we will give ourselves. And there are a dozen of us. While this person’s pain may exceed the pleasure of any one of us, it surely cannot exceed the pleasure of all of us. Thus, the average utility is enhanced by torturing this person. We ought to do so.” (p. 14)

If a utilitarian approach would lead to such outcomes, then we need to be very careful as we consider such approaches to ethics. Something, in short, seems to be very wrong.

Nonconsequentialist ethical theories constitute the other major category of ethical and moral theories. Nonconsequentialist ethical theories presuppose some sort of universal moral or ethical principle or principles that should guide all behavior regardless of the
consequences of a particular action in a single context. Thus, if telling a lie is wrong, it must be wrong in all possible contexts. The Ten Commandments are, basically, an example of a nonconsequentialist ethical theory. God did not provide Moses with recommendations or suggestions; the tablets contained commandments. Thus, the commandment is “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” not “Thou shalt not commit adultery, except where the other party is willing and you are unlikely to get caught.” The NEA’s “Code of Ethics for the Education Profession,” which was referred to in the case of Lenny Epstein (and which is reprinted in Strike & Soltis, 1992, pp. ix-xi), also provides an example of a collection of principles that do not appear to allow for a great deal of situational flexibility (although they do provide a bit more flexibility than the Ten Commandments). Nonconsequentialist ethical theories entail three related features:

1. The moral or ethical principle involved must be a genuine, universal principle.
2. The moral or ethical principle involved must be applied impartially; that is, it must apply to all people.
3. The moral or ethical principle must be applied consistently, and the related moral judgment involved in its application must be consistent. (Strike & Soltis, 1992, pp. 15-16)

As with the case of consequentialist ethical theories, nonconsequentialist ethical theories also have some problems. Perhaps the most troubling aspect of most nonconsequentialist ethical theories has to do with where the universal principles come from. One can address this problem theologically, of course, as in the case of the Ten Commandments, but such an approach has limited force in a secular society. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant provided an alternative way of thinking about universal ethical principles, based on what he called the categorical imperative. In essence, the categorical imperative is the universal principle, or rule, by which one can test all other ethical or moral rules on which one might take action. In other words, the idea underlying the categorical imperative is that “the practical or moral law as such is strictly universal; universality being, as it were, its form. Hence all concrete principles of conduct must partake in this universality if they are to qualify for being called moral” (Copleston, 1960, p. 117). In any case, it is clear that we do not yet possess anywhere near a unanimity of opinion about the origin and nature of such universal principles, and this lack of unanimity is a serious problem for nonconsequentialist ethical theories. There is an additional problem here as well because it is sometimes the case that two or more ethical principles on which we have reached agreement can, in actual practice, conflict. This is a common problem with the NEA’s “Code of Ethics for the Education Profession,” the Ten Commandments, and, indeed, for any ethical code, as we shall see.

Caring and the Professional Educator

An alternative and potentially quite powerful way to conceptualize the moral and ethical aspects of teaching is to think about the role of caring in the educational process in general, and in moral education in particular. This area has been extensively explored by feminists, most notably the philosopher of education Nel Noddings, who has argued “that caring is the very bedrock of all successful education and that contemporary schooling can be revitalized in its light” (1992, p. 27). Noddings’s argument is grounded in the problem of the appropriate role of moral principles. Critiquing the Kantian and rule utilitarian approaches to ethics, which place moral principles at the core of ethics and ethical decision making, Noddings (1995) suggests instead that the core of morality must be the “ethic of care,” which
gives only a minor place to principles and insists instead that ethical decisions must be made in caring interactions with those affected by the discussion. Indeed, it is exactly in the most difficult situations that principles fail us. Thus, instead of turning to a principle for guidance, a carer returns to the cared-for. What does he or she need? Will filling this need harm others in the network of care? Am I competent to fill this need? Will I sacrifice too much of myself? Is the expressed need really in the best interest of the cared-for? (p. 187)

Thus, what the “ethic of care” really does is emphasize the moral interdependence of people, rather than focus on the individual as a
moral agent. For educators, such a proposal has significant implications, as Noddings has explained:

"The ethic of care rejects the notion of a truly autonomous moral agent and accepts the reality of moral interdependence. Our goodness and our growth are inextricably bound to that of others we encounter. As teachers, we are as dependent on our students as they are on us. (1995, p. 196)"

The ethic of care, when implemented in classroom practice (especially in terms of moral education), has four major components: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation (see Noddings, 1984, pp. 171-201; 1992, pp. 22-26; 1995, pp. 190-196). Each of these components is an essential aspect of the practice of the ethic of care, and although not dissimilar to ideas found in other approaches to moral education, these components do have very specific and specialized meaning in the context of an ethic of care. Thus, modeling care is basically our way of showing students what care is and what it means to care, whereas dialogue allows us to engage our students in discourse about caring. As Noddings (1995) notes, "dialogue is such an essential part of caring that we could not model caring without engaging in it" (p. 190). Practice is concerned not merely with engaging in caring behavior, but even more, with the creation of a set of caring attitudes and mentalities that will, in turn, promote caring behavior. Finally, confirmation refers to the need to affirm and encourage the best in others, not in a sloganistic or simplistic manner, but rather through long-term relationships grounded in trust. The key here is the mutual respect necessary for the caring relationship to be possible: "One must meet the other in caring. From this requirement there is no escape for one who would be moral" (Noddings, 1984, p. 201; see also Campbell et al., 1995).

The challenge of caring, however, is a complex one. As Joseph Watras (1999) has noted:

"The ideal of caring is an ambiguous slogan... the general proposal that teachers and administrators should demonstrate a caring attitude is trivial, vague, or indeterminate. As a result, it is open to misuse. For example, school administrators could hold teacher inservices on caring in order to reduce teacher stress instead of offering more expensive alternatives such as reduced class size. However, such criticisms overlook the ways that philosophers use the idea of caring... If teachers spent more time considering the implications [of the concept of caring] about the role of the teacher, the aim of education, and the proper curriculum, they might think more deeply about their jobs. Such caring teachers might improve schools." (p. 83)

In other words, caring, like other positive educational values, only makes sense in the more general context of reflective practice.

**THE ROLE OF REFLECTION IN ETHICAL PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE**

Given the discussion of consequentialist and nonconsequentialist ethical theories, their problems and limitations, and, of course, the essential issues of nurturing and caring as functions of the educator, what are we left with? Certainly, we are left somewhat frustrated, and perhaps irritated, because it is clear that no easy solutions or techniques exist for resolving ethical dilemmas quickly and painlessly. At the same time, our discussion thus far should make clear why a chapter on ethics is necessary in a book concerned with reflective practice. Ethical decisions and decision making are inevitably a necessary part of teaching, as we have seen, and at the same time ethical decision making is as resistant to "cookbook" types of approaches as are other aspects of good teaching. In short, the same kinds of concerns and considerations that affect reflective practice in general will affect ethical decision making in particular.

Perhaps most important in making ethical and moral judgments in the classroom is the need to recognize that such judgments are not merely matters of personal opinion and preference; they are, rather, judgments, and as such must be publicly defended and supported. Further, it is important to keep in mind an important difference in some cases between what the institutional rules and regulations (or even the law itself) dictate and what we may believe to be ethically or morally correct. The better our reasoning, the better our ethical decisions. This does not, of course, mean that all our ethical decisions and judgments will be perfect, but it does mean that we will have done our best and will have made the greatest possible use of the resources.
available to us in making our decisions and judgments. As Donald Vandenberg (1983) has argued:

The ethical problems of educational practice ought therefore be reasoned through with as much objectivity as possible. This means that the questions of pedagogy should be considered as moral questions and reasoned through in terms of universal obligations expressed as human rights. No ethical, political, social, religious, or psychological ideology should be imposed upon these educational questions, for these are manipulative, part of the problem, and an affront to human dignity. (p. 55)

Education, in short, is an endeavor that is intrinsically ethical in nature, and just as we wish to ensure that educators are competent masters of their subject matter, of the pedagogical knowledge of their craft, and of the actual methods to be used in the classroom, so too should we hope that they will be good ethical decision makers. Underlying all these hopes, of course, is the goal of the reflective practitioner.

Propositions for Reflection and Consideration

1. Ethical decisions and judgments involve real dilemmas in which one is presented with two or more undesirable options from which a choice must be made.
2. Good ethical decisions and judgments are the result of reflective interaction involving other people, preferably individuals not themselves involved in the ethical dilemma.
3. Not all opinions are of equal worth. Opinions must be judged by public criteria to determine their validity. To some extent, the opinion of an expert in his or her own field is likely to be of greater value than that of a non-expert.
4. Personal preferences and value judgments are logically and practically distinct, and only the latter should be taken into account in deciding public matters and disputes (including those in the educational realm).
5. Ethical judgments and decisions may be based on either consequentialist or nonconsequentialist ethical theories, but in either case they must also rest on public evidence and argument.