Marking Moral Education: Some Reflections and Issues

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As Editor of the Journal of Moral Education *for over 30 years, it could be said that I have witnessed a generation of international scholarship in the emerging and developing field of moral education. In this article, I offer a personal reflection on this journey, drawing on this editorial experience and as an educational researcher. I address the questions: Whence moral education? Whither moral education? To do so will involve comparing and contrasting: sociological contexts for work in moral education, then and now; changing and enduring concerns, issues, and emphases; the development of educational disciplines; specialism and professionalism; curriculum policy and practice; teaching and learning approaches and methods. "Marking moral education" thus has at least three meanings: this is a time at which to chart the course of moral education and to consider it in its current context; thus it is appropriate to evaluate its progress and ongoing problems; and, in so doing, to remark on likely future concerns and issues for the field. In valuing and engaging with moral education, from Eastern and Western perspectives, scholars need to return to fundamental questions about why be moral in this global age.*

The 2008 Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) conference, *After Values: Practising Values Education in Changing Societies*, provided renewed opportunities for further exploration of moral values education with old and new friends and colleagues. From my perspective, the pioneering and innovative leadership of the CUHK has been the gateway for East–West dialogue, collaboration, and partnerships in values education and liberal studies for many years. CUHK's

groundbreaking values education conference was the occasion for my first exciting visit in 1993. The second conference in 2000 served as a bridge to other conferences in the Chinese mainland (in Lanzhou, Nanjing, Shanghai, Suzhou), which led, in turn, to challenging and purposeful work with Chinese colleagues to produce the *Journal of Moral Education* (*JME*) Special Issue, "Moral Education in Changing Chinese Societies" (Li, Taylor, & Yang, 2004). Latterly, conferences of the recently formed Asia Pacific Network for Moral Education (APNME) have been held in Guangzhou and Beijing. Over these years, dialogue with colleagues and students at the CUHK has been an integral part of my activities in trying to forge deeper and more diverse links between moral educators in the East and West.

Being invited to reflect critically on over 30 years' involvement with moral education, as Editor of the *JME*, the only international journal in the field, and as an educational researcher who tried persistently to work in the wider context of values education, is a daunting task, one which I have not embraced readily or easily. Not readily, as it means one is forced to pause and consider what has taken place in the field of shared interest during this period of time, and one's own modest but long-term role. Hence there is a twin danger of having both too much and too little to say. Not easily, as this task has had to be juggled and balanced with other urgent last-minute responsibilities, including caring for an ill elderly relative and finalizing the 2008 *JME* Special Issue, ironically titled "Toward an Integrated Model of Moral Functioning." I mention this because these are the kinds of pressing challenges which moral educators face daily as they try personally to live moral lives which match in reality to some degree with the ideals they know about professionally as educators. Ideals of fairness, caring, responsibility, diligence, compassion, integrity, and other values and virtues have to be translated skilfully into practice, not only to live the good life to which they might aspire in the global world, but to live at all. This, I contend, is really what moral education should be about.

In this article, I will highlight some key issues in moral education, a selective recollection of a personal and professional journey. My remarks are necessarily generalized and illustrative, to address a diverse readership of local and international practitioners and specialists. Hopefully, the spirit of this overview may resonate with aspects of your own journeying, as teachers and researchers, and may offer some pointers for where efforts in the future of the field need to be focused.

How, from Eastern and Western perspectives, can moral education be marked and evaluated now, some 50 years on from Kohlberg's (1958) dissertation research, approaching the 40th anniversary of the *JME*, and in this contemporary global life context?

Whence Moral Education? A Sketch

Paradoxically, though concerns, issues, and questions which people have come to count and label as "moral" have been around for millennia, moral education is still an emerging and developing field of academic study and pedagogical practice. Moreover, at the heart of moral education is a tension, and often a gap, between theory and practice, between knowing what we know *and* how we know it, how we apply that knowledge in helping others to learn, and learning and practicing morality in our everyday lives as persons.

Notwithstanding the timeless philosophical influences of sages such as Confucius, Aristotle, and Kant on moral thinking, the other constituent academic disciplines of *formal* moral education — psychology, sociology, and education (a science and/or an art?) — are relatively youthful and developing. Moral education is also practiced in family, religious and community settings, through the media and with peers. People all know this from their own experiences of upbringing and adult life. Indeed, it may be that such influences are far more potent and lasting than the reach of the school. The history of moral education which takes adequate account of informal and formal influences has yet to be written. And, so far, academic writing on moral education — at least in the English language — has been dominated by a Western and Northern frame of reference and has almost completely ignored the proper representation of traditions and perspectives from the East and South. Clearly, the scope of Western modern moral education has involved the formal conjoining of the academic study of morality with education and development and can largely be dated from Piaget's (1932/1977) seminal study, *The Moral Judgement of the Child*, and the unparalleled influence of Kohlberg's (1958) research on adolescent moral judgment.

This 50-year-old work and subsequent development by Kohlberg (1981, 1984), his students, co-workers and others, of psychological and philosophical theory, has given rise to a dominant psychological legacy emphasizing cognitive development, especially the measurement of

reasoning about hypothetical moral dilemmas. In my view, "dilemma" is an overused word which should be reserved for extraordinary or even exceptional cases, perhaps only occurring two or three times in a lifetime, when there is no clearly right or good thing to do. Although Kohlberg may not have intended it, the focus in the field on reasoning has meant that attention to other highly relevant factors in moral functioning, such as habits (Peters, 1966), emotions, such as empathy (Hoffman, 2000), will, alertness and determination (Wilson, 1973), has in effect been minimized. In the last decade or so, schemas, such as Rest's Four Component Model of moral functioning, which includes not only moral reasoning or judgment but also sensitivity, focus/motivation, and action, and which may be useful for designing educational interventions (Narvaez & Rest, 1995), have also been gaining ground. Latterly, psychologists have also become more interested in the moral self and moral identity (Blasi, 1993, 2004; Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004), and their role in moral functioning, bridging cognition and action (Walker, 2004). While there has been some interesting research on moral exemplars (Colby & Damon, 1992; Walker & Frimer, 2007), rather little is known about how ordinary people actually think, feel, and act in relation to the moral concerns and issues of everyday life.

By contrast, Kohlberg's educational endeavors, the intensive and morally focused Just Community schools, which related to students' actual lived moral experiences in the group, have received less attention by researchers and educators, because of their particular demands on teachers and school context (Oser, Althof, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2008; Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989). The Just Community approach is an intervention designed to educate children in and about democratic processes and thus to foster motivated and engaged citizenship, as well as the development of collective norms for group decision-making. It is also concerned with changing school culture. More widespread educational programs, founded on the development of virtues, values or character, have usually been seen as more pedagogically viable and pragmatic, given the constraints of the curriculum and timetable. Educational approaches also relate to school ethos, teacher example, rules and discipline, discussion, extra-curricular activities, the use of story and narrative, peer mediation, Circle Time and School Councils (Halstead & Taylor, 2000). Moral education may be implemented across the curriculum, through subjects, such as citizenship, religious education, liberal or social studies, history, pastoral

care, and even sometimes through languages, maths and science, but rarely (for example in Japan, Malaysia) is it found with its own name slot. Would-be moral educators are faced with a severe brand image constraint on perception, policy and practice, and an overwhelming diversity of teaching and learning methods.

Learning as an Editor: From National to International

Then and Now: Sociological Contexts for Moral Education

Looking back 30 years or so to life in the mid-1970s when I became Editor of *JME*, it is difficult to recall with precision and clarity the nature of moral lives and living contexts at that time. For those of us old enough to remember, these will have varied, at least by age, gender, culture, location, and lifestyle. To be sure, people are now more in the world, linked by technologies of instant communication, economic interdependence, cultural contact, all of which have day-to-day, if not moment-to-moment, implications for moral thinking, feeling, and action. Life today is lived at a faster global pace, and, in the developed Western world, with greater materialism and probably less spirituality, and more individuality, freedom of expression, and less social convention. The moral standards and issues which concerned me personally in the class-conscious society of England 30 years ago would seem irrelevant, even risible, today. People may all reflect on their own changed contexts for moral learning and whether or not their own moral education did, or even could prepare them for the responsibilities and challenges of adult life. Yet this is the very task schools are charged with by government educational policy.

Changing and Enduring Concerns, Issues, and Emphases

While the individual social life context has undoubtedly changed in many ways over 30 years, there is no disputing the continuing need for moral education. It would be interesting to make a comparison with the concerns and issues in my first edited collection (Taylor, 1975), boldly titled, *Progress and Problems in Moral Education*. In fact, if people are to believe the sound bites and visual images of the media, they are in even more need of moral education. This perception may, however,

relate to an enhanced awareness, sometimes engendering moral panic, brought about by those very media. People can each supply their own examples of individual, social, institutionalized, and international immorality, ranging from lack of common decency to social disorder and breakdown, computer crime, ethnic violence, lack of human rights, international injustices, genocide, war and terrorism. While this is the stuff of moral lessons in school, it is rarely touched upon in the reporting of academic research, let alone considered as worthy topics of focus. The field is slow to catch up with reality.

The **JME** *as Witness to the Development of the Field*

As the only international journal in the field of moral education, the *JME* can be seen as a common forum for the dissemination of theory, research, and evaluation of practice. How well has it achieved its goals? To some extent, insofar as it is open to submissions for three of the four issues each year, it is circumscribed by the research and evaluation which is sponsored and supported, what gets done by individuals, too often conveniently in their own institutions with their own students, and what is submitted and selected through peer review. Generally speaking, there has been a published lack of large-scale evaluation of pedagogical innovations and, also, by contrast, of ethnography, neither of which fit easily into the constraints of article format. But the *JME* Special Issues, instituted 25 years ago, offer the possibility of a more proactive approach to plug gaps: dealing with a moral topic in depth (e.g., human rights, Vol. 23 No. 3, 1994); the kibbutz experience (Vol. 24 No. 3, 1995); promoting work in as then unexplored areas (e.g., linking learning disabilities and moral education, Vol. 30 No. 3, 2001); exploring distinctive cultural perspectives (e.g., Islamic, Vol. 36 No. 3, 2007) or ideological perspectives (e.g., post-Communist, Vol. 34 No. 4, 2005); bringing together work of a neglected geopolitical region (e.g., China, Vol. 33 No. 4, 2004); offering a current overview of the field (e.g., post-Kohlberg, Vol. 37 No. 3, 2008).

Specialism and Professionalism

A quick glance at an issue of the *JME* from 30 years ago and today would offer a qualitatively different experience, not only in terms of

the standard of work but also in terms of the topics covered and geographical provenance of papers. Now, any single issue, which is much more academically robust, may include contributions from five or more countries, many written by authors whose first language is not English, making special demands on them and the editor. As education in general, and moral education in particular, have grown, so the field has become infinitely more specialist and professional. In 1996, the *JME* had its 25th anniversary issue to which I contributed an overview, "Unanswered questions, unquestioned answers" (Taylor, 1996a). Approaching its 40th anniversary, I would be more inclined to make the title, "Questioned answers, unasked questions." As a personal footnote, I think more should be added from a narrative perspective to the professional and personal understandings of moral connection and connectedness.

Meta-ethical Assumptions

Certainly the *JME* has been a showcase and outlet for peer-reviewed scholarly work and debate. Indeed, it may be seen to reflect a community of scholars, perhaps even a too-closed, self-referential community and hierarchy of elders, with their own lines of work and known positions. There are egos involved and pressures to publish. And there are also some inspiring, ethical colleagues and faithful friends who serve the scholarly community. The meta-ethical assumptions of research in this field have not yet been unpicked, scrutinized and made transparent. As a past researcher and continuing editor, experience makes me suspicious about research objectivity. Yet researchers *can* approach their subject with ideas about what they want to find *and* have ethical stances toward their data.

Implications of Theory and Research for Practice

Psychologists and philosophers are often reluctant to consider the educational implications of their empirical and theoretical research. Sometimes I have the feeling that they are more interested in talking to each other, defending their corners, than making a difference to moral learning. Though they are submitting papers to a journal of moral *education*, many authors seem to have a pedagogical blind spot and

frequently have to be asked to develop the implications of their thoughts and findings for educational practice. The *JME* has certainly had a key role in contributing to the making and development of a field of study. Teachers studying for higher degrees may become aware of some of the work it has published, but I fear that its influence on practice is negligible. So it is right and proper that in its review section, the *JME* also draws attention to worthwhile curriculum resources, manuals and books addressing teachers' needs and interests in moral education.

Learning as a Researcher: Reflections on Policy and Practice

Educational Policy Contexts

As I know well from over 30 years working in a national educational research institution, often on projects sponsored by government, there is much rhetoric about moral education, values and citizenship education. This is common to the rubrics of general policy statements of educational systems around the world. But aims and requirements for the field are rarely adequately translated into curriculum time, resources, and ongoing support for teachers. Some countries in the Asia Pacific region appear to be at the better end of the spectrum of matching rhetoric and resources. Governments should show that they are serious and systematic about the role formal education can play in influencing the nature of society and the participation of active citizens. There is a need to educate politicians about moral *education* and about continuous long-term investment in teaching and research in this domain, so that they can get beyond easy expectations that schools will deliver quick fixes for societies' ills.

Teacher Awareness, Skills, and Reflection

The role of the teacher is *key* to moral values learning in the school and classroom. As a researcher on a wide range of values education projects across all age phases, I learnt continuously from seeing teaching and learning in practice at all levels of school life. My writings were stimulated by and based on these experiences, by the questioning and interaction with students and teachers, and reflection on their actions and interpretations (see, e.g., Taylor, 1998, 2003). Students were often

quick to comment on the dysfunctionality they perceived between what they were told in the formal curriculum and what they experienced in the "hidden" curriculum of school life (Taylor, 1992, 1996b). Teachers, while being willing to talk about their pedagogical approaches to meeting the learning goals of their curriculum subjects, were often far less able to specify their moral objectives, to say how these were likely to be achieved and to be able to state, other than in the most general attitudinal or behavioral terms, what would count as *moral* learning outcomes.

In recent years, while some attention has been given to teacher education in citizenship education, even where citizenship education should have a moral dimension, as in England, teachers have not been helped to see what is *distinctively* moral, and how the moral overlaps with the spiritual, social, and cultural goals of the whole curriculum. Which kinds of teaching methods and learning approaches are most likely to enhance which specific moral qualities, attitudes, and behavior? Can moral education be left to what is implicit, or does it need to be made intentionally more explicit? Existing research evidence is not always used well for teacher preparation and support to enable responsiveness to changing local circumstances and to global citizenship. There has yet to be a professionalization of teachers for moral education.

Focus on Students

To my mind, a lot of what is published about research into moral education neglects students, though they should be the focus of endeavors, and have a say, both in terms of curriculum content and the learning environment. It is necessary to be aware of students' perspectives in order to know what is relevant to their learning needs — what moral issues do they face? Students' voices should be heard in order for them to be valued, and through engagement in school-wide learning experiences, such as school councils, they can develop awareness of concepts, practice skills, and form appropriate dispositions for involvement in participatory democracy (Taylor, 2002). Such learning is as important in established as in fledgling democracies.

Professional and Personal Reflection

To be good educators, concerned with promoting moral learning and

development with others, I suggest, we need to be prepared to engage in some difficult personal and professional reflections about our own moral learning and feed these back into our practices in education and behavior in our lives. Take these interrelated questions for example: (1) Looking at our own lives, has there been development in our moral character, or only change in relation to life's professional and personal challenges? (2) What of the balance of nature and nurture: to what extent are we who we are because of our genes, early upbringing, neurological functioning, later experiences? (3) How can we learn from our mistakes, disappointments, losses, as well as our positive opportunities, achievements, and endeavors? (4) What more can we do ethically, in relation to ourselves, working with others, for our schools and universities, other social institutions, and national and international networking?

Whither Moral Education?

A New Paradigm?

There is some sense that moral development and education have entered a post-Kohlbergian phase and are seeking a new paradigm. The 2008 *JME* Special Issue, "Toward an Integrated Model of Moral Functioning" (Guest Editor: Don Collins Reed), assembles papers on multiple levels of analysis of moral functioning, including: the importance of early experiences for healthy brain development and the role of brain functioning in moral functioning (Narvaez & Vaydich, 2008); the difference between tacit, automatic, and implicit features of moral cognition, as distinct from the deliberative, effortful, and conscious features (Lapsley & Hill, 2008); the role of moral centrality and integrity in moral personality and in bridging the notorious judgment–action gap (Frimer & Walker, 2008); a role for moral stages, not as structures of thought, but as structures of action encoded in thought (Reed, 2008); a model of the dialogic self which shows how individual psychological processes are mediated by cultural discourses, and illustrates how moral functioning is affected by cultural pluralism (Haste & Abrahams, 2008); and the history, recent innovations and limits of the Just Community projects in democratic education (Oser et al., 2008). However, we see here, once again, that moral psychology prevails over both moral philosophy and moral education.

The Contributions of Philosophy and Education

As a philosopher by background and an educational researcher by profession, it behooves me to assert their significant but currently underplayed disciplinary contributions. It needs serious think pieces, modern or even post-modern philosophical analysis of concepts central to moral education and their relation to effective pedagogies, and also philosophical accounts of the role of moral education in relation to living in a global age. In educational terms, reviews and overviews of major aspects of values, moral and citizenship education summarizing and evaluating evidence to date (e.g., Halstead & Taylor, 2000; Deakin Crick, Coates, Taylor, & Ritchie, 2004; Deakin Crick, Tew, et al., 2005) should be applied and used as a basis for values education planning. Conversely, the implications from research and development in other areas of educational theory and practice should be linked to moral education, e.g., it is accepted that children have differentiated learning needs to thrive; can this be applied to moral learning?

Globalizing Moral Education: The Importance of Culturally Diverse Perspectives

It might not be an exaggeration to say that Western paradigms of moral development and education have held hegemonic sway, to the exclusion of giving serious recognition to cultural diversity and the cultural situatedness of morality. As I, personally, know, from my experiences in the Chinese mainland, Taiwan, and Japan, Oriental perspectives have other spiritual dimensions and life philosophies, concepts, and cultural interpretations to contribute to and to enrich the theory and practice of moral education and development. The cross-cultural dialogues beginning in the recently formed APNME will enable national and regional perspectives to be shared and to have a stronger voice in international fora, such as the Association for Moral Education.

As to moral education in the Chinese mainland and its special administrative regions and autonomous zones, there are peculiar challenges. These relate to the moral issues and concerns raised by: rapid economic development and the contrasts between urban and rural locations and increasing migration from west to east, with social consequences; recognition of ethnic minorities and cultural differences in curriculum resources for moral education and pedagogical approaches;

the promotion of open discussion about human rights and their translation into the Chinese context; and, particularly in the case of Hong Kong, how its democratic traditions can be maintained and developed through consultation in a centralized bureaucracy.

Looking to the future, there will be new strands from the global South, of Latin America and Africa, where new regional networks and *JME* Special Issues are in formation for 2009 and 2010. These will demonstrate the many challenges Latin America and Africa have regarding moral issues and moral education, such as: the interrelationships between religion, culture and politics, poverty and morality; justice, democracy and morality; and morality and multiculturalism, as well as violence, corruption, forgiveness and reconciliation. The Special Issues will also provide an academic record of contemporary philosophical, sociological, and psychological work, and a showcase for current best practices, as well as building capacity among Latin American and African moral education academics and practitioners and putting them in the international frame. The field of moral education needs to be more inclusive and tolerant; in fact, it needs a certain degree of ethical education itself. While scholars and practitioners from the global East and South have learnt from peers in the West and North and are beginning not just to adopt but to adapt Western approaches to regional, national, and local needs and characteristics, there has, as yet, been inadequate movement in the opposite direction.

A Return to Fundamental Questions About Why Be Moral in This Global Age: Light at the End of the Tunnel?

In early May 2008, as I was on a train approaching a county town in rural East Anglia in England, I overheard the following conversation between a little girl, about four years old, and her mother:

> Girl: Are we under ground? Why is it so dark?
> Mother: No, it's just a tunnel.

This could well be a metaphor for subsequent events and also for the field of moral education. Are there glimpses of light at the end of the tunnel?

The recent terrible natural disasters of the Sichuan earthquake and Burmese cyclone in 2008 remind us of the small place of human beings in nature, the need to keep a sense of perspective, and to raise individuals' gaze beyond their own personal, domestic, local concerns to the bigger picture. Such events highlight moral issues, bad and good. For example, in the Chinese case, the overwhelming effects of nature have been compounded by man-made greed/need, in the building of more dams, and negligence, resulting in the sub-standard building of schools, probably due to official corruption, giving rise to pain and grief for a lost generation of only children. On the other hand, these terrible events have also shown to the world that the leadership of a government, its armed forces, police and people can work together in a humanitarian response in initial disaster relief. The long-term response to a crisis of such huge proportions is an unimaginable challenge, during which, no doubt, many new moral issues will surface. In stark contrast, in the Burmese deluge, the world sees how a government can not only fail to bring succor to its destitute people but intentionally act to prevent international relief efforts, thereby effectively perpetrating a form of genocide. Yet, through persistent international diplomatic effort to provide aid, even this despotic and self-serving leadership seems slowly to be being brought to open up its closed society. Sometimes good may come out of bad.

These two events clearly show that human beings have basic needs for safety and sustenance, which depend on respect for persons, common decency, human rights and responsibilities as citizens and community members, and the protection of governments. Disappointingly, research on moral education, as distinct from values education curricula, has not yet had much to say about such institutional and macro political matters. Neither has much attention been directed to moral issues of national and international security, environmental and economic sustainability, poverty and violence, difference and diversity (racial and cultural), exclusion and inclusion (e.g., disabilities and ageism), inequalities within and between societies. Moral education and moral educators may need to get more political and proactive, or, in current parlance, may need to both blog and bling.

Above all, moral education must not just be about the abstract and theoretical. It has to be about lived morality, individual *and* social well-being and flourishing, how we live our lives *and* how we can make the world a better place. Morality in action has to be a constant work

in progress: walking the talk, standing up for our values, beliefs and visions; community involvement linking professional knowledge and skills in moral education with personal, political action in our professional organizations and living communities — as some of us do at different levels. Making a difference depends on both individual and collective responsibility — differentially interpreted and emphasized in Western and Oriental cultures. We have to get beyond ourselves, self and national interest, and, as Appiah (2006, 2007) has put it, learn to live in a world which is not just local or national but global, and to balance respective needs and interests. This requires learning about and through a tangible network of human interdependence, both to think globally and act locally and also to think locally and act globally. Dialogue, in its many contemporary forms, is central to a deeper appreciation of diversity and universality. These conversations across the cultures of the world will be perhaps the biggest challenge for moral education and how it will be marked.

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