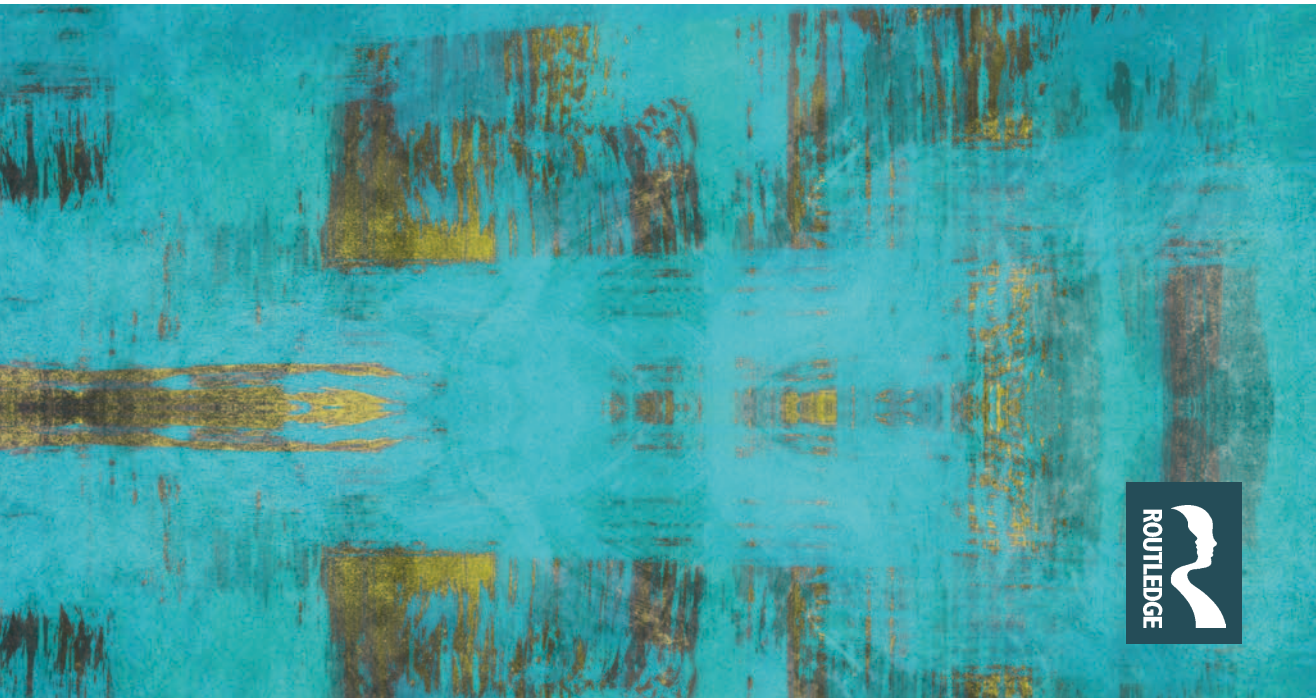
ETHICS IN PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

Edited by
Christopher Martin and Claudia W. Ruitenberg



Ethics in Professional Education

Recent years have seen a growing emphasis on ethics education in different professions, such as medicine and teaching. However, the implications of this emphasis for professional education programs have been underdeveloped. In this volume, philosophers, philosophers of education, and ethics educators engaged in a variety of professional contexts in Canada, the UK, Norway, Malta, and Sweden assess the state of ethics education and the role, if any, of philosophical approaches to ethics for those professional contexts.

This volume speaks to teacher, medical, and business education, and the education of school psychologists. Each of these fields has its own context, aims and expertise, generating distinctive ethical challenges. As such, ethics curricula cannot be uncritically transplanted from one professional context to another. Nonetheless, the arguments and analyses in this volume point to a shared concern about the role of moral respect, self-understanding, and virtue in the education of professionals. The chapters examine a wide range of topics, including empirical ethics, core concepts in professional ethics, moral agency, the ethics of ethics education, risk-taking, professional ethics as a practice with its own ethical requirements, and the tensions between the individual (client, patient, student) and the increasing generalization of professional systems.

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Contents

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Citation Information

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Introduction
Ethics in professional education: introduction to the special issue
Christopher Martin and Claudia W. Ruitenberg
Ethics and Education, volume 11, issue 1 (March 2016), pp. 1–4

Chapter 1
Toward an ethics of professional understanding
Nicolas Tanchuk, Carly Scramstad and Marc Kruse
Ethics and Education, volume 11, issue 1 (March 2016), pp. 5–16

Chapter 2
Self-with-other in teacher practice: a case study through care, Aristotelian virtue, and Buddhist ethics
Dave Chang and Heesoon Bai
Ethics and Education, volume 11, issue 1 (March 2016), pp. 17–28

Chapter 3
Empirical moral philosophy and teacher education
Espen Schjetne, Hilde Wågsås Afdal, Trine Anker, Nina Johannesen and Geir Afdal
Ethics and Education, volume 11, issue 1 (March 2016), pp. 29–41

Chapter 4
Philosophy for Teachers (P4T) – developing new teachers' applied ethical decision-making
Janet Orchard, Ruth Heilbronn and Carrie Winstanley
Ethics and Education, volume 11, issue 1 (March 2016), pp. 42–54

Chapter 5
Ethics in school psychologists report writing: acknowledging aporia
Sunaina Attard, Daniela Mercieca and Duncan P. Mercieca
Ethics and Education, volume 11, issue 1 (March 2016), pp. 55–66

Chapter 6

'I'm not going to cross that line, but how do I get closer to it?' A hedge fund manager's perspective on the need for ethical training and theory for finance professionals
Cathrine Ryther
Ethics and Education, volume 11, issue 1 (March 2016), pp. 67–78

Chapter 7

The overlapping spheres of medical professionalism and medical ethics: a conceptual inquiry
Claudia W. Ruitenberg
Ethics and Education, volume 11, issue 1 (March 2016), pp. 79–90

Chapter 8

Education and moral respect for the medical student
Christopher Martin
Ethics and Education, volume 11, issue 1 (March 2016), pp. 91–102

Chapter 9

Seeing through medical ethics: a request for professional transparency and accountability
J. T. H. Connor
Ethics and Education, volume 11, issue 1 (March 2016), pp. 103–116

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Ethics in professional education: introduction

Christopher Martin and Claudia W. Ruitenberg

Recent years have seen a greater emphasis on ethics education in different professions and their corresponding professional education programs. For example, widespread reform in physician education has led to renewed emphasis on professional ethics in medical programs (e.g. Irby, Cooke, and O'Brien 2010; Stephenson, Higgs, and Sugarman 2001). Media scrutiny of business practices in the fallout from the recent financial crisis has triggered interest in ethics in schools of business (e.g. Freeman, Stewart, and Moriarty 2009; Giacalone and Wargo 2009) Additionally, an international study is underway to assess how, where, and by whom professional ethics is being taught in pre-service teacher education (Maxwell et al., forthcoming).

Philosophers of education, and those with in an interest in philosophical ethics more generally, have long bemoaned the lack of coherent and well-reasoned ethics education curricula in teacher education and other professional programs. These recent events suggest that they may soon get what they have long hoped for. However, what kinds of expertise does a philosophical perspective actually bring to the ethics education table and to what extent does this expertise generalize to different professional domains within the higher education community? At first blush, it might be said that expertise in the application of philosophical ethics to professional issues would be a key selling point. But does theoretical expertise translate into educational value? Should engagement happen at the level of curriculum design, or in the classroom? Are there other ways of framing the contribution of philosophical ethics to the apparent need for 'more ethics' in professional programming? This special issue provides a venue for philosophers, philosophers of education, and ethics educators engaged in different professional contexts to assess the current state of ethics education and the role, if any, of philosophical ethics to those professional contexts.

We are pleased to present in this issue nine new contributions that speak to teacher education, medical education, business education, and the education of school psychologists. Each profession involves specific contexts and kinds of expertise that generate specific ethical challenges, and professional ethics curriculum cannot simply be transferred from one professional context to another. Nonetheless, we believe that many of the questions raised in one context can also be asked in another; for example, Schjetne, Afdal, Anker, Johannesen, and Afdal's argument for empirical ethics in teacher education raises the question how we might conceive of empirical ethics in health professions education, and Ryther's argument that

education in business ethics involves the risk of making practitioners too cautious, seeking to avoid ethical problems rather than address them when they arise, has implications for education in engineering and architecture. In sum, we see ethical inquiry in diverse professional contexts as important work for ethics education, moving forward, and hope that the contributions here will prompt further engagement between ethics educators from areas such as engineering, architecture, and law.

We are also pleased that the journal includes contributions from Canada, the UK, Norway, Malta, and Sweden. Of course there are significant differences in professional education across national contexts; for example, in the UK medical education is often 'direct entry,' meaning students begin medical education immediately after they complete their A-levels, whereas in the US and Canada MD programs are typically 'post-baccalaureate,' meaning that students have already completed an undergraduate degree before starting their four-year MD program. This may play a role in how ethical education as conceived in each context, with a different emphasis on, for instance, the education of character or professional socialization. However, there are also many shared concerns pertinent to professional ethics internationally. An increasing concern with patient voice and patient-centered care affects professional ethics in medicine in many locations, and the role of business ethics (or the lack thereof) in the 2008 financial crises has been a question not only in the US but also in Iceland and the UK.

To help readers navigate the special issue, we have clustered the articles by profession. We open with Tanchuk, Scramstad, and Kruse's more general philosophical consideration of the importance of the moral ends of professional practice and an understanding of moral agency across all professions. They argue that professional education should not shy away from the normativity of professional work. This, over and against a managerial (and morally skeptical) culture mainly concerned with making sure the system 'works' from the point of view of the bureaucracy. The next three papers focus on teacher education. Chang and Bai work through the case of a hardworking student teacher faced with students' indifference to explore the benefits and drawbacks of Noddings' ethics of care, Aristotelian virtue ethics, and Mahayana Buddhist ethics for beginning teachers. As mentioned above, Schjetne, Afdal, Anker, Johannesen, and Afdal argue that the relation between theory and practice in ethics for teachers is a two-way street: while pre-service teachers do benefit from learning moral theory, such moral theory is challenged and enriched by understanding how teachers in the thick of practice actually understand and enact professional ethics. The third paper in this section discusses a workshop held in the UK in which the 'Philosophy for Children' (P4C) model was used as the basis of 'Philosophy for Teachers' (P4T).' Orchard, Heilbronn, and Winstanley argue that a P4T ethical retreat, away from the busyness of school as well as from dominant 'behaviour management' frameworks, allows beginning teachers to frankly express and discuss their concerns about responding to ethically challenging situations, and develop confidence in their ability to do so. Important here, we think, is their reminder of the extent to which and ways in which professions more generally may benefit from sustained opportunities to engage in ethical inquiry.

The next two papers discuss the education of school psychologists and business education, respectively. Attard, Mercieca, and Mercieca call our attention to the double bind of school psychologists who are required to use the forms and diagnostic categories recognized by their profession and governing bodies, while recognizing the inability of these forms and diagnostic categories to do justice to the singularity of their client. The education of school psychologists, then, must include the development of an understanding of the inevitability

of this 'aporia' as well as the ability to dwell in it. Ryther, instead of discussing the alleged moral callousness of finance professionals and the need to teach stricter business ethics, focuses on those CEOs and financial professionals who intervened in the ethically compromised practices of their colleagues, and analyzes some key features of such interventions. For Ryther, important here is not simply educating the professional's ability to solve ethical problems when they arise but also cultivating a willingness to get involved – to 'be in the room' as she puts it – and enter into situations where ethical problems may well arise.

The focus of the final section of this issue is on medical education. Ruitenberg shows how the omnipresence of the discourse of professionalism in medical education has led to a conceptual 'eclipse' of ethics education. As she argues, such conceptual fuzziness risks obscuring the ethical specificity of both the moral agency of professionals and the situations – large and small – in which they find themselves, glossing important tensions between 'professional' and 'ethical' action. Martin, meanwhile, argues that while medicine's increased focus on professionalism and ethics in medicine is a laudable education goal, it has proceeded without any clear sense of the *educational* ethics entailed by such a goal. For Martin, such an education cannot proceed without a respect for the physician as a learner and this may mean setting aside, on moral grounds, pedagogical and curricular approaches that may otherwise appear to be an 'effective' means to increased professional behavior in the field. Finally, Connor forcefully argues for greater professional oversight and regulation of medical ethics understood as a practice. Connor's paper serves as a cautionary tale that bookends this special issue: insofar as professional ethics, educational or otherwise, has any serious pretense of taking hold in practice, its advocates are by no means a legitimate self-exception to the general principles of publicity, justification, and moral accountability that they typically expect of those working in their respective fields of concern.

We hope that the papers collected in this special issue underscore the importance of studying professional ethics as a distinct scholarly focus. As Donald Schön (1983) argued now more than 30 years ago, professional contexts are too complex to think of professional ethics as a simple application of general moral theories in contexts of practice. Responsiveness to the particularities of the practice context must be paired with an understanding and appreciation of general moral concepts and values. It remains a challenge to teach teachers, physicians, bankers, lawyers, school psychologists, and other professionals both a solid understanding of the outer boundaries of their practice – the hard lines of which they can know with certainty that they should not be crossed – as well as a tolerance for living in the uncertainty of the large gray zone between those boundaries. In an era where great emphasis is placed on the assessment of 'competencies' as a way of demonstrating accountability to the public and (re)gaining the public's trust in self-regulating professions, some of the aspects of professional ethics that are harder to measure as competencies can be lost. The moral courage to enter ethically fraught situations, the ability to see oneself as interdependent with the other, the willingness to live in aporia, the commitment to questioning the role of professional ethicists themselves – these and other qualities challenge common forms of professional assessment but as the authors in this special issue show, they are at the heart of understanding the complexity of professional ethics education.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.