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PERSONAL CODE OF ETHICS

During my early teens I started training formally in taijutsu, an obscure Japanese martial art which has recently become somewhat popular. I noticed quite early that I was more fascinated by the mental and ethical aspects of the art far more than the physical. When I dislocated my patella in a school gym accident, I used that as a reason to quite the physical training and focusing on the mental aspects as a hobby. I also always had an interest in science (which I later came to teach) and after the knee injury I took up an intellectual interest in baseball that ended blending the two. I had read many popular science books by Hawking, Einstein, Davies, Gould, etc. but then I found ESPN's Rob Neyer who introduced me to intellectuals, some Harvard and Yale trained, some doctors and lawyers that were not concerned with physics or biology or law but of the trivial matter of how to win a baseball game. Bill James wrote in his 1985 Baseball Abstract, "[There is a] difference between knowledge and [BS]; knowledge is something that can be objectively demonstrated to be true and [BS] is something you just know." These authors showed me that the scientific method was not limited to just science; counting and analyzing things in any part of life could lead to a better understanding of a subject. The three primary influences that determine how I act in any particular situation then are eastern philosophy, science, and baseball.

All three blend to give some shape to my feelings of right and wrong. The movie *Kung-Fu* features the following insight on conflict, "Avoid rather than check. Check rather

than hurt. Hurt rather than maim. Maim rather than kill." Although literally directed toward physical confrontation, the meaning is dual. It applies to mental, verbal, and psychological conflicts as well. I use scientific rigor when faced with dilemmas that have time to be thought through. The important aspect of using a systematic method is finding countable things and you need time to do so. During the second world war, Churchill and the British military were able to break Germany's Enigma coding used to send sensitive information to their ranks. Churchill's code breakers were able to break many of the Enigma coded messages, several which delineated German bombing sorties in England. Stories have that Churchill knew of the locations of several of the bombing missions well in advance, but chose not to take defensive measures, so that the Germans were not made aware of the breach of the Enigma code. It is debatable how many raids were not acted on to protect English Intelligence, but the concept that Churchill knew he had to sacrifice some to save many is resounding. The same is seen in how the FDA limits potentially life saving medications to people suffering debilitating diseases. So when it comes to right versus wrong on important issues, I feel that the majority can be reasoned out if time permits and all other things should not be an issue. Eastern thought then applies when time is not available. If you cannot think, act in haste, but act only as much as you need. Harry S Truman said it best, "It isn't polls or public opinion of the moment that counts. It is right and wrong and leadership."

If you look at my values through the lenses of justice, care, and critique, they align more appropriately with justice and critique than with care. That is a common complaint

with those that rationalize: they seem uncaring. A common proverb holds that if you give a man a fish you feed him for a day; if you teach a man to fish you feed him for a lifetime. What if the man refuses to learn how to fish? After all, he was getting free fish. Some argue you should give the man fish until he learns. I would never give that man a fish if he refused to learn himself. The bipartisan reform of welfare during the Clinton administration exemplifies those ideas. More people are off government assistance that can work which frees up money to use on people that truly cannot care for themselves. My uncle was stricken with polio at an early age and had little use of his legs. He worked as an accountant until the day he died, never getting a cent of disability or assistance. He was able to rationalize he could make more as an accountant than on any assistance program, yet through the lens of justice he was as deserving as anyone. When I received second degree burns to my fingers during a chemistry mishap early last year, I thought the pain was so much I may not come into school the next day. Then I remembered my Uncle, "if he could get to work on crutches everyday for 30 years" I thought, "I can teach with ice on my hands."

That is an attitude you quickly develop growing up on a farm. You had to be John Wayne and saddle back up again when you get hurt. My grandfather was shot while working in the field by a careless hunter with a shotgun. Luckily, it was a long range shot, and fewer than a dozen pellets hit him in the back. Of course he didn't seek medical attention until he finished with his work. In my family, you finish what start, and do what needs done no matter your personal sacrifice.

PROFESSIONAL CODE OF ETHICS

Prior to the assignment I did not have a set of clearly delineated ethics. I believe it's better to have a set of vague values and an ethical philosophy that would apply in any situation. Once one gets specific with their ethics, the more things will not apply, and the more ethical statements one needs. Minnesota and the NEA have many ethics contained in multi-page websites. The New York Education Department lists six core principles. The ethics manual I received when signed my first contract only outlines financial ethics for Ohio public employees. Although some are long, and some short, all the codes are fairly similar. I will highlight the three that are important in my current position. In doing so, I will discount ethics that deal with students as I feel those are separate to ones that deal with the profession.

The New York Education department contends that "Educators advance the intellectual and ethical foundation of the learning community." I serve as a respected role model for the community. Dr. Roby commented that one of his most deeply held beliefs is that personal and professional lives could not be separated. If I live in my employing district I will always be a teacher first, and a citizen second. Even if I think there is a distinction, the community will not see it differently; I have a higher standard. Therefore, I am a teacher everywhere I go, and must show proper public relations for the sake of the school. I am role model whether I like it or not.

As an educator I have a responsibility to students in maintaining and adding to the content knowledge that I possess. Many codes I read ignored this facet, but New Zealand

lists this first in their code, "[Educators] Base their professional practice on continuous professional learning..." It is imperative to learn new techniques, learn what colleges expect to be taught and bring that back to the school. As a teacher of college prep classes, I feel this is my primary obligation. There is debate about teaching content so all learn or teaching a certain quantity of content. I would be doing a disservice by not moving on to more topics in Chemistry. So the best I do is get as many as I can with me; I do a lot of labs to let the material sink in, but eventually I have to move on.

Finally, every code I read had some variation of the NEA's, "The educator shall not accept any gratuity, gift, or favor that might impair or appear to influence professional decisions or actions." This topic arose in my district when I was the only remaining elected union officer for our local association. I was asked to sign a document giving a teacher on supplemental contract a 233% pay raise when an anonymous donor gave money to the school, but specified it go directly to the salary of the individual. As advisor to the quiz team (unpaid) and the Evironthon (unpaid) I was angry that the superintendent even considered going through with it. When I get gifts from supply companies for my orders I am required to turn them over to the office. This ethic forced me to decline signing the document increasing the supplemental salary.

Again if you look at the justice, critique, and care aspects, the three ethics I chose fit more into justice and critique. Interestingly, Robert Taylor of San Diego State University says that, "Thus, the appropriateness of a care approach or a justice approach in any given setting hinges on the economic value of time. Specifically, the scarcer time is,

the more attractive justice is relative to care." Is not time the most critical factor in education? High School students have 45 minutes of class. Elementary levels are allotted even less time teaching their lessons. Also, Taylor argues "... the model demonstrates that care is less relevant, and justice is more relevant, the larger the population under consideration." I have about 150 students a year; on the block schedule I had about 70 a semester. I'm dealing with a fairly large population to teach. I feel I must do justice to the whole as opposed to the individual. Home schools with few students should be awash in the ethic of care.

One may be concerned that I frivolously ignore the ethic of care. This is where eastern thought plays into my ideals. Eastern thought ascribes a lot to polarization. Parker Palmer did the same, noting that educators play roles that seem opposite in nature. Not only does that apply to individuals, but to organizations as well. The school has teachers that exhibit care and some that exhibit justice and some that exhibit critique. At the end of the day, the ethical views will tend to cancel out, allowing teachers to be themselves, and teach according to their strengths.

SUMMARY

Ethics Web Canada lists reasons for having an ethical code and chief among these is defining what is and is not acceptable behavior. That is a valid point for teachers in general, and I have noticed that Ohio lacks any form of standardized code. Certainly, to most, any written code seems like common sense, but without written form it is difficult to force adherence. A code of personal ethics can be used to track historical changes or

continually refine your code. A personal code of ethics is always with a person, whether delineated or not. A solid grounding in ethical behavior can improve a teacher's professional development and student achievement. A teacher that understands what is expected of them, not contractually but covenantally to the student and district will be better prepared for career long success. I would imagine many new teachers that did not stay in the system, failed to fully grasp what is truly expected. A true teacher takes little time off, and works in the background were few people see them. A teacher need not stay at school until night, or come in early, but at some point good teachers go above what many assume they do. And it is the ethical foundation that drives them.

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