

**Augustana College  
Chapel of Reconciliation**

**Ethics and Education**

**Karen Mahan**  
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Teaching is a highly moral undertaking. What makes teaching a moral endeavor is that it is human action undertaken in regard to other human beings. It is humans shaping the academic, moral, and ethical behavior of other human beings. Therefore, matters of what is fair, just, right, and virtuous are always present. Moral considerations are present whenever a teacher asks a student to share something with another student, decides between combatants in a playground dispute, sets procedures for who will go first, second, third, etc., discusses the welfare of a student with another teacher, or calculates grades.

In the field of education, we can approach ethics from numerous perspectives. I am going to discuss education as a profession (professional ethics) and education as a ‘calling’ (vocational ethics). At first glance, it may appear that they are one in the same, but in my mind they serve two different purposes. Let’s look first at professional ethics. There has been a trend to examine individual’s ethics and morality since the mid-1970s when the Watergate scandal broke. Shortly thereafter, medical schools, law schools, and business schools started including courses on professional ethics in their curriculums (Hastings Center, 1980). At that time (and for about ten years thereafter), educators continued to focus on standards for math and science and really left lessons on morals, values, and ethics to family and religious institutions (Strike & Ternasky, 1993). This is understandable because most of us who choose to teach are “good people” who can be

expected to treat our students and colleagues fairly. Thus it raises the question ...why is good character insufficient to ensure ethical behavior? Given the human nature of the profession, educators face ethical dilemmas every day; when contemplating these dilemmas, we rely on intuition garnered from goodness, personal values indoctrinated by family religion, and educational experiences. Sometimes intuition isn't enough to ensure ethical behavior so institutions (in this case education and educators) adopt a code of behaviors and standards that will help ensure that when faced with dilemmas, decisions are made in just and ethical ways.

Professional ethics help us define the profession of teaching in ways that the public can recognize and respect. A professional code of ethics tends to be laden with terms like accountability, alignment, rigor, quality control, and standards (Freeman, 1998; Schwarz, 1998; Vokey, 2005). It guides us with regard to certification issues, assessment issues (you know ...the PRAXIS), and best practice regarding how to conduct our classrooms and ensure students' access to knowledge. By becoming a teacher, we agree to uphold these standards. Focusing on standards for best practice, the behavioral procedures for good teaching, greater public recognition and teacher autonomy, while necessary, just isn't enough and it tends to distract us from the everyday personal and moral dimensions of teaching (Hansen, 1995). Virtually all of teaching involves values (Goodlad, Soder & Sirotnik; 1991); and as Palmer (1998) stated, "good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher" (p. 10). So again I ask, 'why is good character insufficient to ensure ethical behavior' ?

To answer the question, we need to look at the second perspective, that of teaching as a vocation. Most educators view teaching as not only important but rewarding – as a “calling” or as having a “passion” for teaching. If we recognize teaching as a vocation, then we must recognize that teaching is an ongoing growth process ...it doesn't just end with graduation, certification or even tenure; and we must recognize that teaching involves caring. Caring about how and what students learn. Ethical teachers challenge students to think deeply about matters of importance and to seek out as many experiences as possible (Schwarz, 1998). Ethical practice demands the intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical engagement of the teacher (Schwarz). Viewing teaching as a vocation allows us to examine competing moral demands and uncertainty; after all, the most caring and well prepared teacher can still make mistakes.

Let's look at a couple of hypothetical situations that could easily happen in any educational setting: As an elementary school teacher you receive a call from Johnny's father asking how Johnny's academic performance has been. Johnny is anything but a stellar student. Johnny's father is known to have a quick, mean temper and he may be abusive. You are now faced with an ethical dilemma between honesty, a strong moral value, and the risk of physical harm to Johnny if you share the truth about his academic performance with his father. Which decision is right and just: sticking to your moral standards or ensuring the safety of your student?

Or here is an ethical argument that plays out on this campus. Are we ethically bound to the standard of grading on a curve? As educators, professors encourage their student's pursuit of learning. In doing so, they hold before their students the best scholarly and ethical standards of their discipline. Professors are ethically bound to

ensure that their evaluation of students reflects each student's true merit. Must that merit then be based on comparisons to classmates, or can the merit be based on the student's effort and individual growth? Grading policies can challenge not only the professor's ethical standards, but the institutions. Is it okay for college administrators to request or even demand a professor change a grade; or to even challenge the professor to defend his or her assessment methods? Again, we can be two reasonable people with strong moral characters who take different stances on which perspective is right and just.

Another dilemma is when educators find themselves in disagreement with school policies. Some school districts have a policy that if you work directly with a student in the classroom, it is a conflict of interest to tutor the student for a fee outside of the classroom. So, the band teacher is not allowed to provide private lessons for those students who are in band. While acknowledging the strong merit of that broad-sweeping policy, as a practicing speech pathologist, I found it frustrating. The policy was implemented to ensure fairness, but it competed with a best-practice standard for my profession involving cohesion of services. Young children who have severe disabilities need cohesive services across both interventions and interventionists; thus it was impossible to ensure cohesive instruction for these children during the summer months because of the conflict of interest policy. As a good and caring person I wanted to employ best practice to assure the best intervention possible for my students, but ethically it was a conflict of interest because of personal gain.

As caring ethical teachers, we have both moral and social responsibilities as stewards of schools and mentors of the young. Goodlad suggests that the morality of education is a "four-legged stool" involving enculturating our youth, providing access of

knowledge to all students, examining the unique relationship between teacher and student in compulsory schooling, and the role teachers play in school renewal (Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik). All four legs deserve attention, but because of time constraints I am only going to address the first two of these ethical responsibilities.

From the very beginning, a major intention of education was the induction of the youth into the culture; to make them good citizens, good workers, and good parents (Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik). There have been times when we were morally deficient in this area: for a long time neither Black nor Native Americans, nor children with disabilities were allowed in our schools, and thus they were not enculturated into our society. The issue was managed through legislation, but has the ethical dilemma really been rectified? As pre-service teachers and educators of pre-service teachers, I challenge you to really think about your personal beliefs on inclusion. Do we embrace diversity for instrumental reasons (because accrediting agencies require it) or for moral reasons? As a role model are you following institutional policy or are you modeling personal moral and ethical standards? The picture is clearer and simpler when we look at it from the ethical perspective of honesty. We can't expect students to embrace the value of honesty if their educators don't act honestly. To quote Gilbert Ryle in his classic article "Can Virtue Be Taught?"

"What will help to make us self-controlled, fair-minded, or hard-working are good examples set by others and then ourselves practicing and failing, and practicing again, and failing again ... In matters of morals, as in the skills and arts, we learn first by being shown by others, then by being trained by others, naturally with some worded homily, praise and rebuke, and lastly by being trained by ourselves." (p. 46 – 47).

And as the scripture in Luke (6:40) so clearly states: “every one when he is fully taught will be like his teacher.” Educators have an ethical responsibility to parents, students and society to model moral behavior.

One of the most daunting ethical dilemmas facing schools today is the culture of bullying. What once was thought to be playground antics, and part of school children’s social development, has developed into a culture of reacting to demeaning persecution through a system of violent, often deadly, paybacks. Attempts to counter this trend have led to school lockdowns and implementation of curriculum on character in our elementary and secondary schools, and to legislative sessions where we argue the rights of students to carry guns on college campuses to ensure personal safety.

As teachers we must have an understanding of this unique and critical role schools play in enculturating our youth; and we must also recognize the moral justice involved in the right to a free, public education (Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik).

Possibly the clearest goal of education is to promote intellectual development through practice, experience, and access to knowledge. Yes, typically this is embedded in the scope and sequence of the curriculum, but teachers too have an ethical obligation to master their subject areas. We must also be aware of the impact of scheduling, grouping, allocation of instructional time, etc. as all of these impact students’ access to knowledge. Furthermore, access to knowledge involves how we deliver information and the ordered ways we structure the learning experience; such teaching tools as these impact students’ appreciation of the arts, understanding of the physical universe, ability to communicate across multiple contexts, and just simply impacts the student’s ability to feel at home in their environment (Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik).

Again, historically we have been morally deficient in this area. Opportunities for access to the most useful knowledge have often been disseminated unfairly with poor and minority children having less access (Oakes, 1985). And again, we have sought out an institutional resolution for the issue by legislating No Child Left Behind. While the law certainly addresses curriculum, assessment, and accountability by educators and schools; there is absolutely no consideration for the vocation of teaching. In fact, the law is so overbearing that it is obscuring the fundamental purpose of teaching, which is enlightenment of the young, development of human nature, and the emancipation of the mind and soul (Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik).

Public school education has become a political battleground for a war over control of education being fought between policymakers (governors, state and federal legislators, and business leaders) on one side and the professionalization of education on the other. As this battle wages on, it sometimes seems like the moral nature of teaching has been forgotten.

At Augustana, we strive for a more diverse population, but again one has to question if it is for instrumental reasons or for moral reasons? If it truly is for moral reasons, then as an institution we need to take a hard look at the issues surrounding diversity from an ethical perspective rather than from a statistical perspective. We need to systematically look at what types of supports need to be in place in order to enable diverse individuals to feel at home in this environment.

In just a few short months we will all gather at the Arena to celebrate, with all pomp and circumstance, the graduation of students who have spent four short years preparing to not just survive, but have a profound impact on their professions,

communities, and peers. The celebration will culminate with the faculty gauntlet where each graduate will be congratulated and sent off with encouragement, best wishes, and blessings. Both the teachers and the taught will have feelings of pride and confidence at a job well done. Just as we take a sense of ownership with these students who have successfully fulfilled the academic curriculum for the college and their majors, we must also take a sense of ownership of those who entered Augustana, but did not make it, did not experience academic or personal success. It is our ethical responsibility to objectively and systematically look at why these students failed. It isn't enough to say that they just didn't fit into the Augustana Family. We must address the role we, as an institution, played in denying them access to the vast wealth of knowledge available on this campus.

The ethical and moral issues embedded in education are immense and complex, so much so that it is impossible to address them all in this short forum. The educational system must ensure that teachers are well qualified and have a set of ethical standards from which to operate. At the same time, we cannot forget the moral purposes for teaching. Moral qualities are learned – acquired through experiences and from models. Teachers need to study the classics, engage in dialogue, and reflect on the moral aspects of their work.

To conclude this discussion on ethics in education I would like to leave you with a quote by Clarence Walton: “We believe that Individuals do not live by knowledge alone. They also live by a set of human values--ethical, moral, and religious” (1998, p. 1-2). It is within this milieu that educators maneuver everyday as they struggle with ethical dilemmas of what is just, right, fair, and virtuous.

## References

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**MORNING WORSHIP**  
**Monday, Mar. 3, 2008**

<b>Prelude</b>	<i>“A Lenten Meditation”</i>	Charles Callahan
<b>Welcome</b>		
<b>Invocation</b>		
<b>Scripture</b>		Proverbs 2: 6-10 Luke 6: 39-40
<b>Hymn</b>	<i>“O God of Mercy, God of Light”</i>	ELW 714, vv. 1, 3
<b>Message</b>	<i>“Ethics in Education”</i>	Karen Mahan, Educ.
<b>Benediction</b>		
<b>Postlude</b>	<i>“Beneath the Cross of Jesus/In the Cross of Christ I Glory”</i>	Arr. Mark Albrecht

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**CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**CAMPUS MINISTRY STAFF AND MUSICIANS FOR 08-09**

Applications are now being taken for campus ministry staff and musicians for the coming school year. The deadline for returning the applications to the chapel office is Mar. 14<sup>th</sup> (right before spring break.)

**Questions - call or stop by the chapel office (5403)**

**UNITY PRAYER** - There will be an offering of prayer for the community every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 7:00am in the Back Alley and Sundays at 9:00pm at the Valhalla Theme House (1000 W. 28th St.). **All members of the Augustana community are invited to attend.**

**SERVING THE BANQUET** - Campus Ministry is sponsoring a team to serve the Banquet (The local soup kitchen) on Monday, March. 10<sup>th</sup>. There are two shifts that need workers: the afternoon shift to prepare the food (2-4:30 pm) and the evening shift to serve (5:15-8 pm) There is a sign-up sheet on the Narthex table. Please consider helping with this worthwhile project!

**TEN THOUSAND VILLAGES** - Next Saturday March 8,2008 will be College Student Day at Ten Thousand Villages. We will give friendship bracelets to the first 100 customers. Ten Thousand Villages is a not for profit Fair Trade Organization. Stop by and hear stories about artisans that are being paid a fair wage and providing a bright future for their families.

**OUTREACH LEADERS MEETING - Tues., Mar. 4<sup>th</sup> -**

Youth leaders - 5:30 pm, Worship - 6:00 pm

**WORSHIP AT ST. DYSMAS** - For those who filled out clearance forms, we will be meeting in the chapel Narthex. At 5:30 on Thurs., Mar. 6<sup>th</sup>. If you can drive for the carpool, please bring your car to the Commons Circle and we will all leave together. **We need to be at the prison by 6 pm.**

### CHAPEL CALENDAR

Mon. (3rd)	Worship, 10 am - Karen Mahan, Ethics & Educ.
Tues. (4 <sup>th</sup> )	Catholic Mass , 10 am - Fr. Joe Vogel - Outreach Leaders Meetings - 5:30 Yth., 6:00 Wor.
Wed. (5 <sup>th</sup> )	Holy Communion, 10 am - Mark Braun
Thurs. (6 <sup>th</sup> )	Worship at St. Dysmas
Fri. (7 <sup>th</sup> )	Worship, 10 am - Jackie Strey, Sr. Spkr.
Sun. (9 <sup>th</sup> )	Worship, 11 am - Pr. Paul