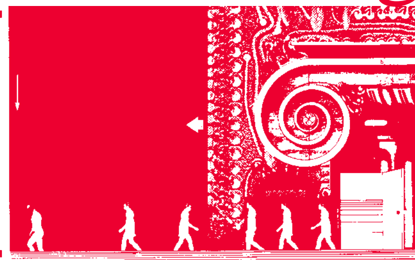
The National Teaching & Learning
FORUM

Volume 10 Number 5 2001



CONTENTS

• **EDITOR'S NOTE,** p. 3.

• ***The Three Rs Revisited***, Sharon Lynch Norton, St. John's University, p. 1. There may have been things about grade school that college would do well to remember.

• **PHILOSOPHY:** ***Teaching: Emptiness, Compassion, Failures, & the Art of Disappearing***, Alan Altany, Marshall University, p. 4. Teaching transcends the moment, and always has.

• **DEVELOPER'S DIARY:** ***An Ethical Framework for Practical Reasons***, Edward B. Nuhfer, University of Colorado at Denver, p. 5. Some touchstones help us find our way in the dark.

• **CARNEGIE CHRONICLE:** ***Lessons Learned in Implementing Scholarship of Teaching and Learning***, Samuel Thompson, Indiana University—Bloomington, p. 8. Given the "all clear," amazing interest in the scholarship of teaching emerges.

• **COMPUTERS:** ***Computers, the Web, and Composition***, Gabrielle M.V. Fletcher, Thomas Nelson Community College, p. 10. Easy, friendly ways to let the Web help teach composition.

• **AD REM . . .:** ***Yet More Questions***, Linc. Fisch, Lexington, Kentucky, p. 12. Six different kinds of questions for six different purposes described and illustrated. A tour de force in 514 words.

An Ethical Framework for Practical Reasons

Edward B. Nuhfer
University of Colorado at Denver

Let me begin this column with a core personal belief: The primary purpose of college administration lies in helping an institution reach its best potential as a place to work as a scholar and a learner. Faculty development has an essential role in achieving this purpose, whether it's carried out by a vice-president or academic dean, or by a full-time faculty development specialist. Faculty development is among the most people-centered aspects of administration, and it carries many of the boundary issues found in teacher-student or professional-client relationships— in which caring, trust, understanding, respect, and competence are essential for success. In such relationships, actions taken without the benefit of a solid grounding in an ethical framework can be hazardous.

Institutions recognize the damage that results when workplace interactions go badly. Commonly, in an effort to help them go well, institutions sponsor workshops on diversity, affirmative action, governance roles, and legal practices. Yet I have not found a single workshop given on any of these topics that provided as effective or as useful a foundation for actions as does acquiring a working framework based on ethical principles.

How to Form a Framework

As is often the case, one finds the mentor one needs in one's own institution, and my own good fortune in working out an ethical framework appropriate to my job lay in having conversations with colleague Mitch Handlesman, a specialist in ethics within CU–Denver's psychology department. Mitch led me to appreciate the degree to which an ethical framework informs all teaching practices and choices, and this allowed me to extend the ethical framework into faculty development.

The framework I've arrived at is built on four basic principles: **nonmaleficence, beneficence, justice**, and **autonomy** (Beauchamp and Childress, 1994; Keith-Spiegel and others, 1993). In a sense, half of it derives from the ancient creed of the healing arts, the Hippocratic oath, and the other half from the higher principles with case illustrations specific to developers.

Nonmaleficence

Helping, "Da" – Tattling, "Nyet"

Nonmaleficence means, "above all, do no harm." It is easy to see how gossiping about a student's poor performance exemplifies doing harm as a teacher. Each student comes to class to be taught, even graded, not to be harmed by gossip. Analogously, a faculty member comes to a developer in order to improve his or her teaching, and sometimes

to remedy a concern arising from a perceived weakness. The instructor discloses the perceived weakness in order to improve, not to have the confidence used against her or him later in an evaluation. If a developer carelessly conveys the private exchanges to third parties, the developer has risked violating nonmaleficence because he can't guarantee what the third party may do with the information.

Developers who've been faced by deans or provosts seeking information about a problem faculty member know that *nonmaleficence* can be a two-edged sword. Almost certainly, the dean is trying to minimize harm—to students—and, thus, the challenge: In such a case, would a breach of confidentiality decrease or increase harm to the community? Looking at the larger picture, while solving the dean's short-term problem is tempting, such an action will certainly become common knowledge, and it will discourage faculty from seeking needed help in the future. As soon as a developer explains that solving the immediate problem will cause more long-term harm, most deans and provosts will have the wisdom and maturity to see the issue in perspective, and stop asking for the information. In essence the dilemma tests the strength with which all parties hold the conviction that faculty development is as vital and important as academic freedom. Unless that conviction forms the foundation, any ethical framework will be a house of straw.

Since faculty development has grown in stature and intellectual sophistication in the last thirty years, fixing problems and patching up weaknesses are by no means the only reason faculty become involved with the faculty developers on their campuses. Work with the teaching and learning center might well be something a faculty member would like noticed in a merit review. Thus, one means of preserving *nonmaleficence* would be to ascribe complete ownership of all information to the faculty member. If a faculty member chooses to use the developmental consultation as evidence of merit, that's their prerogative. In either case, it keeps the developer from doing the harm that would arise if she slipped from the role of consultant into the role of informant.

Thwarting Quackery and Fads

Nonmaleficence has a further implication. It obliges every developer to advocate only practices well documented as being effective. Pressures to adopt practices or technologies of dubious value sometimes arise from external or internal authorities. Becoming complicit in foisting quack pedagogies onto faculty violates *nonmaleficence*. It consumes faculty time and resources to no benefit. Ethical practice obligates a developer to find the best information available on proposed innovations, to speak out for instructional schemes with substantive proof supporting their value, and to strongly question the value of schemes that lack such proof.

Beneficence

Beneficence is the opposite of maleficence; it's the obligation to provide benefit (good) to those we work for. Faculty development is a faculty-centered service. Just as a teacher's first professional responsibility is to his or her students, in development, recognizing that we work first to support the faculty in achieving their success is essential to enacting *beneficence*. Developers' relationships with faculty are built on trust that their work with us will enhance their success.

Yet, that does not mean that we must always agree with or please faculty members in order to exercise *beneficence*. For example, developers know—and have the data to prove—that cooperative instructional methods increase learning and retention and develop communication skills in ways that lecture formats do not. Even though some students may initially dislike—or faculty may initially resist—cooperative methods, we practice *beneficence* by gently, but consis-

THE NATIONAL TEACHING & LEARNING FORUM

Executive Editor:
James Rhem, Ph.D.
213 Potter St.
Madison, WI 53715-2050

Editorial Advisory Board

Jonathan Fife, Director Emeritus
ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education

David Graf
Executive Director of Technology
Nova Southeastern University

Judy Greene, Director
Center for Teaching Effectiveness
University of Delaware

Pat Hutchings, Senior Scholar
The Carnegie Foundation
for the Advancement of Teaching

Susan Kahn
Director, Urban Universities Portfolio Project
Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis

Wilbert McKeachie
Professor of Psychology, Emeritus
University of Michigan

Edward Neal, Director
Center for Teaching and Learning
University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill

Laura Rendón
Professor of Education
Arizona State University

Marilla Svinicki
Director, Center for Teaching Effectiveness
University of Texas at Austin

Editorial correspondence:
James Rhem
213 Potter St.
Madison, WI 53715-2050

Subscription information:
The Oryx Press, an imprint of
Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.
88 Post Road West
Westport, CT 06881-5007
Phone: 1-800-793-2154 or 203-226-3571

The National Teaching & Learning Forum
(ISSN 1057-2880) is published six times during the academic year by The Oryx Press, an imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc. in conjunction with James Rhem & Associates—October, December, February, March, May, September.
One-year individual subscription: $39.

Periodicals postage pending at Westport, CT and additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send change of address to:
The National Teaching & Learning Forum
Greenwood Publishing Group
88 Post Road West
Westport, CT 06881-5007

Copyright © 2001
James Rhem & Associates

DUPLICATION BY PHOTOCOPYING OR OTHER MEANS IS STRICTLY FORBIDDEN.

http://www.ntlf.com
September

Editor's Note:

Over the summer, I spent a week with a group of faculty at a "Boot Camp" at Colorado Mountain College in Leadville. At 10,200 feet, it was a heady experience. I'd been invited as a speaker by Ed Nuhfer, director of Teaching Effectiveness and Faculty Development at Colorado University at Denver. My job was easy. Ed had heard me say a few years back that I'd love to screen the 1948 film "Apartment for Peggy" and then lead a discussion with faculty on what it means to be a teacher, a topic this film explores with wonderful, even believable, optimism. As I said to the audience then, faculty so seldom have time or provocation to reflect on themselves in philosophical ways.

Although my part may have been, most of the work faculty did that week wasn't easy. They were asked to absorb masses of new ideas and to think hard about the very real, very practical challenges they face every day. As I sat in on these sessions, I began to wonder if encouraging them to think of themselves as part of an archetype with a long and noble history wouldn't seem a little silly, a little naive.

They take health very seriously in Colorado. Their teeth glisten like Pepsodent ads; their skin radiates a friendly relationship with the sun. I kept hearing about these morning walks people were taking before breakfast, and I was encouraged to take one. "You can't get lost; the trails all loop back around," someone said. So on the only cloudy, rainy day of the week, I set out for a 30 minute saunter. Two and a half hours later, soaked to the bone, I walked down the mountain and into a roadhouse some three miles away asking where I was. Had I "lost" time or "found" it? Had I "made" it unconsciously? I ask because on this walk many needful things happened. Lost as I was, cold and wet though I was, feeling foolish as I surely was, I relaxed. For me, this was no small thing.

Instead of the well-groomed mountain trails, I found the road to the dump. While others saw only wild flowers, I saw wildflowers and abandoned refrigerators and broken beer bottles. But as I walked along in the mud, I managed to do a lot of thinking. And a lot of it was philosophical. In my view, extreme situations demand philosophical thinking. Leisure never does. We never "find" time or "have" time for this important activity; such time is thrust upon us or we "make" it because we see the need. And so this first issue of the *Forum* is somewhat philosophical, because in addition to practical tips and new ideas, we need reflection, need to make time for it.

Sharon Lynch Norton's essay pursues exactly this radical idea, suggesting not just that we need time for reflection, but that our students do as well and that insisting on it may be a powerful, neglected pedagogy. **Alan Altany** describes the teacher in more heroic terms, but, in the end, finds the teacher's true heroism in disappearing. **Samuel Thompson**, in this issue's CARNEGIE CHRONICLE, writes an optimistic report based on the faculty's interest in teaching on the Bloomington campus of Indiana University. Given the right conditions (fairly easy ones to achieve) faculty seem ready not only to talk about teaching in meaningful ways, but to do serious research on it as well.

Ed Nuhfer's DEVELOPER'S DIARY bridges the philosophical and practical in stressing the importance of ethical touchstones in making day-to-day decisions in academe. **Gabrielle Fletcher** offers some purely practical advice on using the Internet to teach composition, and **Linc. Fisch** rounds out the issue with an AD REM . . . full of specific advice on forming good questions, the place where all learning begins.

— James Rhem

tently, advocating the benefits of such methods to the faculty, and helping faculty to use these methods well.

We also can assist by conveying to administrators the fact that faculty who commit to unconventional instructional changes often see a dip in their student ratings until the unfamiliar methods are mastered, but such a short-term drawback is more than compensated for by long term results. We thus optimize our institution as a fit place in which to learn by practicing this *beneficence*. Educating administrations as well as faculty ensures that risk-taking does not result in punishment for less-than-perfect initial outcomes.

Development is primarily a service, but developers come from a workplace where there is tension between teaching, research and service. Development centers can reflect these tensions. Sometimes hard decisions must be made about using a center's resources for the director and staff's research in development or for service to faculty. The practice of beneficence requires that we not forget our primary responsibility—the last thing that should be curtailed in any development center is service to faculty.

Using Two (or More) Heads

Beneficence seems also to confirm the wisdom of humility. Just as group work increases student learning, plans and policies arrived at through group discussions result in more thorough explorations of issues, and the results are usually superior. Our ability to serve can be enhanced by employing a faculty steering committee to participate in managing development. There is an immense difference in outcomes that will result from the administrator who manages by respecting protocols and building unit level consensus, and the administrator who ignores protocols and "manages" by cutting deals with a few favored individuals. In short, *beneficence* obligates us to make use of locally available expertise,

because the ability to do good is, quite simply, increased by the brainpower used to do it. Leaders who "know best" and fail to consult with others often allow themselves (and thus their institutions) to operate at levels inferior to those they might attain simply by using available brainpower.

Justice

Nurturing Fairness

Justice equals fairness, the obligation to "treat equals equally and unequals unequally" based upon specific legitimate criteria. In teaching, we give students different grades based on direct measures of their learning. Awarding grades for criteria unrelated to learning is obviously unethical and unjust.

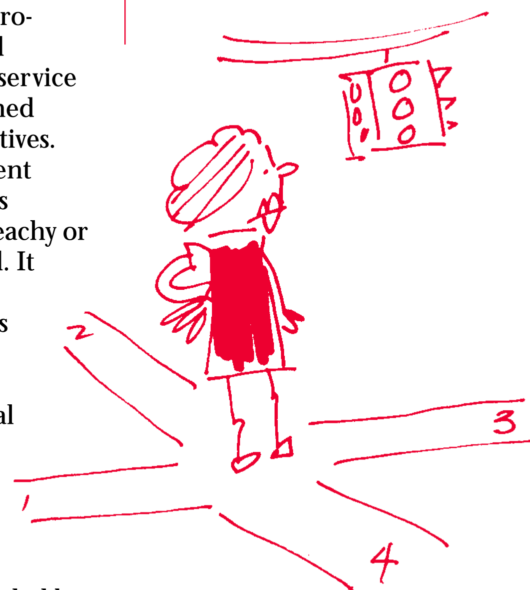
In development centers, thinking about *justice* proves particularly important when new directors fresh from faculty ranks must shift gears quickly and think in terms of their institutional responsibilities. Obviously, one acts unjustly in serving his or her friends, department or college better than unfamiliar faculty from other units. Faculty who seem most interested in what we're doing are certainly easy to serve, but *justice* obligates us to be as ready to "go the extra mile" for those faculty who are resistant to our ideas, interests and values, as for those whose values and interests accord with our own.

Autonomy

Getting Out of Their Way

Autonomy refers to the ability of human beings to govern themselves and make reasoned decisions. Autonomy is a cornerstone of academic freedom. This freedom presumes that a professor has the authority of expertise, and this authority confers to any professor the right—within the bounds of an ethical framework and within the bounds of responsibilities and obligations to his or her institution—to decide what to teach and how to teach it. Developers respect faculty autonomy when they help faculty make informed pedagogical decisions, but leave final decisions to the faculty member. For example, if a faculty member masters the basics of cooperative learning, but then chooses to utilize lecture, the decision must be respected, no matter how frustrating it may be for a developer. Developers are obligated to deliver relevant and adequate information to faculty, but to pressure faculty to adopt what the developer thinks "is best" violates autonomy. Whether the developer thinks he or she is "saving the students" is irrelevant. Such pressure violates faculty autonomy. If a faculty member is truly harming students, every competently run institution has established processes for review, appeal and sanction. Developers do no service by trying to replace established process with their own initiatives.

In conclusion, development based on a code of ethics has nothing to do with being preachy or claiming moral high ground. It has to do with the practical realization that all academics face difficult situations, and need to exercise sophisticated judgment. A functional ethical framework offers a powerful tool—a compass—in carrying out this work. A code of ethics resists yielding to the moment. In work where judgment can be clouded by personal feelings, institutional culture, pressure from authority, fads, or rationalizations, reflection upon each of the four ethical principles described above and a quick review of whether each is violated or enacted can help improve the chances of making truly competent decisions.



References Cited

- Beauchamp, T.L., and Childress, J.F. 1994. *Principles of Biomedical Ethics, 4th ed*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Keith-Spiegel, P., and others. 1993. *The Ethics of Teaching: A Casebook*. Muncie, Indiana: Ball State University Press.

Contact:

Edward B. Nuhfer, Director
Teaching Effectiveness & Faculty Development
University of Colorado at Denver
Campus Box 137, PO Box 173364
Denver, CO 80217-3364

Telephone: (303) 556-4915
Fax: (303) 556-5855
E-mail: **Ed_Nuhfer@ceo.cudenver.edu**