VALUES AND ETHICS IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

PROMOTING MORAL LITERACY TEACHING COMPETENCY

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Assumptions about the fundamental purposes of education are inherently reflected in any discussion of moral literacy in formal education. Despite the current focus on literacy in reading, mathematics, and science in public schools, throughout the history of education in the United States, educational purposes generally have included more than an emphasis of basic academic skills (Rothsetin, Wilder, & Jacobsen, 2007, p. 9). Existing accountability systems that hold educators accountable "solely for basic skills" (p. 11) probably explain why moral literacy education is not a high priority and

essentially ignored in public schools today (Tuana, 2007). Arguably, in a democratic society, schools need to go beyond teaching fundamental skills to teach the whole child (Scherer, 20007). Considering the societal, moral, and economic implications of narrowly focusing on academic content and skills, it is the authors' contention that moral literacy warrants consideration as an integral dimension of public education. Unfortunately, however, teachers may lack the pedagogical competencies for teaching moral literacy skills. This begs the question: If teachers are to teach their students holistically, then should not teacher education programs also reflect a holistic approach to preparing teachers?

Given the complex world we live in and the value-laden decisions required of everyday life in the 21st Century, a holistic approach to teaching is desirable. A holistic approach to teacher education is one that views the teacher as a multidimensional, whole person. Teaching the whole teacher requires dealing with not only the cognitive dimension, but with the aesthetic, spiritual, and moral dimensions as well. Accordingly, moral literacy, along with literacy in reading, writing, and arithmetic, must become an integral component of formal education (Tuana, 2007). To this end, and guided by the assumption that moral literacy can be developed through the structured nurturing of moral awareness, moral agency, and moral reasoning, the authors endeavored to design and implement a moral literacy course for teachers. The overarching purposes of the course were threefold: (a) to increase teacher awareness of the need to focus on moral literacy development in adolescents; (b) to examine and select moral literacy teaching resources and instructional strategies for cultivating moral literacy in adolescents; and, (c) to extend moral literacy learning through service within the broader community.

The need for a moral literacy course was highlighted in Leonard and Basinger's (2008) research project, designed to field test an instructional strategy for its value in facilitating teacher candidates' moral literacy in a teacher education Diverse Learners course. This strategy was largely based on Branson's (2007) structured approach to introspection and reflection and its usefulness for cultivating teacher candidates' moral literacy. The research findings of that study suggested that participant reports of both positive and negative life experiences in their early lives appeared to have

resulted in largely positive teacher behavior outcomes. As a result of that research, Leonard and Basinger (2008) recognized and confirmed the need to better understand ways to develop morally literate teachers.

Conceptual Framework

The work of Nancy Tuana (2007) informed the authors' attempt to reach a shared understanding of the concept of moral literacy within the context of formal education and served as an overlay for the development of each of the three course modules. Tuana (2007) asserts that moral literacy includes three basic components which include:

1. Ethics sensitivity: This component is a key element of moral literacy; it is a developmental skill, not an innate ability. According to Tuana, training in ethics sensitivity can improve one's ability to recognize an ethical dilemma, judge its intensity, and formulate a response accordingly.

2. Ethical reasoning skills: This component involves understanding various ethical frameworks and identifying and assessing facts and values relevant to the moral issue.

3. Moral imagination: This component includes the cultivation of empathy and imagining oneself in another's situation. A morally imaginative person does more than merely recognize an ethical issue, but can appreciate the other's perspective, is empathetic, and has a highly developed sense of personal responsibility.

The authors' shared understandings of moral literacy aligned with these three basic components of moral literacy (Tuana, 2007). To that end, the three course modules were grounded in Tuana's conceptualization of moral literacy and her practical suggestions for application of these components within school settings. The following section includes the identification, preliminary description, and research base for each module.

Module I: Moral Literacy and the Teacher—The Power of One

Increasingly, teacher training programs are charged with the task of producing teachers who exhibit desirable dispositions, particularly those pertaining to the moral and ethical dimensions of teaching (Helm, 2006). Professional and accrediting organizations have set standards for teacher education programs to cultivate and document appropriate professional dispositions in teacher candidates. This is the case because "teachers play a role not only in facilitating the development of students' content knowledge and cognitive skills – the official curriculum – but also in shaping the hidden curriculum" (Hillman, Rothermel, & Hotchkiss Scarano, 2006, p. 234) of societal and cultural values and civic responsibility. In the interest of educational equity and the belief that *all* children can learn, teachers have a moral responsibility to be culturally responsive in their teaching. Culturally responsive teachers believe not only that all students can learn and be successful in life, but also understand the importance of building connections with families and community, vary instructional methods to meet the needs of learners and are willing to be introspective and reflective about themselves and their teaching (Bennett, 2007). Culturally responsive and morally literate teachers are those who build classroom environments leading to the holistic development of *all* students. Accordingly, teacher educator programs need to holistically prepare teachers for holistic teaching – teaching the whole child. This means that they teach content knowledge and skills to help children make more sense of life, experiences, and the unknown future (Brady, 2006). Noddings (2005) suggests that the aims of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act are far too narrow and proposes that our schools educate people to care about how their actions affect the lives of others. In order to do this, the teacher must know the whole child.

Landsman and Gorski (2007) believe that teachers should be empowered to incorporate pedagogy that will work best for diverse populations. They describe a student-based curriculum rich in independent thinking, creative problem solving, physical health and academic success. Such a curriculum facilitates an informed citizenry that is able to lead, make important decisions, and collaborate toward a better future. From a student's perspective, this type of personalized teaching, where a teacher is keenly interested in the whole child, is an affirmation of personal worth (Tomlinson & Germundson, 2007). Students learn best when they feel appreciated, acknowledged, respected, and validated (Lambert & McCombs, 1998). This leads us to ask, what type of curriculum are we teaching our teachers?

Teacher candidates and practicing teachers must demonstrate content knowledge, instructional skills, as well as understand the moral and ethical dimensions of teaching, such as those described by Zeichner (1992):

> Effective teachers of diverse populations recognize and accept their own culture, commit to equity for all students, maintain high expectations for all students, develop strong relationships with students, provide academically challenging curriculum, establish collaborative learning environments, include connections to different cultural groups, scaffold between academic curriculum and cultural resources that students bring to school, involve parents and community, and understand the political issues outside the classroom. (as cited in Knight & Wiseman, 2005, p. 390)

In order to help teachers become culturally responsive and morally literate, critical reflection must be an integral part of teacher education and teacher educators need to cultivate an ethos of inquiry and moral purpose in the fashion espoused by Norlander-Case, Reagan, and Case (1999). "Too many of our conversations about effective teaching focus on content, teaching methods, and learning outcomes….Evoking the inner life of our teachers— that is, engaging teachers in activities that cultivate their capacity to teach with greater consciousness, self awareness, and integrity—is a necessary condition for successful [teaching]" (Intrator & Kunzman, 2006, p. 39). Teachers need to be reflective practitioners in interest of being culturally responsive in their teaching. Fletcher (1997) and Conle, Blanchard, Burton, Higgins, Kelly, Sullivan, and Tan (2000) advocate the use of purposeful reflective thinking to

explore, uncover, and reduce any underlying prejudices that may potentially have a direct and negative impact on pedagogy and teacher interactions with diverse students. Given that inquiry and critical self reflection are essential features of the education profession, teachers and administrators should be on a constant quest to reflect on their valuational and ethical dispositions and practices. Consequently, as part of this moral endeavor, professors of education also have an important role in ensuring that the courses they develop and teach include standards-based goals that address not only knowledge and skills, but teachers' self-knowledge of their values and beliefs and the impact of their belief systems on teaching practice.

Given the importance of introspection and critical self-reflection for cultivating self-knowledge, Module 1 of the proposed moral literacy course would utilize Branson's (2007) model to guide teachers in a "deeply structured process of self reflection" (p.472). The following list presents the focus, objectives, and preliminary content and activities for Module I:

Module I Focus: Teacher self-knowledge as a prerequisite to being a moral agent and to having moral reasoning skills.

Module I Objectives:
1. To acknowledge the importance of moral literacy development in teachers and adolescents;
2. To recognize the teacher's responsibility as a moral role model for adolescents; and,
3. To consider and reflect on the teacher's influence as an active moral mentor of adolescents.

Module I Preliminary Content and Activities:
1. Various reading assignments related to moral literacy, critical self-reflection, and holistic teaching and learning.
2. Critical incident--Structured self-reflection (Branson, 2007; Leonard & Basinger, 2008)

Module II: Moral Literacy and the Student—The Exponential Power of Teaching

Teachers, serving as moral agents, must be attentive to the needs and interests of students, and act on students' behalf. The relationship is one of dynamic caring, in which the teacher attends as the one caring to the one cared for—the student (Tuana, 2007). Noddings (1984) recognized the inevitable interdependency of human relationships and the range of relationships possible, not just between equals, but between the "one-caring" and the "cared-for."

A moral agent possesses moral imagination (Tuana, 2007). Teachers serving as moral agents are committed to putting themselves in another's place, and possess "a rich and affective commitment to *being ethical*" (p. 12). Such teachers not only recognize situations that involve ethical issues, but moral imagination motivates them to advance from mere awareness to a desire to invest in the situation, to personally experience ethical action.

Effective teachers are recognized as influential and essential moral models for adolescents. The teacher's affective characteristics, or social and emotional behaviors, are the focus of a substantial amount of research on stakeholders' perceptions of good teaching. Stronge (2002) listed several research studies that emphasized the teacher's affective characteristics rather than pedagogy in terms of effectiveness or perceptions of effectiveness. The studies were categorized as addressing some or all of the following affective characteristics of a whole teacher: role of caring, fairness and respect, interacting with students, exhibiting enthusiasm and motivation, attitude toward the profession of teaching, and the role of reflective practice (pp. 23-24). Clearly teachers must be equipped to teach students, not just content.

The importance of cultivating these student-teacher relationships is further underscored in a recent study by the Alliance for Excellent Education (2006). According to this study, 1.2 million students every year do not graduate on time from high school. In fact, nearly one in three U.S. high school students, 7,000 every day, drops out of school. Their reasons for leaving school vary, but many dropouts admit they could have graduated had they been more motivated to

work harder, received more support from parents or teachers, or found their classes more relevant. Many of the teenagers that do show up for school are disengaged, bored, alienated from school life and culture. Expressing disdain for a curriculum perceived as irrelevant, they fail to complete any meaningful work. Considering the increasingly complex intellectual and literacy demands placed on students of the 21st century this is a moral, societal, and economic crisis of epic proportion.

In contrast, students that believe in themselves, are actively engaged in their learning, and understand the purpose of what they are learning, are more likely to have high aspirations. Students with high aspirations have shown marked improvements in academic achievement, social awareness and positive contributions to their school community. Student aspirations encompass both dreaming and doing (Quaglia, 2008). The balance between dreaming and doing is critical, and the challenges teachers face when fostering aspirations with different students are complex. Through building personal relationships with individual students, teachers provide the guidance and support students need to become independent and responsible for who they are today and who they will be in the future. This personal relationship is also integral to the development of what Tuana's (2007) concept of moral imagination. Cultivating moral imagination goes beyond the notion of dreaming; it empowers students to empathize with others in situations that they may not have yet experienced. While moral imagination cannot be taught in the strict sense, teachers can facilitate a "personal ownership of ethical behavior" (Tuana, 2007, p. 12).

Tuana (2007) identifies the use of narratives and stories as the most common pedagogical techniques for cultivating the moral imagination in students. By placing themselves in stories depicting social inequities or morally complex dilemmas students are not only able to identify with characters in stories, but to also develop empathy and ethics sensitivity. Culturally relevant and real-world texts are particularly engaging to adolescent students. Matching students to appropriate, interesting texts is a challenge for teachers attempting to personalize and differentiate instruction. This is particularly difficult for teachers of culturally diverse students of varying reading levels.

Moreover, many minority students and students from poverty are struggling readers. It is imperative, therefore, to provide these disadvantaged students reading materials that are highly engaging and at an appropriate reading level.

Townsend Press is a nonprofit publishing company that strives to meet the twofold needs of this segment of the student population by providing access to engaging, easy to read books that are also affordable. Townsend Press publishes the Bluford series, a collection of thirteen young adult novels built around the lives of a group of minority students in an urban high school setting. The African American and Latino students at Bluford High, named after Guion "Guy" Bluford, the first black astronaut, are dealing with real life issues such as family problems, race relations, school violence, drugs, gangs, abuse, pregnancy, and poverty (Comodromos, 2007).

Although personal character development and moral literacy are not cited as goals of Townsend Press, the books of the Bluford series naturally compel the reader to take stock of personal ethics when relating to the ways the protagonists of each story deal with conflict and challenges (Lester, 2004/2005). Moral dilemmas common to humankind are faced by the young men and women of Bluford High and their families. The reader follows along as the characters struggle through tough situations, ultimately solving their own problems.

The teacher's guide to the series is conspicuously devoid of any references to what may seem to teachers as uncomfortable social issues best avoided in class. The guide instead focuses on the primary goal of reading these books—getting students to read and to enjoy what they read (Lester, 2004/2005). African-American cultural influences in the books need not lead to stereotyping, but may serve to foster understanding about difference and others' experiences (Lester, 2004/2005). The Bluford books afford teachers unique opportunities to discuss the social issues presented in the novels with students. Honest discussion about the sometimes complex and sensitive issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, and violence presented in these books need not be avoided or seen as offensive to teachers or age-appropriate students. Deliberating about ethical issues and

considering questions such as those posed by Tuana (2007) afford opportunities for students and teachers to identify unwarranted biases or values. Such deliberation serves to improve students' ethical reasoning skills and cultivates their moral imaginations.

The reading level for the novels is between 5th and 6th grade, and each novel contains less than 200 pages, encouraging even reluctant readers to read from cover to cover. Taking into account recent research on gender and reading, an effort was made to ensure that students of both sexes would find the Bluford books appealing. White female readers are as engaged as male minority readers by issues and themes that are more societal and teenager-common than racial or gender-specific. The books feature both male and female protagonists. The thirteen titles of the Bluford Series of paperbacks sell directly from Townsend Press for one dollar each (Embracing the Child, n.d.).

Considering the societal, moral, and economic implications of the current crisis in adolescent moral literacy and the influential role of the teacher as moral literacy model, Module II of the moral literacy course will be designed to empower teachers to become effective moral agents. The following list presents the focus, objectives, and preliminary content and activities for Module II:

Module II Focus: Ethics sensitivity, ethical reasoning skills, and moral imagination as elements of adolescent students' moral literacy.

Module II Objectives:

1. Critically examine assigned reading materials that will cultivate moral literacy in adolescents; and,
2. Evaluate appropriate reading materials from multiple perspectives.

Module II Preliminary Content and Activities:

1. Select a reading resource and develop discussion questions and a culminating activity that will promote moral literacy awareness in adolescents; and,

2. Identify, review, and select appropriate reading materials from multiple perspectives that will address the moral literacy needs of each school's student population.

Module III: Moral Literacy and the Community—The Infinite Power of Community

As Furman (2003) writes, "the sense of community, of connections with others, is based in relationships" (p. 4). The classroom may be seen as a microcosm of the broader community and an appropriately safe environment for developing adolescents' moral literacy skills. However, ethics sensitivity, ethical reasoning skills, and moral imagination evolve more fully in the context of the real-world community, beyond the boundaries of the school. Service learning, as a teaching and learning strategy, is one vehicle for providing initial real-world, semi-structured experiences that nurtures students' moral literacy through meaningful community service. Engaging in service learning fosters the development of an ethic of care, a sense of personal responsibility, and an understanding of the role of self as a contributing moral agent within the community. Given the ambiguity related to understanding service learning, clarification of what constitutes effective service learning is warranted. The authors define service learning as any project that connects, applies, and extends classroom learning within and for the benefit of the community. For examples of schools that practice this notion of service learning, see The International Center for Leadership in Education (ICLE, 2008) Model Schools. Many of the Model Schools have been recognized for curricular programming that develops students' ethical reasoning skills through leadership opportunities and service learning.

Given the importance of communal processes and the ethic of community for structuring service learning projects to develop moral literacy and provide adolescents with a sense of belonging, Module III includes the following focus, objectives, and preliminary content and activities:

Module III Focus: Service learning within the broader community as an extension and application of adolescent students' moral literacy.

Module III Objectives:
1. Analyze case studies of exemplary schools, such as ICLE's Model Schools, that employ service learning and their differing approaches to developing adolescent moral literacy;
2. Develop a rationale for a school wide action plan that promotes adolescent moral literacy;
3. Identify a school service learning activity to implement within the community;
4. Examine and analyze student reflections on community service learning experience; and,
5. Evaluate the utility and success of the community service learning project.

Module III Preliminary Content and Activities:
1. Read Furman's "The Ethic of Community" and service learning pamphlet/reading on service learning;
2. Read the four ethics (critique, justice, caring, community—Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001) and Starratt (2004) to examine a problem or need in the community.
3. Read three case studies of exemplary schools and their differing approaches to developing adolescent moral literacy;
4. Create a school wide action plan for promoting adolescent moral literacy that includes a service learning activity to provide opportunities for student—community involvement.
5. Engage students in a teacher-facilitated community service learning project;
6. Develop a measurement tool for assessing moral literacy development in adolescents engaged in the community service learning project; and,
7. Reflect and report on teacher, student, and community perspectives as related to the service learning project outcomes.

Conclusion

The premise of this discussion is that educating the whole child includes focusing, not only on academic and social development, but also on the moral literacy development. Additionally, if teaching the whole child encompasses a moral dimension, then it is imperative that teachers gain competency in moral literacy instruction. The authors contend that a course designed to formally engage teachers in authentic learning experiences such as researching and reflecting on moral literacy, selecting morally relevant reading materials, and involving students in community service learning projects should increase their moral literacy teaching competencies. Furthermore, such teachers should become better qualified to cultivate in their students what Tuana (2007) has articulated as essential components of moral literacy—ethics sensitivity, ethical reasoning, and moral imagination.

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