moral underpinning of a code of ethics should emerge, from that of teachers within a State school system, or a Muslim system. Ultimately, it all depends upon whether or not individual conceptualisations of morality match the corporate conceptions of morality that characterise the ethical framework within which schooling takes place.

It is, I believe, true that if teachers are to become teachers of ethics, there is a need for them to be (rather than to adopt the role of) life mentors. I think that it is arguable that teachers need to be either professionals or deliberately ‘curriculum practitioners’ to do this. They do, however, need to have access to both inservice and time to make sense of the area and to begin to be able to articulate their individual and collective stances in the area. The questions remain: Who will develop a code of conduct based upon ethical principles which is applicable to teachers? How will this make them better able to teach ethics to children? And ultimately, if teachers do become ethically literate, how will it affect the way in which they relate to all of the elements of schooling with which they engage on a daily basis?

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**Ethics Education — Rejoinder**

**Ethics Education: Reactions and Rejoinders**

Terence Lovat

At the end of it all I think Mark d’Arbon and I agree more than we disagree, although I am more hesitant to make such generalised claims, having read of Mark’s concern for the particularist rather than the ‘absolutist’, and his eschewing of ‘unjustified assumptions’. While particularism is very much in fashion, it is easier to render it lip-service than real service, as Mark himself has no doubt reflected after some of his own sweeping assumptions. Take the second and fourth paragraphs of his article, where he speaks of the ‘real experiences’ of teachers, and even the ‘reality’ of teaching (a theme he returns to on a number of occasions), as though here we have the archetypal absolute, shared in uncompromising generic form by Australia’s 100,000 or so (why not the world’s millions?) of practising teachers. Not only is it so, but apparently one can make sound judgments (never unjustified assumptions!) about whether another is privy to this generic experience merely by perusing that other’s writings. Now there’s a grand narrative!

I would even be prepared to concede to the truth of the narrative (after all, I’m not a particular-ophile) if one could explain what the point of it all is anyway. Is the point that unless one is sharing daily in a profession’s unaltering common experience, one should make no comment upon the profession? No-one should make comment on the law unless one is a practising lawyer, or about taxi services unless one is doing the 3am shift, or about politics unless one is ‘in the house’? How convenient for those committed to closed shops!

It fits well with the concern for particularism that one never label in a values-laden way, because that would betray a lack of sensitivity to contexts of meaning and, especially for the outsider, may even itself be labelled in the worst possible way as ‘patronising’. Hence, there is no such thing as a wise, shrewd—or presumably even good—lawyer, taxi-driver, politician, teacher. There are just lawyers, taxi-drivers, politicians and teachers, all working in contexts of meaning which are closed
off from us and, therefore, whose practical actions are beyond our capacity to assess. Lawyers, taxi-drivers, politicians (and teachers) rejoice!

Now, the most patronising label of all, not to mention the most unjustified assumption, is to attach to any occupation the notion of ‘professionalism’. It is patronising because it imperiously encumbers the occupation with all sorts of burdens, like needing to have a professional code of conduct. Presumably, an occupation does not require this so long as it is deemed to be something less than a profession! It is unjustified because we apparently have to wait for community consensus before we can describe any occupation as a profession, or so Bowyer (1998) says on the basis of evidence which is withheld at this point. Fortunately for them, the medical, legal and engineering advocates of the past hadn’t read Bowyer as they naively pursued the then unpopular view that these occupations were best regarded by society as professions. One muses on chickens and eggs!

The main reason Mark d’Arbon puts forward for eschewing teaching as a profession, replete with a professional ethical code, is the rather bleak one that this may be used by others for exploitation purposes. Similarly bleak is the notion that a code of conduct does no good because some religious teachers with strong codes have nonetheless been known to engage in vile acts. So, by the same logic, the lesson to be learned from the crooked judge is that it’s better not to have laws at all. In this way, at least hypocrisy is avoided!

Not only does Mark have trouble with the notion of teacher as professional, but moreover of teacher as a player of any role which society might have a part in deciding. Why is this? Because, it is said, teaching is ‘an extension of personality expressed as intention and behaviour’. The logic (again of particularism) is that no generalisation can be made about teachers and proper moral conduct. If one wishes to say anything meaningful here, one must refer to the million or more ‘extensions of personality’ that staff the world’s schools. Such a pity the Wood Royal Commission did not have the benefit of this pearl before it impelled charges against certain personality extensions which it found to be improper. Fortunately, however, the pearl might inform impending legislation on teacher registration which, in its absence, might otherwise mandate that certain roles are in, while others are excluded, and might even be crass enough to hire and fire on this basis.

The curious becomes curiouser in Mark’s sentiment that ethical concern, including codes of conduct and pre-service training, is a natural part of the medical and health regime because it deals in life and death issues which are ‘newsworthy’ and so generate community interest and presumably a sense of accountability. Sadly, we are told, none of this applies to teaching. The community doesn’t really care what goes on in the teaching regime because there are apparently no burning ethical issues, and hence no pre-service courses in ethics training. Or is all this the other way around? Worst of all, teachers don’t even know (because they lack the necessary skills to reflect on such things) what the ethical issues would even be were there to be a debate about such things. Moreover, it is said that teaching is such a melange that it is impossible to identify what might be an ethical issue from what is not, and that teachers are so unskilled in dealing with ethical concerns that they cannot so much as identify in rational terms which aspects of policy, syllabus or curriculum (which is an obfuscatory term, and ‘curriculum practitioner’ a morally questionable one?) might be open to ethical debate and which not. Finally, we are told that teachers simply don’t have time to worry about such things, so immersed are they with the functional side of their occupation, and so presumably society, the law, employers (and especially those philosophical types who are so removed from the ‘reality’ of teaching) had better lay off with all this ethical propriety stuff and just let teachers get on with their jobs. If this is all true, and I’m so out of touch, I had best concede defeat and look to the ethics of architecture, or something else with a little more going for it.

So, why do I say Mark and I agree more than we disagree? I guess because we both seem to care about the issue. I sense that my own experiences with the profession (and I insist that, for reasons covered quite well in A Class Act (Senate, 1998), this is the term that we must promote for our collective) has been more positive than his. This applies both to my own considerable exposure to the ‘realities’ of teaching, as well as my experiences of the broader profession in its systemic and policy dimensions. I agree thoroughly that there are serious resource and morale issues to be faced, and that consideration of ethical conduct, codes and training should not be divorced from these. At the same time, I do not believe, as Mark tends to imply, that we should wait for these issues to be resolved before we can meaningfully address the ethics agenda. On the contrary, raising the ethics agenda has potential to play its own part in raising the image of teaching,
the questionable image presenting as a major reason why the resource and morale issues remain unresolved.

To be entirely fair, and hopefully not too patronising, Mark raises some acute cautions against my enthusiasm that matters of ethics and ethics education be enhanced at all levels of the teaching profession, and I thank him for that. I do appreciate his concern that these matters be thought through with care and in ways that result in appropriate and achievable goals. I am sure that he, equally, appreciates my concern that all of us who are committed to the profession should advocate unapologetically, and without overdue deference to the attached problematics, to raise awareness in the teaching regime of those ethical imperatives the likes of which govern all professions of high status in the current era.

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