

TEACHING STANDARDS AND MORAL DISPOSITIONS: CAN WE HAVE ONE WITHOUT THE OTHER?

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Abstract

It has often been said that what isn't measured isn't valued. When we examine this little truism in the context of the teaching standards movement we are faced with an interesting and troubling paradox. While it is widely understood that teaching is a rich and complex act requiring a range of qualities, many lists of standards are reduced to a subset of 'measurable' attributes of teaching (knowledge and skills) leaving aside the 'unmeasurable' (the moral, ethical and aesthetic domains). The teaching standards movement, it would seem, has foundered on this important point—how to measure that which is valued and, in turn, value that which is measured. In this paper, we extend the discussion on standards and moral dispositions through our involvement in a standards project with a group of experienced science teachers. Teachers were asked to examine video episodes of classroom teaching for evidence of various standards including the moral disposition of *sincerity*. We use teachers' comments on the teaching episodes to show that moral dispositions are recognised and described by experienced colleagues. We suggest how moral dispositions might be incorporated into lists of standards that provide a rich and full account of teaching and form a sound basis for making judgements about good teaching.

INTRODUCTION

This paper reports on a study investigating the importance of moral dispositions in teaching. We investigated specifically whether experienced teachers can recognise and describe the moral principle of *sincerity* in video teaching segments of their colleagues. Twenty experienced secondary science teachers met six times over a period of eighteen months to view video segments of their teaching, discuss them in the group and prepare audiotaped commentaries about what they saw and discussed. The project was established because of some doubts we held about the usefulness to teachers of many sets of professional standards that have been promulgated in the last ten years or so. We held this view for two main reasons. First, wordy lists of what teachers should know and be able to do often become irrelevant to the contexts in which teachers work. Second, important moral dispositions are commonly omitted from sets of professional standards, apparently on the grounds that they cannot be measured. The framework for the discussions and commentaries that took place in this project was a set of standards agreed upon by the teacher participants. These standards are brief, transparent, contextualised and relate to the details of the teaching observed in the video. Among the standards used as the basis for these activities was the moral disposition sincerity. This paper reports on the teachers' commentaries and discussions related to the standard of sincerity, how they could observe it in the teaching in the video segments and the teacher actions they described that demonstrated it.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Two perspectives on teaching are contrasted in this paper – professional teaching standards and consideration of teaching as a fundamentally moral activity. We attempt to find some useful middle ground between the two positions.

Teaching Standards

During the last fifteen years or so, standards approaches have been applied widely to programs of educational change in the English-speaking world. Curriculum content standards, performance standards and opportunity to learn standards have been developed for students' learning (Darling-Hammond, 1997). In the professional domain, standards have been developed to describe what beginning teachers, experienced teachers and school leaders need to know and be able to do. The argument in Australia, as in other English-speaking countries, has been that the elaboration of professional standards is a crucial part of the larger agenda of improving the status of teaching by reforming the profession's career structure (Darling-Hammond, Wise & Klein, 1995; Ingvarson, 1996).

We have provided a fuller account of the developments in professional standards elsewhere (Louden, Wallace & Groves, in press). At the current stage of development of a standards approach many issues remain to be addressed. There often seems to have been an emphasis on setting standards quickly rather than adopting a process that involved teachers and the profession, and insufficient attention has been paid to the ways the standards will be used and the necessary accompanying material (Louden, Wallace & Groves, in press). Whilst there are benefits from these developments in that different Australian authorities offer a similar image of the work of teachers, there are also weaknesses common to all of these Australian standards. These weaknesses include long lists of duties, opaque language, generic skills, decontextualised performances, expanded duties and weak assessments (Louden, 2000).

Most sets of standards list items of knowledge and skills that teachers need to have in order to be classified as, for example, an accomplished teacher. Thus the standards appear to become a set of rules rather than 'guides for actions' that are useful for professional development and sharing of expertise. Moreover, moral principles, such as sincerity, empathy or enthusiasm, are noticeably absent from these sets of standards, apparently on the grounds that they cannot be 'measured'.

Moral basis of teaching

Over the last ten years or so there has also been an active discussion about the moral basis of teaching. Several authors have entered into this arena. Clark (1990), for example, made the point that "Teaching is a moral craft as much as it is a technical and procedural endeavor" (p. 252). He went on to make suggestions about the moral relationship involved in teaching and discussed cases involving honesty, responsibility and respect and concluded "moral issues are intrinsic to and ubiquitous in teaching" (p. 263). Clark (1990) recognised that "Morally responsible teaching is difficult, complex and sometimes painful and thankless work. Teaching is a fundamentally moral enterprise in which adults ask and require children to change in directions chosen by the adults" (p. 264). In discussing teacher education he made the point that these issues are quite different from the questions and topics used to organise teacher education curricula and professional development programs for experienced teachers.

Another view has been expressed by van Manen (1991) who suggested that the intuitive side of life in teaching is very often severely neglected. He also commented "Yet, the

essence of education is less a technical or production enterprise than a normative activity that constantly expects the educator to act in a right, good, or appropriate manner" (p. 9). Van Manen used the word 'normative' to indicate that teaching, like parenting, is always concerned with questions of value, preference and morality and argued that teachers must have a set of standards so that they orient themselves to the good – whatever this good may mean in particular circumstances. He suggested that there are some qualities that are fundamentally important for a teacher and essential to good pedagogy and included a sense of vocation, love of and caring for children, a deep sense of responsibility, moral intuitiveness, self-critical openness, thoughtful maturity, tactful sensitivity towards the child's subjectivity, an interpretive intelligence, a pedagogical understanding of the child's needs, improvisational resoluteness in dealing with young people, a passion for knowing and learning the mysteries of the world, the moral fibre to stand up for something, a certain understanding of the world, active hope in the face of prevailing crises, and, not the least, humor and vitality.

In a similar vein, Banner and Cannon (1997) argued that teaching is an art. They analysed the qualities of successful teachers and the ways in which these qualities promote learning and understanding. Their discussion was illustrated throughout with portraits of fictional teachers who exemplified or failed to exemplify particular qualities. The book was written with the intention of encouraging teachers to consider how they might strengthen their own level of professional performance. Banner and Cannon (1997) listed learning, authority, ethics, order, imagination, compassion, patience, character and pleasure as qualities of great teaching, several of which are moral dispositions.

In discussing how manner in teaching may be made visible Fallona (2000) constructed a framework applying Aristotelian moral virtues to teaching. Each of the Aristotelian moral virtues were contextualised to the actions of teachers and Fallona included bravery, friendliness, truthfulness, wit, honor, mildness, magnanimity, magnificence, generosity, temperance and justice in a list of moral virtues applicable to teaching.

There are several ways that teachers might serve as moral agents and moral educators. Fenstermacher (1990) argued that it could be through direct teaching of particular moralities or by teaching about morality. But it is his third way that is relevant to this study.

A third way to undertake moral education is to act morally, holding oneself up as a possible model Here the teacher acts justly while assisting and expecting just conduct from students; the teacher shows compassion and caring, seeking these traits from his or her students; the teacher models tolerance while showing students how to be tolerant. Nearly everything that a teacher does while in contact with students carries moral weight. Every response to a question, every assignment handed out, every discussion on issues, every resolution of a dispute, every grade given to a student carries with it the moral character of the teacher. This moral character can be thought of as the *manner* of the teacher. (p. 134)

Fenstermacher (1990) also made reference to the education of teachers and aspects of who controls teaching and its status as a profession.

Teachers' manners as moral persons are as vital to their work as teachers as their mastery of the subjects they teach and their skill as instructors in the classroom. Yet one seldom hears about improving one's moral actions, one's manner, in the furor over who will gain hegemony over the occupation of teaching. (pp. 135-136)

It is commonly recognised that teaching is complex and that there are several aspects of knowledge and skills that need to be considered. But important qualities are sometimes not included in discussions about teaching. Van Manen (1991), for example, acknowledged the need for teachers to know the subject matter they teach and the need for them to know how to enable students to learn, but emphasised the qualities that are important at a more fundamental level. He also raised issues related to the education of teachers and how it is approached.

Similarly, a technological approach to education assumes that teaching can be taught by means of generalizations and general techniques. Only recently has anyone recognized that education needs to turn back to the world of experience. Experience can open up understanding that restores a sense of embodied knowing. (p. 9)

Within the complexity of teaching it is necessary to focus on details in order to recognise, describe and share understandings about teaching (Kilbourn, 1998). Kilbourn (1998) also commented that "there is room to say serious things about teaching in a form that is not saturated with jargon and that is open to a more general audience" (p. xiii) and discussed some principles that were useful to him in an extended teaching-learning situation with his daughter. He argued that, in the tradition of Dewey, principles are 'guides for judging suggested courses of action' rather than rules to be slavishly followed (Dewey, in Kilbourn, 1998, p. 37). Further he argued that because such a large part of teaching is intuitive and unarticulated "the need to articulate teaching principles arises less from teaching itself than it does from the effort to show teaching's complexity and to treat my own teaching as a matter of enquiry" (pp. 37-38).

THIS STUDY

In this study we have investigated whether experienced teachers can observe sincerity in the teaching of their colleagues seen on video segments. Sincerity was chosen as an example of a moral principle. Further we were interested to find if they could relate the sincerity to the details and instances in the lesson and to actions that the teacher took.

We have the view that to be useful to experienced teachers standards should be brief, less opaque, more contextualised and focus primarily on the details of teaching. We take the position that standards should be built around short lists of non-technical words, that the standards include moral principles as well as knowledge and skills and that the standards need to be accompanied by rich exemplification in the form of case and other material.

In his essay about the complexity of teaching Kilbourn (1998) introduced principles of teaching as guides for describing and analysing teaching. He suggested four families of principles—subject matter, student enjoyment, technique and morality. This study investigated experienced teachers' reactions to Kilbourn's standards of *ownership*, *rigour* and *sincerity* and in this paper we report the findings about the moral principle of sincerity.

Kilbourn (1998) explains sincerity in these terms:

The principle of sincerity reflected the intent to have clean, straightforward, honest interaction between Alison and me. While I accepted the responsibility of making moves intended to affect her as a learner, it was also intended that those moves not be insincere, gratuitous, or artificial. I tried to avoid manipulative teaching moves like rhetorical, 'guess-what's-in-my-head' questions. I tried to avoid creating an aura of knowing things that, in fact, I did not know. I aimed at taking her seriously as a

person and as a learner, trying as best I could to understand her reasoning and her point of view. (p. 44)

This paper explores the interactions between experienced Western Australian secondary school science teachers, video cases of their classes and the notion of sincerity as a teaching standard. A reference group of twenty science teachers met six times between August 1999 and November 2000. These teachers, comprising representatives from Perth Government, Catholic and independent schools, were invited to participate on the basis of their reputations as competent practitioners and their availability to attend project meetings. The meetings were day-long and discussion was based on video segments of the participants' science classes with students in the age range 13 to 15 years old.

Initially the teachers viewed and discussed videotaped segments of the classes of science teachers and also of these teachers being interviewed about their teaching. In early meetings it became clear that a standards framework was useful in structuring these discussions and in assisting teachers to derive maximum benefit and apply their new insights to their own teaching.

Typically, each meeting in our study involved the group in an intensive viewing of video segments of one of the participants teaching a lower secondary (Years 8-10) science lesson. These video segments were recorded by the project team during a visit beforehand to the participant's school. The 5-10 minute clips were edited from a longer teaching segment to illustrate aspects of the lesson that appeared interesting, problematic or challenging, and often involved some kind of teaching dilemma. A group discussion, which included the videotaped teacher, was then held.

The larger group was then divided into sub-groups of three or four teachers. Each sub-group recorded a series of short audio commentaries on how each of the three standards (from Kilbourn, 1998) of rigour, ownership and sincerity was enacted in the science teaching viewed in the video segment. Each sub-group also recorded an audio commentary on trade-offs and tensions visible in the video segment. The videotaped teacher also prepared a series of videotaped commentaries introducing the context of the school and the lesson, and critiquing her/his own performance in relation to the standards.

This paper reports on participants' commentaries and discussions about the standard of sincerity. Video from five teachers was used as the basis of these commentaries. Details of these teachers and classes are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Details of teachers for whom commentaries have been prepared

Name of teacher	Sex of teacher	Type of school	Details of class	Topic of lesson
Elaine	Female	Government	Year 8, mixed sex, mixed	Simple machines

			ability	
George	Male	Private	Year 9, girls, mixed ability	Forensic science
Graeme	Male	Private	Year 9, mixed sex, mixed ability	Electric circuits
Mike	Male	Private	Year 10, boys, mixed ability	Chemistry
Sandra	Female	Government	Year 8, mixed sex, mixed ability	Investigating factors that affect plant growth

FINDINGS

The experienced teachers in the reference group were asked to comment on the aspects of accomplished teaching they saw in the video segments, using the standard of *sincerity* as a framework for the discussions and audiotaped commentaries. When asked to make comments related to the standard the participants referred to specific teaching/learning moments and the contexts in which they occurred.

The experienced teachers did identify aspects of the teaching where they observed sincerity. From the commentaries provided by the experienced teachers, categories of teacher actions related to sincerity have been developed by an inductive process. For this reason, in the text of this paper extensive use has been made of quotes from the commentaries and interviews.

The quotes are also used to demonstrate the kinds of details that the participants observed, discussed and commented on related to the videotaped lessons.

Despite the complexity of the ways that sincerity manifests itself in accomplished teaching, in the commentaries we have noted four categories of teacher actions that demonstrate it. These four categories of teacher actions are a relaxed, comfortable, caring style; accepting of all student responses; honesty in all interactions with students; using appropriate, friendly language. These are illustrated using excerpts from the commentaries and interviews.

A relaxed, comfortable, caring style

In the commentaries there were many examples of words such as *relaxed*, *comfortable* and *caring* with regard to the way in which sincerity was apparent in the accomplished teaching. The experienced teachers who prepared the commentaries were able to see and articulate this important style in contextual science teaching situations. This style relates to the ways the teacher values the students as people.

In an interview with the students from Sandra's class they described her as 'a happy teacher' and 'not grumpy like other teachers', which suggests that they appreciated a relaxed and comfortable manner. Experienced colleagues also commented on Sandra's manner in her lesson.

I thought Sandra made them feel comfortable with her style, she had an easy style and good manner and tone and that sort of indicated a feeling of sincerity as well as comfort for the students.

The way in which Elaine corrected the students was noted in the commentaries. The experienced colleagues thought that this led to the students being comfortable in asking questions.

Elaine also demonstrated her sense of compassion for the students by correcting them in a non-threatening manner and as a consequence the students felt comfortable answering questions.

The experienced teachers noticed Mike's relaxed style and the effect this had on the students. It seemed obvious in the video segment that the students knew that Mike cared about them. Here the experienced teachers were focusing on one specific interaction Mike was having with a student named Kingsley. They commented on the decision Mike had to make about how much attention he could continue to give to Kingsley, but the main comment was about how obvious it was that he made Kingsley feel good.

I consider that Mike was very relaxed. He seemed to feel comfortable with the class and I guess in the same way the kids felt fairly comfortable with him so that sort of shows that he cares a little bit about them and he was trying to set up that sort of environment. I also, the way that he was aware of what Kingsley's needs were for answers. Instead of just saying, 'look that's well and truly outside our scope' he actually ran with that student for a fair amount of time. And I guess he had to make a decision of just how far he would go with that particular student at that time but at least he gave him some answers and he asked some other questions that made the kid at least think that 'yeah I'm special at this moment, the teacher cares a bit about where I'm going'.

In his interview Mike referred to how well he knew the students both personally and in regard to their chemistry and their aspirations and how this affected the way he treated them

Interviewer: I hear you saying it's actually quite important to know the boys pretty well, to know what sorts of things they are good at and not so good at.

Mike: Yeah. And I also know which ones are doing chemistry next year and which ones aren't and which ones to, well not that I don't want to push them, but

which ones not to push further than what their comfort zone is. I need them here for the rest of the year to be working well and learning more about chemistry and if they think it is all too hard then they'll maybe disturb others or not want to be there, so there is different levels that you work at there.

A straightforward comment about the manner George had with his class and how they felt summed up the importance of a relaxed manner and how this indicates sincerity.

Regarding sincerity the thing that stands out for me is the relaxed manner in the way that George talks with his students. The students are very, very comfortable with him.

Accepting of all student responses

The importance of accepting all student responses in a way that shows that the teacher is listening and valuing came up several times in the commentaries. This is an indication of the value the teacher places on the student as a learner.

In Sandra's lesson the experienced colleagues commented on how she accepted and wrote up all the students' ideas. This was done in a way that the group thought showed sincerity and also increased ownership by the students.

And I think that Sandra, with her accepting all answers the way that she did, that they felt like they had ownership of the ideas and their ideas were up there for everybody to see. So, that contributed to their feeling comfortable and feeling ownership and also aspects of sincerity were there as well.

The commentary below shows that that the group noticed that Elaine accepted all responses and gave positive feedback to the students.

Whilst engaged in group discussion Elaine accepted the statements and observations of the students. She gave positive feedback to the student responses.

With regard to George's lesson the group noticed the way he handled incorrect responses, trying to guide the students and build up their confidence. Again the group commented that 'the kids knew that he was concerned'.

And George is very comfortable with the wrong answers: now he's not saying 'oh you're wrong' he will just say, to try and direct them in the right direction without being too obvious about it. The kids knew that he was concerned that they come up with the right answers and that he wants to help them do that.

In the interview about his class Graeme was asked whether it was a priority for him to try and create that atmosphere where the students can put their ideas forward, and he responded "Well I'd like them to feel very comfortable to challenge what I've said, or ask questions". This indicated sincerity without any loss of rigour and provided a nice insight into the subtlety of what is occurring in Graeme's lesson.

Honesty in all interactions with students

The experienced teachers also described situations in the videotape segments where honesty was the quality that was apparent to them. Again the focus in the commentaries was on specific teaching instances and interactions with particular students.

The experienced colleagues' group noticed that Mike did not attempt to pretend he knew something if he wasn't sure of the answer. We also saw in the video segment that Mike was prepared to think aloud with the students to try and work something out.

I think that Mike also showed that he had a very honest nature with the students when they asked him certain questions that he wasn't sure of the answer and he said that he didn't know and the students respected that and went on.

Mike also demonstrated that he was concerned to redirect a student back onto a task in a way that maintained the student's dignity.

He managed to redirect the student with a little bit of dignity so certainly in Mike's view he put the kid back onto a task but without sacrificing the kid's ego or anything else. I think that was quite a sincere way of doing it.

George's lesson was designed around a crime scenario where the students were taking the roles of forensic scientists. The experienced teachers indicated that this whole setting and its emphasis on being a real-life situation enhanced the sincerity that was a significant feature of the lesson. This comment was made by an experienced colleague about George when asked to refer to his sincerity and clearly there are aspects of sincerity here. It also referred to the ownership by the students and to a dilemma George dealt with in balancing ownership and timing and duration of certain teaching activities. This is a common kind of dilemma and the way George dealt with it was highly regarded by his colleagues.

I think the sincerity also comes in, in the whole idea of the lesson trying to apply it in an everyday situation, with the courtroom scenario. 'How would you handle this?' so it's not 'I'm going through the motions' but 'This has a real purpose in everyday life'. I suppose sometimes that is a trade-off for us in a class we have got to get through the course and things like that: in this case George was saying 'Well this is an everyday situation'.

Using appropriate, friendly language

Appropriate, friendly language was mentioned as a specific point in the commentaries about sincerity. While this is a part of style and manner it is a specific area that teachers can consider and make moves to improve in if they choose.

The group of experienced colleagues commented on Mike's friendly use of language and body language in interacting with the groups, and how this led to an obviously caring relationship.

I think Mike is using a lot of friendly language as well so that is trying to include as many people as possible. If they don't fully understand the concept perhaps they can participate with language at a level that they can understand. I think that coupled together with body language which links in with it, of being relaxed with the students and sitting down next to them at times. This suggests 'I'm here for a while I've got some time to spend with

you, tell me what you know and I'll help you'. These things lead to a caring sort of relationship.

The group of experienced teachers commented on the 'level' at which George interacted with the students and his use of humour. They noticed how comfortable this made the students feel.

George is very much at their level as well. Both physically and mentally in the discussion processes. His humour is always there like with his microscope 'don't drop it please, pretty please, or I won't be back here' and I think the kids must have felt comfortable asking

DISCUSSION

This study has focused on ways of representing the complexity of teaching by developing and using standards as principles that underlie accomplished science teaching. The moral principle of sincerity has proved to be of particular interest. The use of sincerity as a standard proved to be of benefit in drawing out the richness and complexity of the teaching but also allowing it to be understood. In this regard the standard of sincerity was useful as part of a framework that does not diminish the complexity of science teaching.

The commentaries, interviews and discussions with the experienced practitioners have confirmed the importance of moral principles in teaching. Sincerity proved to be a useful standard as part of a framework for critical discussion and was referred to many times in the commentaries. The other standards of rigour and ownership that were investigated are often acting in tension with each other and with other standards such as timing and duration in any lesson, and thus trade-offs are made many times by a teacher. But sincerity is not traded off by accomplished teachers. A high level of sincerity underpins all accomplished teaching. This confirms Kilbourn's (1998) contention that the moral principles, such as sincerity, are ends in themselves rather than means to the end of improved student learning. In this regard sincerity is a different kind of standard to the technical, subject matter and student enjoyment standards.

Sincerity was manifested in the teaching by several kinds of teaching actions. Some of these, such as a relaxed, caring manner, demonstrated sincerity towards the student as a person. Other actions, such as accepting all student responses to open questions, demonstrated sincerity towards the student as a learner. These two aspects of sincerity—towards the student as a person and towards the student as a learner—were referred to by Kilbourn (p. 44). It is of particular interest that experienced teachers can recognise sincerity in these two forms and describe teacher actions that enhance it.

In the commentaries moral principles associated with successful teaching, such as sincerity, permeated all aspects of the teaching/learning situations. Many sets of professional teaching standards do not include qualities or dispositions such as sincerity on the grounds that they are too personal and can be manifested in too many different ways: in other words they are too difficult to measure. Based on this study we would argue that sincerity, as an example of a moral principle, is too important a standard to be left out of the consideration of accomplished teaching. We have found that experienced practitioners readily recognise and describe sincerity in videotape segments of accomplished teaching. They have agreed that the standard of sincerity has been an essential aspect in the consideration of accomplished teaching.

CONCLUSIONS

The commentaries and discussions of science cases described above are attempts to develop and use professional standards in a professional development context. We have found that brief, clear, contextualised standards that focus on the details of teaching have been very useful to a group of experienced science teachers. The standards of rigour, ownership and sincerity (after Kilbourn, 1998) have been valuable in assisting the teachers to describe and analyse accomplished science teaching and apply what they have learned to their own teaching situations.

In this paper we have focused on Kilbourn's (1998) notion of sincerity as an illustration of the essential moral principles underlying accomplished science teaching. The standard of sincerity is not a definition or prescription about behaviour or a quality that a teacher can achieve or not achieve, like conventional standards. Rather, we have preferred to follow Kilbourn's Deweyan strategy of using the principles as guides for judging suggested courses of action rather than rules to be slavishly followed. The standard of sincerity proved to be a useful device for promoting critical discussion about science teaching. The experienced teacher participants have identified sincerity in videotaped teaching episodes and been able to describe teacher actions that demonstrate it. Their commentaries indicate that sincerity, as an example of a moral disposition, is an important standard for accomplished science teaching and any description of accomplished teaching that omits such moral principles could be deficient.

We also argue that contextually rich examples of teachers' work, such as these cases are essential to avoid the trivialisation and atomisation of teachers' work that results from decontextualised standards. The experienced teacher participants have commented extensively on the value of the video segments and the cases being based in contexts that are real to them. They have been able to contribute actively to the analysis of the teaching on the video segments and also transfer what they have learnt to their own teaching situations. In these rich, contextual representations of teaching other experienced teachers have consistently recognised sincerity as an important characteristic of accomplished teaching.

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