Morality, Education, and Judgement

Alan Williams

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Abstract

To better understand the nature of teaching, educational research can focus on many issues. It can, for example, illuminate the challenges teachers face daily by studying the kind of emotional distress they typically experience. Research can also look into the types of relationships they have with their colleagues at school. A thorough investigation of the rapport between teachers can help us learn the extent to which teachers can rely on others for professional support. Another promising and interesting mode of investigation is to scrutinize what teachers actually do behind classroom doors. Research can study the kinds of tasks they set, the ways in which they praise students, and how they explain difficult concepts or themes. This paper will examine the moral evaluations teachers give in class, a practice that has not received much attention in studies in education. Teachers, as we shall see, commonly evaluate what students do and say from an ethical frame of reference, labelling and categorizing particular actions as morally right or wrong. A close study of moral evaluation can hopefully deepen our understanding of what teaching is.

Keywords: *Classroom research; moral evaluation, philosophy*

Introduction

Because teaching is an immensely complex craft, it can be studied from multiple angles, each zeroing in on a very specific aspect of teaching. Psychological studies on the inner lives of teachers can highlight the complex psychological reality of teaching. Works documenting the impact students' aversion to learning has on teachers have unveiled one of the common sources of teacher demotivation. Research on teacher efficacy has also shown how teachers experience professional dissatisfaction and a sense of inefficacy when they are forced to use teacher-proof textbooks that deny their pedagogical expertise and professional experience. Besides psychology, sociological analyses of the relationship between teachers have

led to many illuminating insights into teaching. Sociologists of education have amassed a mountain of evidence showing how teachers rarely have the time to discuss matters on effective teaching practice between and after classes. They are for the most part forced to build their teaching repertoire on their own by experimenting with new techniques in class and monitoring their effects themselves. Other sociological works investigate the relationship between classroom teaching and the community schools serve. Again, a wealth of evidence demonstrates that teachers working in poverty-stricken areas tend to lower their academic expectations, set tasks that require nothing more than rote memorization, and spend considerable time managing student misbehavior in class. Historical studies too have shed important light on teaching. Historians have helped us realize that teaching is a relatively conservative profession, where what we typically witness in the classroom today − longwinded lectures, very little collaborative learning, teacher-led discussions, etc. − was commonplace in the past. Historical inquiries (Schneider, 2014) have also ascertained the kind of educational research done in the ivory tower that has influenced classroom teaching the most. It was found that research that is both simple to understand and implement has had the greatest impact on pedagogical practice. Teaching has throughout the years been studied through the distinct theoretical lens provided by different disciplines.

Alongside investigating the psychology of teachers and the social relationships they have with their coworkers, there is research on the dynamics of what takes place in the classroom. This type of research typically examines what teachers do and say and think in the classroom context from various theoretical perspectives. Some study, for example, the extent to which teachers offer verbal praise when students give the right answers. These studies show that almost everything students say and do is the subject of praise, thereby demonstrating its prevalence in the classroom. Researchers interested in how teachers scaffold student learning analyze closely the language teachers use when explaining new concepts. Research findings reveal that teachers often resort to short sentences containing simple words and phrases to help facilitate the understanding of cognitively challenging materials. As Berger and Foster (2020) point out, there is also a plethora of studies on the kinds of questions teachers pose—from those that elicit short yes or no answers to more elaborate ones that require deeper reflection on content—to assist student learning. Teachers, according to the literature, are inclined to ask questions

they already know the answers to. Questions, in other words, are often used as a means to check student understanding, not a way for sparking their curiosity or imagination.

Educational research on what teachers do is important for a number of reasons. First of all, it can give a realistic picture of what teaching entails. Studies on teaching that are not rooted in what actually happens behind classroom doors can give a misleading picture of the reality of teaching. They can be too idealistic, portraying how teachers with a light workload face a class filled with competent and keen students in schools that are equipped with modern technology. Second, as Stigler and Hiebert (1999) claim, research that focuses on the classroom can in principle demonstrate what is effective and counterproductive in education. Based on classroom research, teachers can, for instance, learn to pose more open-ended questions that challenge students to think more critically and avoid questions that require the quick retrieval of simple facts and figures. Third, educational reforms that attempt to revolutionize teaching by prescribing new teaching strategies and curricular aims often fail because they don't take the reality of classroom teaching into consideration. They make unrealistic demands on teachers, requiring them to devote more time to prepare their classes and attend to the needs of thirty students who are all unique and different. Educational reform measures can bring more positive changes if they reflect the daily challenges and realities teachers face in the classroom. Finally, the multidimensional and complex nature of teaching can be illustrated when studies analyzing different areas of teaching − explaining, motivating, caring, etc. − are brought together. Anything as multifaceted as teaching cannot be brought to light unless the wide array of its activities are studied with care.

To help realize the aforementioned aim of shedding some light on the nature of teaching, this present study will examine a very common practice teachers engage in: morally assessing what they experience in class. During the course of a single class, teachers evaluate their experiences from a moral frame of reference. Consider the following typical cases. A student makes a rude comment about her classmate's physical appearance. The teacher asks her for an apology because he thinks it is morally inappropriate to harm someone's feelings in front of others. The teacher notices a student copying someone else's homework just before class starts. He reminds her that copying is unfair and is not the right thing for responsible students to do. Another student lends her pen to

a classmate who forgot to bring her own to school. The teacher thanks the kind student, commenting that sharing what you have to someone who doesn't is always an admirable thing to do. A student goes up to a friend whose grandmother recently passed away and consoles and encourages her by sharing her experience of losing a family member. The teacher is deeply moved by her student's display of empathy and decides to read as a class a short story about how suffering and pain can help make us grow as human beings. Events such as these, where teachers encounter situations that call for a moral response, are repeated daily in different educational contexts. They are not atypical occurrences they have to handle on very rare occasions. That is, the moral assessment by teachers is a salient feature of teaching. This is not at all surprising, because teachers face actual human beings with feelings and thoughts of their own, not non-sentient physical objects like tables, chairs, and blackboards, where moral evaluation is unnecessary.

In what follows we will examine the core characteristics underlying the moral assessments teachers give in classroom settings. Because morality, or the study of good or bad human action, is the province of philosophy, the approach and orientation will be philosophical.

1

Some of the activities teachers engage in are restricted to a particular time during the class period. Teachers offer greetings at the beginning of the lesson and it is also during this time when they have informal conversations with students to help establish rapport and show interest in their private lives. Teachers often review what was covered in the previous lesson during the start of each class to help establish continuity between what the students have studied and the new materials that will be covered. Important announcements concerning upcoming events and reminders of important dates are again made before students switch their focus to learning. There are also common classroom routines that happen towards the end of each lesson. For example, teachers tend to review the main points of every lesson at the end, reminding and underscoring their importance. It is also at the end of each lesson when teachers announce what will be covered next class. Any reference to future classes during the middle of a lesson can disrupt the flow and momentum teachers try very hard to create. Furthermore, during the last minutes of class, it is not

uncommon for teachers to allow students to work on assignments set in other classes if they are able to achieve the lesson's objective before the end of class.

What teachers typically do in class is not always restricted to a time-frame. For example, the offering of explanations is a key element of teaching and it is not bound to a particular segment of the lesson. Teachers offer explanations throughout the whole lesson. They explain why it is important to learn the theme of today's class at the beginning. After the brief introduction, they use gestures, drawings, analogies, examples, and personal anecdotes to explain the main content of the lesson – grammatical structure, chemical formula, mathematical equation, etc. – so that their students learn the material. And towards the middle of class, they explain and demonstrate how to complete an activity that reinforces the main point they want the learners to acquire. And while the students are busy working on their tasks, they reiterate their explanations to those who don't know what they are supposed to do. Towards the end of class, if they think many learners failed to meet the goal of the lesson, they re-explain the central point using different examples and analogies. During the course of a lesson, teachers offer explanations at all times. The same is true about motivating students, another important teaching practice. Because students can fail to learn if they are disengaged, teachers try hard to motivate their learners. In fact, student motivation is a central concern that preoccupies the attention of teachers. Before they even step foot in class, they prepare reading materials they think will pique their pupils' interest or design tasks that are both relevant and meaningful. Once class starts, teachers continuously try to enhance their learners' level of motivation. Many offer praise throughout the lesson to students who work hard and stay on task because it is commonly assumed that praise helps nurture the willingness to learn. Whether it is at the beginning or the end of class, when teachers notice students struggling with the content, they try to maintain their interest by giving them hints or advising them to try a different strategy or approach to help solve the problem in question. They also help build their learners' confidence during the course of the lesson by referring to their past successes in solving similar problems or by telling them that the approach they are using is the right one to adopt. The act of motivating students can be witnessed at every moment of the lesson.

In a similar vein, teachers' moral assessment is a pedagogical practice that is enacted throughout the entire class. Take the following hypothetical

teaching situation: As the students enter class, the teacher quietly observes the way they take their seats and warns those who push and shove their classmates or those who are too boisterous, unable to calm themselves down before the lesson. Teachers' moral evaluations continue as the lesson unfolds. While reviewing yesterday's lesson, the teacher notices a student looking out the window, not paying attention to what he is writing on the board. He calls out her name and asks her to face the front, since he reasons that it is rude not to pay attention to someone who is talking. A little into the lesson, the same student is now drawing pictures on her desk with a pencil. The teacher quietly goes to her side and tells her to erase the figures because students must use school property with respect. The teacher then sets a task whereby the students have to discuss the novel they have been reading in pairs. While listening to their students discussing, he overhears a student compliment and show genuine interest in what her partner says. The teacher approaches the pair and congratulates the student for praising her partner's contribution, saying that we should always try to offer positive feedback to those who try hard. The teacher is pleased with everyone's overall performance. He asks the class to end their discussions but some pairs don't because they are too engrossed in the topic. He, however, responds positively to their enthusiasm. He decides on the spot to give them another five minutes to continue the discussion because he is convinced that teachers are morally required to both ignite their students' passion for learning and to always maintain and preserve their enthusiasm if it is flourishing in class. It is almost time to end the lesson. After summarizing what was covered in class, the teacher assigns them new homework. A student sitting at the front immediately reminds the teacher that he promised not to give additional homework if they were all well-behaved. He decides to keep the promise because teachers, he believes, must be morally upright at all times and serve as a role model to their students. This short account of a typical class is filled with incidents that elicit the teachers' ethical assessment of what is right and wrong. He negatively assesses boisterous and off-task behavior and positively judges students who are supportive and hardworking. Classrooms are places imbued with events and incidents that can at any time provoke a moral assessment by those in charge.

What does the ubiquity of events that elicit ethical judgements imply about teaching? It shows that effective teaching amounts to more than implementing pedagogical skills. In order to do their job well, teachers

obviously need to have techniques to remember the names of their students, to capture their students' attention at the beginning of class, to liven up the class when students are losing interest, or to define new vocabulary using simple language. As Moore (2004) argues, however, teaching cannot be reduced to skills. A teacher can skillfully orchestrate a lesson with strategies supported by cutting-edge research but can nonetheless fail to teach effectively if she doesn't have the moral sense of how to respond appropriately to what takes place in class. Suppose a student is sobbing before the start of class. The teacher's relationship with this student would be ruined if she were to tell her to open her textbook without showing any care or empathy. She would have been more effective as a teacher if she had sensed the student's need for comforting words and eye contact. Or suppose a struggling student writes a poem that expresses her love of animals. Underlining and crossing out every grammatical error with a red pen without encouraging comments would dampen her interest in writing. Had the teacher sensed the importance of praising hard work even if it entailed many shortcomings, her confidence and interest might have bloomed. Because teachers constantly encounter situations that demand moral responses, technical competence alone is not effective to ensure a productive learning environment. They must through experience acquire the ability to interrelate with students in a morally appropriate manner and discern how they should respond to situations that are often morally complicated.

2

One of the key responsibilities teachers have to fulfill is assessing their students. Assessment takes different forms. Teachers are expected to assess their students' academic competence and this aim is achieved by going over their test results, marking their essays and reports, and closely monitoring their work during class. They also assess their learners' emotional intelligence or social skills. Teachers try to construct a reliable psychological profile of their students by checking whether or not they have problems relating with their peers or whether they are helpful towards those who are ostracized in class. In addition to their emotional intelligence, teachers are very keen on evaluating their learners' attitude towards learning in general because the understanding they gain of their ability to cope with ambiguity, their willingness to take risks, and their

level of motivation can be put to good use when planning lessons and devising activities.

Ordinarily, the area teachers assess is restricted and confined. Academic assessment covers the students' academic output – essay writing, reading speed, vocabulary comprehension, etc. – so it doesn't entail areas that are not strictly academic. Teachers don't refer to their ability to run fast or sing well or make friends easily when gauging their schoolwork. Similarly, when assessing their learners' emotional intelligence, the area of assessment is quite limited and narrow. Students' ability to translate sentences accurately or to use original metaphors when writing or to paraphrase what they read falls outside the purview of emotional assessment. And when teachers evaluate their learners' attitude towards learning, the area that is subject to assessment is restricted to their psychological response to different types of activities and teaching styles, not how they cope with stress at home or how they like to spend their free time on the weekends or what they wear to school.

The peculiarity of moral assessment is that unlike academic and emotional assessment, the area it spans is wide-ranging: everything students say and do is the subject of moral assessment. There is nothing that falls outside the domain of moral evaluation. Teachers, for instance, morally assess what students wear. Many schools follow a strict dress code and if their attire doesn't meet the regulations, they are penalized for breaking the rule. And even in schools with more relaxed dress codes, those wearing shirts with, say, obscene slogans or images are told off by their teachers for being insensitive. How students sit at their desks can also provoke moral commentaries from teachers. Those slouching when sitting down or reclining their chairs are often given a warning for not being physically prepared for learning. The way in which students walk along corridors between classes is also monitored by teachers. They are again reprimanded if they are caught running down the hallways, pushing or shoving others, or talking or laughing loudly. The language students use is also assessed morally by teachers. Though students use slang and colloquial language among themselves to form a bond, teachers are often dismissive of language that isn't formal and academic. The language teachers use is seen as setting the standard of acceptable use of English, and language that doesn't correspond to this benchmark is criticized for being foul, nonacademic, barbaric, or uneducated. Teachers encourage and reinforce the use of correct English by assigning texts written in

acceptable language and the model sentences and paragraphs that appear in grammar and composition textbooks are all formal, academic prose. Students in turn are required to write essays and engage in classroom discussions using formal English and the use of colloquial phrases is criticized or even banned. And students whose first language is not English must strive hard to acquire standard English if they want to compete academically. Many feel that non-native speakers of English are being marginalized because they are discouraged from using their first language at school. In addition to monitoring their language, teachers assess the way their students think from a moral perspective. For instance, students when scolded for nodding off to sleep in class sometimes justify their behavior with reasons that are far from convincing instead of offering an apology. Teachers often point out how it is often more important to admit one's mistakes instead of resorting to excuses and evading responsibility. Or again if students blame their classmates for not successfully completing group work, teachers do challenge their reasoning, indicating how it is both wrong and counterproductive to denounce others for the failures they personally experience. Teachers also morally evaluate the views students express. Students are sometimes given the chance to articulate their views on ideas and issues explored in class, and they can express ideas that are biased and stereotypical. Very few teachers tolerate let alone encourage hasty generalizations and blanket statements that attribute misleading characteristics and qualities to any given group of people. Even assertions and remarks that are not made with malicious intent are corrected on moral grounds if they convey hatred or a condescending view towards a particular race or religion. The correcting of student biases and prejudices is one of the central responsibilities of teachers because education involves the replacement of unfounded preconceptions with views that are impartial and fair. Moreover, how students relate and communicate with their teachers fall under their moral radar as well. When addressing and conversing with their teachers, they are expected to use polite forms of expressions that convey their respect and if this norm is violated in any way, they are held accountable for showing disrespect. Many educators expect their students to acquiesce to classroom rules without raising questions or voicing criticisms. Those who question how things are done are not ordinarily welcomed for being critical and courageous. They are seen as rebellious troublemakers who can cause more harm than good by spreading the same attitude amongst their classmates. The relationship

students have with their peers is also under constant surveillance by teachers. Because school learning encompasses both academic pursuits and the development of social skills, teachers are naturally interested in how students relate with others and try very hard to promote healthy, stable relationships and discourage those that are counterproductive and harmful. Teachers are quick to step in when students verbally abuse or make fun of others because ties between friends can be severed by words. They also reproach students who deliberately ignore and sideline those who look different or speak differently or have uncommon interests and enunciate why it is important to value and embrace differences. Teachers try to bring students together by setting cooperative learning tasks and organizing sporting or cultural events and when their learners manage to unite under a common task or goal, they often introduce similar activities in the future to help achieve the same purpose. And during the course of any school day, teachers can be seen reiterating and underscoring the significance of expressing gratitude, showing concern to those who are distressed, and listening attentively to others not only because they help build a caring community of learners who work together towards academic excellence but also because expressing gratitude and showing care are morally commendable ways of relating with people. In summary, from the way students dress to how they relate with their peers, teachers morally scrutinize a wide range of student behavior, in the hope that their encouragement of what is good and their discouragement of what is bad advance their students' learning and help them become more mature, responsible, caring people.

3

One of the characteristics shared by occupations that don't involve much human interaction is that workers are not subject to moral judgement while working. A farmer alone in the fields planting seeds is not overseen by others trying to morally assess every move he makes. A novelist sitting quietly in his study writing a short story is not closely monitored by someone else in the room, assessing whether what he is expressing on paper meets certain moral requirements. Nor does a truck driver driving along the highway to deliver goods have to be concerned that his driving technique is subject to evaluation of a moral kind. And while fixing a pipe in the kitchen, a plumber doesn't need to worry about

the quality of his work being checked from a moral perspective.

There are also jobs that involve human interaction that are rarely assessed from a moral viewpoint. During a typical game, members of a professional baseball team don't ordinarily view and evaluate their teammates from a moral perspective, questioning the ethicality of hitting or pitching a ball in a certain way. A group of carpenters working together to build a house often critique the technical aspect of what they do but they rarely expose the moral flaws of what others do because the hammering of nails and the sawing of wood usually fall outside the purview of morality. Workers industriously attending to their allocated tasks in a factory screwing bolts and weaving thread don't reflect morally on what other members of the team are doing because the technical execution of manual labor doesn't usually raise moral issues.

Teaching, on the other hand, is a profession where teachers interact with students under their charge and what teachers do and say is morally assessed by their students. The moral dynamics in the classroom are reciprocal in the sense that teachers and students morally evaluate each other. Besides teachers morally assessing students who plagiarize their work or those who are helpful towards bullied classmates, students too measure their teachers with a moral yardstick. Moral assessment is not the sole prerogative of teachers. Students judge their teachers all the time and every aspect of teaching is subject to their evaluation. Students, for example, expect their teachers to come to class on time and those who are late are negatively evaluated as incompetent, lazy, or noncommittal. Students also expect their teachers to be well-prepared − have their notes ready, have enough worksheets for everyone in class, have things written on the board before the start of class, etc. − and those who aren't often fail to gain their respect. Furthermore, teachers who are not knowledgeable about the subject they teach are not judged positively since students regard their teachers as an authority on the subject. Teachers, therefore, who cannot address the questions students pose, those who contradict themselves when expounding a particular point, or those who mistakenly teach false information can face learners who question their right to educate the young. Alongside knowledge, students value teachers who show genuine interest in what they teach. Students expect teachers to be brimming with interest, wanting to share their joy in learning history or science. Those who lack this enthusiasm and don't convey their passionate interest in the content they are delivering are again viewed negatively.

Besides displaying interest, students need to be taught by those who genuinely care about their well-being. As Lang (2020) contends, students rightly experience emotional security, confidence, and well-being when teachers show interest in their passions, upbringing, future dreams, and concerns. On the contrary, teachers who don't convey care and concern, those who are indifferent towards their students' well-being, are not conceived in a positive light. In fact, it is not uncommon for students to convey their antipathy to learning in classes taught by teachers they think are not interested in their education. Moreover, students carefully attend to what teachers say in class. Those who make sexist comments, racist remarks, or insensitive references to physically challenged people are subject to moral criticism. And those who express disparaging opinions and are condescending to students who struggle with their work are seen as discouraging and unapproachable. Students also scrutinize the relationships teachers have with those they teach and they are very critical of any form of favoritism they discern. Students rightly realize that teachers shouldn't on moral grounds treat students unequally and unfairly by favoring particular groups because of their academic competence, appearance, popularity, race, etc. It is also customary for students to rate their teachers morally in terms of the tasks they set in class. Students on the whole do not respond positively to those who set assignments that are below their academic level. They feel their competence underrated and their intelligence belittled when given work that is undemanding. On the other hand, teachers who set work that asks for their students' opinions and thoughts are not viewed as condescending and insulting because these tasks convey their interest in what their learners think about the issues covered in class. From their expertise to the attitude teachers display in class, every aspect of teaching is seen and interpreted through the moral prism students bring to class.

The fact that students assess their teachers from a moral viewpoint suggests that it is misleading to think that students wield very little power in the classroom. To be sure, it is customary to view teachers as the sole source of power in class. Teachers, after all, make most of the key decisions that affect what their students learn. They decide what content to impart and which mode of instruction to adopt. Teachers also have the right and privilege to set tests and quizzes that determine their students' final grades. Because students don't ordinarily have the power to determine how their teachers teach or what content they should learn, they are often

understood to be the passive recipients of knowledge whose experience in the classroom is molded and determined by the all-powerful teacher. This is not an entirely accurate portrayal of the relationship between students and their teachers. As Pauly (1991) maintains, students have considerable more power than it is customarily assumed. For classes to run smoothly and effectively, students need to cooperate with their teachers and follow what they are required to do. They can, however, rebel against their teachers in any number of ways if they conceive their teachers in a morally negative way. Students can talk back to their teachers and disobey orders if they view them as uncaring and unsympathetic. They might also question the content their teachers impart if they doubt their competence and expertise. Students can also engage in off-task behavior and show their antipathy towards learning if they sense that their teachers don't respect them as people. Teachers cannot provide an environment conducive to learning if students view them negatively. Experienced and skillful teachers can fail to educate if their status as morally upright agents is questioned by their students. And conversely, students are more inclined to be attentive and focused in classes taught by teachers they believe are caring, fair, and enthusiastic. They would be more willing to work hard and reciprocate the passion, commitment, and studiousness the teachers they respect embody. It is, therefore, more accurate to say that students too have the power to influence the course of each lesson by complying with or disobeying what teachers mandate.

4

Most jobs don't require practitioners to engage in moral assessments. Doctors, for instance, offer medical prognoses but patients don't expect them to judge their way of raising children or the kind of relationship they have with their spouse. Similarly, bankers and accountants handle money and often offer financial advice to their customers but don't ethically evaluate their food habits or their sense of fashion. Experienced commercial airline pilots offer technical advice to neophytes but it is beyond their professional responsibility and interest to counsel them on moral matters.

Moral deliberation is more central in other professions. Priests offer religious counselling to members of their congregation, whereby they advise how they should lead lives that fulfill the will of God.

Psychotherapists, to mention another example, morally judge what their clients do and exhort them to pursue certain paths so that they could lead more psychologically fulfilling and meaningful lives. Social critics too are disposed to use different platforms to voice their moral outrage towards unjust policies and undemocratic ways of managing society and urge citizens to take action to put an end to systems that do more harm than good.

Classroom teaching resembles the work of priests and psychotherapists because the moral assessment of students is an intrinsic part of education. Reflecting on ethical issues is not a dispensable part of teaching if teachers want to truly nurture educated, autonomous learners. As long as they are in the classroom, they are bound to encounter situations that invite a moral response. From the way students are dressed to how they face the board during lectures, everything that takes place in class is morally evaluated by teachers. Teachers who abdicate their responsibility of morally monitoring what students do are discarding and ignoring one of the core characteristics that define teaching. Teachers who ignore the moral dimension of teaching are akin to doctors who fail to keep themselves informed of the latest research on human health or pilots who don't continue their training and improve their skills using flight simulators. In fact, parents, school administrators, curriculum specialists and politicians expect teachers to engage in ethical reflection. Parents would express genuine concern if teachers educating their children rarely responded to disruptive behavior in class or congratulated those who succeeded academically. And administrators and politicians simply assume that responsible teachers who take their job seriously praise good behavior and inflict punishment when school rules are broken. And writers of textbooks describe the atrocities committed in the name of civilization and modernization so that students, under the moral guidance of their teachers, can learn moral lessons from past errors. And when society faces moral problems involving youths – drug addiction, truancy, underage sex, pornography, etc. – many point their fingers and blame teachers because they are seen as moral caretakers who are responsible for imparting ethical norms.

But why is morality such an integral part of teaching? Why can't teachers simply give lectures, mark essays, and give grades without worrying too much about moral concerns? This is in part because teachers are held accountable for morally educating their students. Their

professional responsibility as educators extends beyond the mere transmission of knowledge and skills. Besides inculcating knowledge, they are expected to shape students to be moral agents who do what is ethically good and avoid what is ethically bad, both in and out of class. It is incumbent on teachers to nurture both their learners' heart and head. Society as a whole wouldn't function effectively if it only consisted of highly intelligent, rational people incapable of empathizing with and caring for people who were sick, poor, disabled, and discriminated against. A system of education that focused only on the students' intelligence would breed a dystopia, a nightmarish society of citizens who lacked the moral sense to cooperate with one another and contribute to the social good.

To help achieve the end of nurturing morally upright individuals, teachers, first, enforce school rules − how to address their teachers, when to submit assignments, how to answer and ask questions during class hours, etc. − that mandate how their students should behave and when these rules are breached, they are penalized. Punishment, in other words, is used to negatively reinforce good behavior. Schools expect students to learn the importance of following rules and respecting order by internalizing these rules prescribed by school authority. And as Hare (1993) convincingly argues, teachers try hard daily to cultivate students' moral understanding by instilling dispositions or traits that are vital in leading a moral life. Because open-mindedness, or the willingness to listen to ideas and opinions that one doesn't endorse, is important in a pluralistic society, teachers strive to build this competence by teaching why it is vital for people to understand beliefs contrary to those they adhere to or setting texts that they think will open their students' minds to alternative ways of viewing the world. And as Park (2008) stresses, critical thought, or the ability to exercise skepticism and question what we are told to believe and think, is necessary in a time riddled with fake news and charlatans who attempt to manipulate and control our thoughts by feeding misleading information. Teachers again try to create an environment that advances critical reflection by leading debates, questioning the answers students give, and setting writing assignments that require them to critique a particular point of view. Teachers are also expected to deepen their students' sense of what is good and bad by becoming role models their students can emulate. They try therefore to embody some of the values society endorses and convey their importance in class. For example, because society values citizens who work hard to achieve their goals,

teachers try to demonstrate its importance by being hardworking themselves and praising and condoning diligence. Again, society as a whole puts a high premium on creativity or the ability to think outside the box. This is not entirely surprising, because economic and technological advances often involve original thinkers who are not trapped in accepted assumptions and conventions and who can entertain alternative viewpoints. Teachers can model creativity in any number of ways: creating original classroom activities, sharing personal episodes where creativity helped address a problem they had, reading about original thinkers who departed from tradition in class, giving high marks to original writing, etc. By modeling the mores and conventions and values espoused by society, teachers act as a conduit that transfers their importance to their students. Schools are a temporary passage that students must go through before they enter society as agents capable of moral deliberation and action, and teachers help realize this function of schooling by teaching the values schools deem as ethical.

5

When we give a physical assessment of the world, there is often very little room for disagreement. We don't, for example, engage in heated debates when assessing the height of a mountain or the depth of trenches. Nor is there a clash of opinions over whether the planet Saturn is closer to earth than Uranus or whether Mars has a moon orbiting around it. Quantitative analyses are relatively uncontroversial because we can rely on scientific equipment that can give us extremely precise and objective measurements that leave little room for doubt. And if we cannot reach a consensus, we can replicate our studies so that an agreement can be established.

However, we not only understand the world in physical terms. We also view the world from an aesthetic framework by interpreting our experiences in terms of beauty or sublimity. Unlike our physical responses to the world, the realm of aesthetics is more mooted because we don't all aesthetically respond to our experiences in the same way. A painting by Monet might delight one person but leave another unimpressed. The sunset can evoke a deep sense of awe and mystery amongst certain viewers but leave others bored and unmoved. And unlike studying the world quantitatively, when we approach the world aesthetically, we simply

don't have the means to help settle our differences of opinions by conducting precise measurements. We cannot, in other words, use test tubes and microscopes to help determine whether the paintings of Monet are in fact beautiful.

Our moral response to what we experience resembles our aesthetic mode of sensibility. We can agree over the physical details of what we experience − a middle-aged man being executed for first-degree murder, a teenager terminating her pregnancy, a woman in her fifties smoking cannabis on the streets, etc. − but disagree in terms of how we morally respond. For some, the death penalty is a perfectly legitimate way of dealing with criminals who commit atrocious crimes while others view it as a barbaric and unforgiving way of ending someone's life. Abortion is another social issue that elicits multiple reactions from the public. Some argue that women who decide to have an abortion are simply expressing their right to have or not have a child. Opponents counter that abortion is tantamount to murder because the fetus is a living being whose life needs to be protected. Moral issues don't typically invite a standard, unified response from people. From the death penalty to the use of drugs, we each understand and assess moral matters by appealing to beliefs and principles that are not universally shared. We cannot settle moral disputes by referring to a set of values and beliefs that is common to us all.

Analogous to our moral experiences in general, teachers morally respond to similar or identical experiences in various ways. Teachers don't all draw similar moral conclusions to experiences they often share in class. Consider a few common examples. A student asks the teacher a personal question about his family and children. Responses will greatly vary. Some welcome such questions as a way of bridging the gap between teachers and students. Others dismiss them as morally inappropriate, for they might undermine the professional distance they want to maintain. Another typical scenario involves students making biased comments about politics or religion in class. Again, teachers differ in how they respond. Some pick up on such comments eagerly, because they might spark an interesting discussion in class. There are those, however, who not only judge biased comments negatively but also try to steer away of controversial issues that are not susceptible to clear and definitive answers they can give. The third example: A student asks why she has to read works written in an archaic style nobody uses. Many teachers try very hard to give convincing reasons that justify the reading of Shakespeare and Chaucer. But not every

practicing teacher is appreciative of queries of this kind. It is not uncommon for teachers to ignore them as a nuisance because it cuts into their time of teaching or treat them as an expression of reluctance or unwillingness to grapple with quality literature. Or consider how the competitive ethos pervades schools. In order to receive the best grade, earn a trophy, or get brownie points, students have to outperform or beat their classmates. Their academic success often hinges on others not succeeding. Many teachers find the competitive mindset morally unacceptable. They seek to build a more caring and cooperative learning environment. To help meet this end, teachers set cooperative learning tasks which require students as a group to share their knowledge and experience to help achieve the same academic goal. Others supportive of competition conceive it as an effective means for motivating learners to work hard and outperform their peers. The classroom is a place richly imbued with incidents that provoke a wide range of moral reactions.

But then why do teachers morally react to similar experiences differently? One main source of difference is due to the beliefs they endorse. That is, teachers' moral evaluations vary because they are made in light of different, sometimes contrary beliefs. For example, teachers vary in their religious commitments, ranging from devout followers of a faith tradition to diehard atheists. The religious beliefs they espouse shape the moral outlook they have on what they experience in class. Compared to someone of faith, a teacher of history who is an atheist will be less sympathetic and more critical of the birth and growth of Christianity, though he might not express his criticisms against organized religion in class. And while a devout Christian won't be favorably inclined to stories that depict antagonists engaging in underage sex or having homosexual relationships, teachers without religious allegiances will not on the whole share this criticism. Our political views also shape our moral vision. As Hirsch (2020) contends, those with a conservative political outlook tend to be more supportive of teacher-centered methods of teaching, where teachers adopt lecture-style lessons, imparting knowledge for students to faithfully acquire. For traditionalists, classrooms should be places where teachers as authority figures wield power for what they know and are in full control of the learning that takes place. On the contrary, those belonging to the more liberal end of the political spectrum view didactic lectures as being morally dubious since students are assigned the passive role of notetaking and are not given the freedom to voice their concerns

and opinions in class. Teachers, they believe, should play a more facilitative role, handing over more responsibility to the students by getting them to decide the content they want to learn and how they want to demonstrate their understanding. The philosophical beliefs teachers have about human nature is another source that engenders differences in their moral outlook. Whether they are aware or not, teachers have entrenched views about what humans are really like. Those who share a pessimistic philosophy of our humanity think that students are by nature uninterested in learning, and take shortcuts and do minimal work, whenever possible. On the whole, teachers who uphold this rather cynical view of students are disposed to tightly control student behavior by imposing punishments and conferring rewards to somehow preserve their weak interest in learning. Teachers with a more optimistic outlook believe that students by nature desire to know and their will to learn flourishes if nurtured in an environment that caters for their personal interests and needs. Teachers with this mindset view the systematic use of punishments negatively. Punishments, they contend, simply instill fear and anxiety in students and undermine their joy of learning by programming them to conceive learning as a means to gain academic rewards and avoid punishments. Another source of moral disagreement in education stems from the pedagogical beliefs teachers accept as binding and self-evident. Adhering to a different set of beliefs about teaching, teachers can respond quite differently to what ordinarily takes place in the classroom. Teachers who champion the basic principles of multiple intelligence, for example, are very critical of the standard lockstep teaching found in many schools. Students, according to the theory of multiple intelligence, are all uniquely different in how they best learn. While some are visual learners who learn best when materials are visually presented, others learn most effectively when they engage in hands-on activities, using their hands and moving their bodies. Because students' preferred mode of instruction differs, teachers who accept the theory in question believe that it is morally wrong to force everyone to learn in the same way. Students' right to quality education is denied by forcing them to learn in ways that run against their preferences in learning. Beliefs rooted in culture also affect how teachers morally respond to what they experience. Take, for example, how people generally conceive those with authority. While some defer to authority, others are more willing to question and doubt what people with power claim. Teachers born and raised in a culture that expects people to show respect to authority will be

more disposed to negatively assess students who raise questions and challenge what they say in class. On the other hand, teachers reared in a tradition that values critical dialogue and encourages people not to be deferential to authority might be more embracive of learners subjecting the ideas they express to criticism.

We can reasonably infer from what was just discussed that teachers respond differently to classroom situations and that they don't enter their classes viewing and interpreting their surroundings from a neutral, unbiased standpoint. That is, it is misleading to assume that teachers passively absorb their experiences and register everything from a perspective that isn't shaped by their commitments. Rather, they conceive their experiences from a very particular stance, which in turn is shaped by their religious, political, and philosophical beliefs. Teachers, unlike mindless robots, view everything through their cognitive filters and these filters in turn shape the moral judgements they give. What is conceived to be good from one standpoint is thought to be bad from another angle. In fact, the idea of adopting a neutral frame of reference in teaching doesn't make much sense. Teachers have no choice but to see through the pair of cognitive lenses shaped by the beliefs they have. They must wear their pair of lenses to give meaning and focus to what they experience. Otherwise they will not be able to make sense of their experiences in class.

Another point that is worth addressing is this: Moral disagreements over classroom issues among teachers can explain why education is an area that is forever embroiled in controversy. Besides areas like politics and religion, education is a subject that sparks heated discussions and debates throughout almost every country. It is extremely difficult for those involved in education to reach a consensus concerning how to best educate students. Groups with different commitments and beliefs sit down for discussions but often end up talking at cross purposes. Why is it difficult for participants in such debates to reach an agreement? The answer is partly because people, like teachers, don't morally respond to educational issues in the same way. Almost any issue in education − the value of homework, the legitimacy of sex education, the justification of corporal punishment, etc. − triggers a wide range of responses. While some, for example, criticize homework for preventing students from pursuing their interests after school, others support homework on the grounds that it keeps students out of trouble by keeping them preoccupied and busy. The situation would be different, however, if people shared the same moral beliefs and standards.

If everyone, say, were evangelical Christians or hardnosed Marxists, then there wouldn't be such fierce disagreements over teaching. A consensus, though difficult, would be more likely. Evangelicals on the whole support religious education though many question the teaching of evolutionary biology. Marxists favor multicultural education but question the reading of classical literature. As long as we live in a pluralistic society, where people with different moral values share the same space, education will remain a subject that raises more questions than answers.

6

When practitioners fulfill their responsibilities by doing what they commonly do, they hold a wide range of beliefs about their standard practices. When nurses measure their patients' temperature or blood pressure, they assume that the results will tell something important about their physical condition. If there were no causal connection between the results and their patients' state of health, they wouldn't bother recording what they measure in detail. Police officers, to mention another example, give out parking tickets to drivers who violate traffic regulations. This standard practice assumes that drivers don't want to pay fines or lose their license. It wouldn't function as a deterrence if drivers didn't mind being penalized for violating the law. Scientists spend countless hours conducting rigorous experiments in labs. Their devotion to research rests on the assumption that there is a truth about the world waiting to be discovered by the power of empirical science, a truth that is revealed to those who ask the right questions and adopt the right mode of investigation. Scientific research wouldn't make sense if truth was a fiction, or something that could be conjured up by the imagination without any support from reality.

Similarly, whenever teachers engage in some of the standard practices of teaching, they implicitly assume a number of things – some obvious, some not – about the activities they perform. Teachers, for example, often give quizzes and the very act of quizzing students presupposes that they help demarcate those who know the material from those who don't. Teachers wouldn't take the time to design true and false and fill-in-the-blank type questions unless they helped gauge their students' knowledge and understanding. Or consider the assigning of homework, another common practice found in most school settings. Students wouldn't be asked to read their textbook or write an essay for homework unless their

teachers were convinced that they would help reinforce or advance what they learned in class. It beggars belief that teachers would set homework, knowing that it would undermine their knowledge and dampen their curiosity. Furthermore, teachers often reward students by giving their students stickers, trophies, candies, and verbal encouragements. The very act of rewarding students presupposes that rewards have the power to motivate students to work harder in the future. They are used as a way of strengthening and enhancing their level of motivation so that they will be able to perform better academically by writing longer essays, reading more books, or scoring more on quizzes. Rewards wouldn't be distributed if they had the opposite effect of demotivating learners or if they didn't have the power to exert a positive influence on students.

What do teachers tacitly assume when they engage in moral reflection? First, most assume that when they express a moral view in class – slavery was a crime against humanity, there is no such thing as justified war, cheating on tests is wrong, etc. – what they articulate is something understandable which doesn't defy understanding. They assume that students listening to their moral assessment won't have problems understanding the meaning they want to express, though they might not agree with their point of view. The language they use to convey their thoughts consists of words and expressions that are not beyond their level of comprehension and the grammatical structures used are within their zone of understanding. Also, it is assumed that the ideas and issues their moral judgements touch upon are not beyond the purview of their students' knowledge. That is, teachers voice their moral opinions on topics that are familiar to their learners. They criticize totalitarianism and uphold democracy because the students have the relevant background knowledge to comprehend different political systems. They extol the value of reading classical literature and discourage students from reading comics because they both share a similar frame of reference that aids communication or the exchange of ideas. The third assumption is that when teachers morally exhort or denounce something within the classroom context, they are convinced that what they articulate is a rational or reasonable position to hold. They voice opinions they think are morally compelling and intuitive: the value of cooperation, the importance of love and care, the beauty of nature, etc. To put the matter differently, they wouldn't, as an educator responsible for cultivating the minds of their students, state views that are unorthodox and morally repugnant such as expressing hatred towards

people of a particular race or religion, condoning genocide as viable means of liquidating people, supporting censorship as a means of protecting people from dangerous ideas, advocating academic cheating and plagiarizing if it helps earn good grades, etc. Another assumption underlying moral judgments is that they benefit in some shape or form their students' learning. Teachers presuppose that the moral views they express will help instill within their students correct moral beliefs, expand their intellectual horizons, fill in gaps in their understanding, or correct mistaken moral views they have. Being committed to their learners' growth of mind, they simply wouldn't share their moral views, knowing that they would narrow their mental outlook and thwart their intellectual growth. Teachers presume that when they share their moral beliefs, they are aiding, not hindering, their students' learning. The next assumption is that the expression of moral views is not simply a private and subjective expression of taste. When expressing matters of taste − what food we like, where we enjoy traveling, which flowers we find beautiful, etc. − we ordinarily think that the preference we convey is subjective or that it is a personal opinion we hold. That being the case, we don't, when expressing our preferences, expect to change our listeners' subjective view and convert them to what we believe. We tolerate and respect what others believe and learn that people are all different and unique. Yet when teachers support or denounce something morally in class, what they are expressing is something more substantial and weightier than the personal preference they have for wine or cheese. They don't expect their students to brush what they say aside as nothing more than an idiosyncratic, subjective opinion with very little significance. Teachers expect them to pay heed to their ethical views and reflect and ponder on their significance. This expectation on the teachers' part wouldn't make sense if moral assessment was equivalent to our expression of personal taste. The last assumption is that teachers believe that their moral assertions are true. Though their level of commitment to the truth of what they say might differ, they adhere to the moral beliefs they state and believe that they give a reliable and viable account of how we should think about ourselves and the world. They teach their students the importance of perseverance when facing problems because they believe grit is actually valuable. They encourage their students to contribute to social justice by eradicating poverty because they sincerely believe that poverty is a social evil. And teachers morally praise students who help classmates with physical

disabilities because they are convinced that we all should help those who are in need. In summary, teachers' moral assessments rest on a number of assumptions that are taken for granted when they convey their ethical stance in class.

7

In any given field of work, practitioners perform particular activities to help realize specific ends. Doctors use a stethoscope to help determine whether the heart is beating regularly and they take samples of their patients' blood to check if the vital organs are functioning properly. Chemists use a microscope when viewing items on different slides so that they can gain a sharper and clearer vision of what they are studying and they pour chemicals into separate test tubes if they don't want to mix chemical compounds. Translators constantly check the meaning of words in the dictionary in order to learn the exact and precise meaning behind the language writers use. They also read widely on areas they translate because they need to share the background knowledge writers assume their readers have.

Teaching too is a purposeful endeavor, where what teachers do fulfill very particular purposes. The nature of teaching can in principle be illuminated if we ask ourselves what function standard teaching practices and routines serve. For example, teachers don't spend hours at their desks creating quizzes to simply fill in time or to entertain their colleagues. They do so because quizzes can help assess their students' learning by showing areas they couldn't understand and those they found relatively easy. But quizzes can also help teachers improve the way they teach. If the overall results were low, they can try to alter their mode of instruction to help deliver their lessons in a more comprehensible way. Quizzes and other forms of assessment also help categorize students into different groups and levels so that the learners themselves know where they stand in comparison to their peers. Another common teaching practice is tracking students into different levels, depending on their past academic performance. At a more superficial level, the system of tracking helps teachers cater to their students' needs more effectively because they can aim and target their instruction to a specific level, without worrying too much about students finding the learning too easy or difficult. But, as many critical theorists have been pointing out, tracking also serves to reproduce

the inequalities found in society. Those who end up in classes for low-achieving students are usually from poor working class families, and though they need to be exposed to challenging learning materials taught by experienced teachers, they experience often the opposite: distressed teachers focused on rote learning. Being academically unchallenged, they leave school with little knowledge and understanding, making them unfit and unqualified for high-paying jobs.

What then are some of the more important functions moral judgements given by teachers fulfill in class? First of all, they help create an environment that makes learning possible. When teachers assert what is permitted and not permitted in class, and reinforce these points whenever these rules and regulations are broken, they help set the conditions where learning can take place. An effective interchange of ideas between teachers and students can take place if everyone follows simple classroom rules such as showing respect to the ideas others express, listening attentively when others speak, and never making derogatory remarks when referring to people of other races, religions, or nationalities. Also, rules concerning student behavior are useful when students are quietly reading and writing at their desks. Students can concentrate and work effectively when there are codes of behavior − don't disturb others while working, work only on the assignments set in class, don't share or copy others' work, etc. − that ensure a learning environment conducive to learning. Second, teachers' moral assessments can in principle help unite the classroom of students into a whole, breaking down boundaries and divisions. It is common for many teachers to post moral slogans or aims − 'all for one, one for all,' 'never give up,' etc. − on walls and billboards that embody the moral commitments they have and help serve as an overarching philosophy that every student is expected to embrace. When what students do as a group or as individuals comport to these aims, teachers often bring this to their awareness and underscore the importance of working hard towards realizing these aims. By accepting a common moral goal and creed, students sense that they are members of a group that share a common identity. Separate and unique individuals are brought together by moral dictums that reflect what teachers often enunciate in class. Third, the moral evaluations teachers give serve to establish and reinforce their authority in the classroom. One of the marks or signs that someone has authority is that she can lay down the rules that determine what others can and cannot do. Because parents have authority,

they can enforce house rules – should always tell the truth, must not watch TV after dinner, should never hurt others' feelings, etc. – which their offspring must follow. Parents maintain and demonstrate their authority by the moral rules they mandate and the moral assessments they give. Likewise, teachers, by setting class rules and morally assessing what students do and say, reveal their authoritative status in the classroom and remind students of their subservient status. Fourth, when teachers morally assess their students, their assessments act as labels that define and characterize their identity in definitive ways. Consider: A teacher observes Mary's reluctance to study and her unwillingness to submit her work on time. She is categorized as lazy and this label shapes the teachers' understanding and way of communicating with this student. The same teacher carefully notes how Eric always talks back to his peers and rips his work when he isn't satisfied with what he has done. Eric is categorized as rebellious and temperamental and again this label acts as a filter that influences how the teacher perceives and relates with the student. Of course, such labels rooted in moral assessment undergo change but it doesn't alter the fact that they influence and mold teachers' overall conception of each and every student. Finally, when teachers appeal to established classroom rules and regulations to evaluate student behavior, students become aware that they are all subject to the same rules. The teachers' moral assessments are not entirely arbitrary, since their assessment is based on rules that apply to all members of the class. This means that students are not treated or evaluated differently because of their gender, race, academic ability, or personal interests. Rules cannot be modified or be applied differently, depending on the students' hair or skin color. Public rules therefore help reinforce the idea that students are treated equally and fairly by their teachers, and that moral standards are not based on favoritism. To summarize, teachers' moral assessments serve a number of different purposes and when they are realized, teaching generally becomes more effective.

Conclusion

The nature of teaching can be better understood by examining what teachers typically do in the classroom. Besides explaining content and motivating students, teachers morally assess what they experience in class and this study examined some of the important characteristics inherent in

teachers' moral assessments. As was argued, teachers not only judge continuously throughout the course of each lesson, but the subject of their evaluation is wide-ranging. Furthermore, assessing students from a moral vantage point is an intrinsic part of teaching, because teachers are responsible for nurturing students who do what is good and avoid what is bad. Teachers, however, not only judge their students morally, but they too are morally assessed by their students. It was also argued that the experiences in the classroom provoke different moral responses from teachers. Moral assessment is often contentious because teachers don't all share the same political or religious beliefs that shape their moral outlook. Classroom ethical evaluations are also built on assumptions teachers take for granted. They assume that their evaluations are rational, true, and beneficial. Evaluations of a moral kind also serve various pedagogical aims. They help establish the teacher as an authority in the classroom and moral slogans and mottos can help bring students together to form a community of learners. The multidimensional reality of teaching can only be elucidated by examining it from different angles and perspectives. Studying the moral dimension of teaching has the potential to bring some light to an enormously complicated subject.

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