

EDITORIAL

Moral Education in the Schools

This special issue of *The Journal of Educational Thought* provides an excellent opportunity for us to comment on the nature of moral education in public schools and the role of the 1981 Summer Institute on Moral Education at the University of Calgary. Moral education is essentially community education. It arises out of the fact of our interdependency, establishes the character of our interdependency, and reforms it. It is in the conduct of community life that moral training begins.

The family, and its ordinary extension into neighborhood, friendships, and institutions, conditions and trains children in conformity to particular conceptions of right and wrong. In this process children acquire specific commitments by which they defend sanctioned behaviour and by which they rationalize questioned behaviour. Children also acquire the complex set of attitudes supportive of their community. This aspect of moral instruction is reinforced by schooling. The school inevitably reflects the character of the community of which it is a part. This is not a simple relationship of reinforcement and it does not mean that the schools cannot examine and influence those values. The relationship of the school to its community is such that successful instruction in values which alters, corrects, enhances, and transforms a community, either directly or indirectly, takes place in the crucible of socialization. The basic function in values instruction is maintenance of the general moral tradition, including basic assumptions, normal commitments (including often a commitment to pluralism or to tolerance), sanctioned behaviour, and standard thinking. The educational potential of this socialization process is twofold. The school may by careful instruction enable us to fully grasp the meaning of the moral tradition so that we may achieve critical understanding of our community; and the school may train our self-respect and confidence so that we may exercise autonomous participation in our community. Of course the school is likely to pursue this educational potential of moral instruction only if the community is committed to it. In his analysis of moral community in the school, Power distinguishes community and pragmatic association. He points out the tendency of the school to function as a pragmatic association with inadequate attention to the need for community *within* the school.

Several important inferences can be made for moral education in public schooling.

1. The first is that the school has the potential of being a strong moral community. It has the general character of the community of which it is a part. Quite clearly in a pluralistic community, such as ours, that character is highly complex and dynamic. Attending to the conditions of an effective moral community in the school will be difficult. However, school teachers necessarily engage in moral instruction by the very effort of schooling. Basic social rules and expectations apply in school, and because school students are minors, teachers must instruct as well as enforce the community's rules of behaviour. Most schools constitute moral communities: teachers, students, administrators, and support staff become interdependent according to the specific expectations and commitments actually made in the daily activity and governance of the school. What is necessary for a strong moral community is the open, voluntary commitment to interdependence.

2. Because teachers are directly and constantly interactive with students they are the

directing agents of this moral community, much as parents are in the relationship of a child to his society. Consequently the teacher's responsibility for the moral quality of the school community is unavoidable. Her exercise of this responsibility is crucial in determining whether students merely conform to rules and expectations, or appropriately contribute to the adequacy of rules and to the quality of relationship. Power's paper shows some of the conditions of this responsibility as it is exercised in the Just Community approach to moral education in the schools. The distinction between giving *authoritarian* direction and giving *authoritative* direction is often difficult to make, and yet it is crucial in making instruction educational in the area of moral thinking.

3. In any case, the teacher is a moral model. How he relates to his peers and his students constitutes his actual and observable identification of what a person ought to be. It is every teacher's obligation to be wide awake in this high exposure of the human choice for right, for the teacher as community advocate, according to Power, speaks for the basic ideals of the community. The teacher is expected to know and care about the conditions of fairness in treating the young because it is mainly by their treatment that they learn how to treat others. As Malikail's account of Murdoch's philosophy of mind suggests, the teacher's characterization of *good* becomes an important focus of attention by which moral disposition develops. By conscious effort the teacher may foster a classroom environment within which a child becomes attached to those attitudes and standards necessary for conscious moral consideration.

4. Moral education as an undertaking of the public schools depends on the teacher's exemplification, but it is not assured by this. The teacher presents the rational substance of moral reality in her speaking as well as in her behavior. O'Leary argues, by careful analysis of the difference between habits and virtues, that the discipline of virtue necessarily involves the exercise of moral judgement. Or as we put it, the student will not achieve critical understanding of the moral obligation unless he learns the nature and practice of moral reason. If moral instruction is to achieve the student's autonomous participation in the moral community the teacher must teach her class how to test and warrant moral claims. This task of the teacher is not necessarily identified with specific course instruction in moral argument. It is undertaken as much by the presentation of such argument as the occasion allows in all areas of instruction and in the management of the classroom and the school. The educational environment of the school is necessarily one of reasoned and articulated thought, carefully developed for both the implicit and explicit moral instruction of students. Berkowitz and Daniels each present important analyses of instruction in moral reasoning. Berkowitz from the psychological cognitive-development view of moral education, and Daniels from the rational moral deliberation view of moral education.

Berkowitz analyzes the use of moral discussion to facilitate stage development from pre-conventional to conventional-level reasoning. While reassessing the usefulness of the "+ 1" technique, he describes several valuable conditions of classroom discussion by which teachers facilitate and genuinely model moral reasoning. Daniels presents a particularly lucid account of the conditions of rational moral consideration, and forcefully makes the case for the teacher as an instructor of moral reasoning. Both critical understanding of community and autonomous participation in it depend on such instruction.

5. Because of the teacher's central role in the conduct of moral education, and because moral education can only adequately be undertaken in a substantiating environment, the school (classroom) constitutes a conscious though largely unwritten curriculum developed by teachers in relationship to their students, and by instruction in all subjects. Moral education is not adequately viewed only as a separate subject in the school curriculum. It is an element of all subjects, of all school government and class control, and of all play and conversation. The most demanding undertaking of the teacher then is identifying and

developing the curriculum elements of moral education — i.e. the conditions, attitudes, problems, issues, and dilemmas that constitute the complex set of learning units in this subject. Because of the community context of moral education the curriculum cannot be readily imported, or timetabled. Teachers must develop the moral education curriculum. They must recognize and enhance the conditions and opportunities of moral education in the classroom and in the school. For this task they must critically examine the varied theoretical claims of moral development and moral thinking, and carefully assess the learning materials available to them in published or practiced form. The papers by Berkowitz, Daniels, and Power each present approaches to moral instruction already practiced in schools. Fiordo's account of Integrity Training is distinctive in its introduction of the relevance of this practice to schooling. All of the papers, and particularly those by O'Leary and Malikail, clearly indicate the value of critically examining the theoretical ground of moral education.

6. The teacher of moral education is as much the student of moral education. The study of theory and the development of instructional competence by teachers are essential aspects of moral education. This special issue of *The Journal of Educational Thought* is expected to contribute to the teacher's resources. It is our intention, as co-ordinators of the Summer Institute on Moral Education 1981 (University of Calgary), to encourage examination of a range of views on moral education, in part by the use of these papers. The Summer Institute is designed specifically for the classroom teacher and the school counsellor. It provides the opportunity for individual teachers to initiate and direct their study of moral education. The Institute assumes that informed and sensitive teachers are crucial to genuine moral education in the schools. This special issue of JET should be of challenging assistance to them. In advancing his concern for the adequacy of communication between theorists and practitioners in moral education, Dwight Boyd recently argued that it is

...becoming increasingly apparent to people working in this field that too little attention has been paid to what the teacher does or does not bring to attempts to institute a program.... Respecting the *teachers* rational autonomy may be equally as important as insuring that he/she has certain teaching skills that are thought important for the desired effect on students.

("Teachers' Reflections on Morality: An Exploratory Study," *Moral Education Forum*, Vol. 5, No. 4, Winter 1980, p. 7)

Boyd commendably argues for an appreciation of the theoretical preconceptions that teachers bring to involvement in this enterprise. We agree with Boyd that one major requirement this makes of researchers is that they listen carefully to teachers. A major requirement of theorists is that they submit their claims to the critical scrutiny of teachers. This communication is essential to effective moral education in the schools.

John L. McNeill
Gary J. deLeeuw
Guest Editors