

The Cambridge Handbook of Ethics and Education

This handbook provides an interdisciplinary discussion on the role and complexity of ethics in education. Its central aim is to democratize scholarship by highlighting diverse voices, ideas, and places. It is organized into three sections, each examining ethics from a different perspective: ethics and education historically, ethics within institutional practice, and emerging ethical frameworks in education. Important questions are raised and discussed, such as the role of past ethical traditions in contemporary education, how educators should confront ethical dilemmas, how schools should be organized to serve all children, and how pluralism, democracy, and technology impact ethics in education. It offers new insights and opportunities for renewal in the complex and often contentious task of ethics and education.

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The Cambridge Handbook of Ethics and Education

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To the memory of Walter Roberts III (1959–2021)

τὸ γὰρ τοι θάνατον δεδιέναι, ὦ ἄνδρες,
οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἐστὶν ἢ δοκεῖν σοφὸν εἶναι μὴ ὄντα:
δοκεῖν γὰρ εἰδέναι ἐστὶν ἃ οὐκ οἶδεν.

To fear death, gentlemen, is no other than to think oneself
wise when one is not: it is to think one knows what one
does not know.

—Plato, *Apology* 29a

To educators who dare in dangerous times . . .

Consciousness doesn't come automatically; it
comes from being alive, awake, curious, and often furious.

—Maxine Greene

To the memory of Ramon Lemos (1926–2006)

Freedom is a constant struggle.

—Angela Davis

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	page x
<i>List of Tables</i>	xi
<i>List of Contributors</i>	xii
<i>Foreword</i>	xix
<i>Danielle Allen</i>	
<i>Preface: Ethics and/offfor Education: The Task before Us</i>	xxi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xxiii

Part I Traditions in Ethics and Education

1 Ancient Chinese Ethics and Education <i>Charlene Tan</i>	5
2 Ancient Greek and Roman Ethics and Education <i>Kirsten Welch</i>	24
3 Ubuntu Ethics and Education in Southern Africa <i>Agrippa Chingombe and Thenjiwe Major</i>	43
4 Ethical and Environmental Knowledge and Education: Indigenous Cultures from Latin America <i>Angelica Serna Jeri</i>	64
5 Ethics, Education, and the Inheritance of Abraham: An Essay in the Pedagogy of Difference <i>Hanan A. Alexander</i>	82
6 Prioritizing Outcomes: Utilitarian Ethics and Education <i>Tal Gilead</i>	106
7 Freedom and the Ethics of Educational Authority <i>Christopher Martin</i>	125
8 Moral Education in the Virtues <i>Michael S. Pritchard and Elaine E. Englehardt</i>	145
9 The Ethics of <i>Bildung</i> and Liberal Education <i>Seamus Mulryan</i>	166
10 American Pragmatism, Democratic Ethics, and Education <i>Leonard Waks, Chris Voparil, and Justina Torrance</i>	186

11	Radical Ethics: Marxism and Habermasian Critical Theory <i>Katie Haus and Barbara Dennis</i>	213
12	The Ethics of Phenomenology and Hermeneutics in Education <i>Clarence W. Joldersma</i>	237
13	Feminist Ethics and the Contradictions of Gender <i>Cris Mayo</i>	257
14	Postmodern/Poststructuralist Ethics and Education <i>Marianna Papastephanou</i>	274
Part II Ethics and Education in Practice: Perennial Dilemmas		
15	Why Educate? Competing Ethical Frameworks in the Practice of Education <i>Liz Jackson</i>	305
16	The Displacement of Ethics in Education through Educational Standardization <i>Austin Pickup</i>	330
17	School Health Policies and Practices: Ethical Entanglements and a Call for Criticality <i>Carolyn Plum and Michael Gard</i>	352
18	Value Creation and Happiness in Education: Considerations for a Post-Truth World <i>Jason Goulah</i>	373
19	Children's Rights, Childhood, and the Sovereignty of the Good <i>Megan Jane Laverty</i>	400
20	School Discipline and the Ethics of Punishment <i>Bryan R. Warnick</i>	422
21	Educating All Children: The Legacy of Race in Education <i>Beththena Johnson and Winston C. Thompson</i>	443
22	Decolonizing Curricula: Indigenization and Critical Settler Consciousness <i>Stephany RunningHawk Johnson and Anthony Angel Keola Birano Jr.</i>	465
23	The Political Necessity and Perilous Ambiguity of "Academic Freedom" <i>John E. Petrovic and Shelby J. Morris</i>	485
24	Teacher Activism and Ethical Speech: Strikes, Labor Actions, and Ethical Responsibility <i>Pamela J. Konkol and Isabel Nuñez</i>	509
25	The Specter of Agreement: A Contractarian Analysis of Market Ethics in Education <i>Deron Boyles and Kenneth Driggers</i>	529
26	Philosophical Reflections on Ethics in Teaching and Teacher Education <i>Janet Orchard</i>	544

27	The Ethical Dimension of Educating Educators: Cruel Optimism, Professional Development, and the Need for New Ethical Attachments <i>Jessica Heybach and John Lupinacci</i>	571
Part III Emerging Ethical Pathways and Frameworks: Integration, Disruption, and New Ethical Paradigms		
28	Defining Moral Responsibility for School Leaders in Times of Democratic Crisis <i>Kathleen Knight Abowitz</i>	597
29	Convivialism, Interdependence, and Education: New Conceptions of Human and Planetary Flourishing <i>Claudia Ruitenberg</i>	619
30	New Existentialism <i>Myron Moses Jackson</i>	638
31	Antiracist Moral and Civic Education <i>Lawrence Blum</i>	657
32	A Decolonial Feminist Perspective: Saving Ethics of Care from White Saviorism <i>Yibing Quek</i>	676
33	Ethics and Mindful Leadership in Education <i>Charlene Tan</i>	693
34	Ethics as a Field Discipline in the Classroom: An Homage to Greta Thunberg <i>Charles C. Verharen</i>	712
35	Centering an Environmental Ethic in Climate Crisis <i>Charlie Kurth and Panu Pihkala</i>	734
36	Ethical Inquiry in Educational Research <i>Aaron M. Kuntz</i>	758
37	Education and the Technological Horizon <i>Paul Farber</i>	777
38	Teaching in Credal Deep Pluralism: From the Displacement of Politics to the Ethics of Risk <i>Sheron Fraser-Burgess and Chris Higgins</i>	797
39	A Pragmatic Approach to Ethics in Education <i>Ben Paxton</i>	821
40	Spectatorship, Black Bodies, and Urban Education: Womanist Excavations of Binding Inner Visions <i>David Humphrey Jr. and Sheron Fraser-Burgess</i>	846
	<i>Index</i>	868

Figures

27.1 Educators' attachments: crisis narratives	<i>page</i> 584
27.2 Educators' attachment: crisis narrative as impasse	584
33.1 Decision-making process for virtuous mindful leadership	702

Tables

22.1 Immersion schools	<i>page</i> 477
22.2 Integrated schools	480
27.1 Crisis narratives of PD and underlying assumptions	581

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Foreword

At the dinner table of my childhood, debates about how we should live and what actions we should choose defined the ebb and flow of my family's time together. My father was a political philosopher; my mother, a librarian who continuously pursued further education. At one point, she was pursuing a master's degree in the broad area of liberal studies. I remember debates over spaghetti Bolognese about whether it is possible to do wrong knowingly – that old debate in Plato's early dialogue about whether bad action is a product of ignorance or maliciousness. I was lucky to be introduced to Socrates before I was even in my teens. That puzzle about how motivation and knowledge factor into right action has stayed with me for life.

Ethics education is much broader than what Socrates had to offer, even if what Socrates had to offer continues to be indispensable. This volume does a marvelous job of surveying the historical scene across cultures – from China and Greece to Abrahamic, African, and indigenous Latin American traditions. It tracks the major streams of thought in the post-Enlightenment period – utilitarianism, consequentialism, virtue ethics, *Bildung*, pragmatism, and Marxism. It tackles the practical realities of formal ethics education – from questions of measurement to themes of professional preparation for instructors. It explores the pressure applied to ethics education by contemporary challenges – from climate change to pluralism to religion, existentialism, and racial reconciliation.

The education that I received at the dining room table wasn't formal, but it was nonetheless both powerfully formative and foundational for my ability to navigate the world as an adult ready to own my moral commitments, navigate dilemmas, and make my necessary choices as a fully responsible moral agent. In a world of ever-increasing scale and complexity, it can be tempting for people – whether in the workplace or in politics or in the life of civil society – to think that what they do just doesn't matter very much. After all, are we all not so very small in the face of the seemingly totalizing powers of the economy or of Facebook and AI or of climate change? And yet, even the most seemingly immutable large-scale phenomena in human life do flow out of the aggregation of all our individual choices. While our choices are often constrained, and while

we must understand our choices in relation to those constraints, nothing could be more important for the collective well-being of humanity than that we should see where we can choose otherwise, how we can collaborate with others to choose otherwise, and what might be the appropriate grounds of a good and worthy choice.

Educating young people to have confidence in their own ability to see occasions for moral choice and to navigate them effectively could not be more important. The work is hard and subtle. It requires both the resources of past traditions and fresh experimentation. Taken together, these assist in bringing ethical reasoning to life for students now facing current challenges. Any given teacher who seeks to understand how best to equip a classroom of young people in the twenty-first century for a life of ethical reasoning will profit immensely from the chance to draw on the wisdom in this book.

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Preface

Ethics and/of/for Education: The Task before Us

We, the editors, are humbled to have ushered this comprehensive collection to completion in what represents roughly two years of thinking together with each other and the many authors. What follows is an expansive exploration of ethics at a disciplinary crossroads – philosophy and education. But, like all who dare to think and commit those thoughts to words on a page, we are aware that in any such collection important ideas are missed, contradictions are not settled, and all possible vantage points have not been accounted for. We defined our central aim in this project as democratizing the scholarship concerning ethics and education. We took seriously the tasks of diverse representation and inclusivity, not just of thought but of place. We tried mightily to include international voices and non-Western schools of thought. We worked diligently to allow for ideas that pushed our own orthodoxies and assumptions about ethics and education. We trust these commitments have made a difference.

The authors included in this handbook invite readers to consider the relationship between ethics and education from various disciplinary standpoints. Some authors within this volume are positioned within philosophy and some within education – all transgress these imagined divisions to provide readers with an account of how ethics and/of/for education has been conceived of historically, thought of within cultural and intellectual traditions, and deployed within schooling institutions to enable ethical futures not yet known. The backdrop of this handbook is a lived experience awash in political unrest, and controversy animates what follows. Although the three of us are positioned within the United States, we acknowledge that the material circumstances we face are likely replicated across the globe in the many places pushed to conceptual breaking points when conceiving of an ethics and/of/for education.

Part I of this handbook explores how various traditions have conceived of ethics and education. Tracing lines of inquiry from the ancient to the post-modern, these authors provide an important historical analysis of ethical thought in education and raise questions about the role of the past in informing our orientation to the present and future, questions such as: How should one live? What is the good life? What is the role of education in promoting the good

life? And finally, to what extent do past ethical traditions still impact educational thought and practice today?

Part II explores the ethical dimension of schooling and practice, or how ethics unfolds within institutions. The chapter authors engage the perennial problems of a mostly modernist notion of schooling and how the site of schooling policies and practices reflects our moral and ethical commitments in known and unknown ways. Questions such as how should educators confront contemporary ethical dilemmas in concert with others (students, colleagues, parents, community members), how should schools and curricula be organized to serve all children, and who gets to influence an institution organized for public good are central to this section.

Part III explores emerging ethical pathways and frameworks in education broadly defined. The chapter authors describe new ways of thinking through ethical and moral commitments in education reflective of our contemporary lived experience. Questions related to power, the crises of democracy, technology, the environment, and pluralism are some of the topics taken up in this section. In addition, this section offers new insights and opportunities for renewal within a complex, often contentious set of variables that play out in both theory and practice. How might we think through the inconsistencies of existence rather than following ready-made standards of belief and action from another time? This question, and many more, provides the starting point for the task of ethics and/of/for education.

Finally, we acknowledge the work of R. S. Peters, who first published *Ethics and Education* in 1966, in what was an equally complicated historical moment filled with social strife for educators to wade through. Peters' work stands as a classic philosophy of education text and introduces a new generation to the study of ethics and/of/for education to foster democratic aims in schools and society. His text in three parts – “The Concept of ‘Education,’” “Ethical Foundations of Education,” and “Education and Social Control” – is essential reading for both scholars and practitioners. Over the span of 300 pages, he provides philosophical justification and explanation of how the study of ethics is central to education. His last chapter is titled “Democracy and Education” and here he reminds readers that “if a democratic way of life is to be a reality, there must in fact be a large number of people who are committed in fact to such a way of conducting their affairs.” When we recently reread this passage, we were struck at the poignancy of such a simple statement. Or maybe we heard it differently this time – that is, abstracted rules, laws, codes, standards, and discipleship will not save us from ourselves. In fact, any set of principles that does not take seriously the human cost of our “principles” will fail to meet the ethical demands of the future. The shattering of belief in associated living and the common good that is afoot can only be resisted by fostering the *desire for* and *commitment to* such ends. For example, academic freedom can only exist if we, and a great many “we,” desire such a commitment and are willing to act in ways that allow such a maxim to exist and be extended to others. Might we reach for new forms of thought, new educational arrangements, and new ethical commitments that can bring about a just and sustainable future? That is the task of ethics and/of/for education.

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We express our heartfelt gratitude to our contributors, an exceptional group of scholars whose work we proudly offer to the reader. Moreover, we would like to extend our appreciation to one another for embarking on this remarkable scholarly journey, which has led us to discover that we share a profound and genuine commitment to educational ideals. Despite the often-cynical nature of lived experiences, this undertaking has rekindled our faith in ethical principles and renewed our dedication to their pursuit.