

Book Review: Snook, I. (2003). *The Ethical Teacher*. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.

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This is a timely book in several respects. First, it comes at the end of a long and illustrious academic career during which Ivan has given much thought to ethical issues in education. Second, he was recently a member of the Teachers Council working party developing a draft code of ethics for teachers. Third, a good New Zealand based text for undergraduate philosophy of education classes is long overdue and his book fills a serious gap.

The book covers a wide range of issues and topics in each of its ten chapters. (1) 'The Role of the Teacher' introduces the reader to philosophy and teaching, the latter connected to autonomy, reason, authority and freedom; (2) 'Accountability, Teacher Assessment and Appraisal' tackles accountability for outcomes and assessment or results, performance appraisal and relevant ethics principles including avoidance or harm, respect for persons, truth and honesty, and fairness; (3) 'Rights in Education' deals with the rights of children, parents and teachers in relation to free speech in schools, school uniforms, special needs and streaming; (4) 'the Personal in Education' ranges over the personal relations, sexual matters, pornography, gender, ethnicity, moral education and competition; (5) 'Privacy and Confidentiality' covers forms of privacy linked to children and schools and the confidentiality of information; (6) 'School Rules, Discipline and Punishment' examines the need for discipline and the nature and justification of punishment and its place in education; (7) 'Controversial Issues in Education' asks what makes an issue controversial, the place of neutrality and the problem of indoctrination, asking 'Do New Zealand state schools indoctrinate?' (8) 'Counselling in Schools' explores the nature of the counselling relationship and the ethical considerations central to it – confidentiality, consent, cultural differences; (9) 'Research in Education' investigates the point of research and allied ethical concerns including informed consent, honesty and truthfulness, prevention of harm, cultural sensitivity, and confidentiality; (10) 'Ethics and Politics' summarises all that has gone before within the 'educational settlement' 1939-1988, the subsequent social and educational revolution and the 'decent society'.

As a colleague and fellow philosopher, there is much in Ivan's book with which I agree. I will not deal with these, but rather discuss some of the issues that divide us. First up, Ivan deliberately avoids any exploration of ethical theory. This is unfortunate because it deprives the reader of an ethical framework to reflect on ethical issues. If the book is to be used as a student text then students will need to be provided with additional material on general ethical theory.

Somewhat oddly, Ivan begins chapter one on the role of the teacher with an examination of philosophical method. I say oddly because an explanation on philosophical method seems out of place in an explication of the role of the teacher. On the other hand, it serves a useful purpose since it allows us to reflect on what philosophy is.

Ivan is favourably disposed towards the saying 'what the best and wisest parent wants for her child, the whole community should want for all children' but this does hide a deeper problem. Who, or what, counts as being 'the best and wisest parent?' You? Me? Who? What are the criteria? Given that we live in a pluralistic society, this seems unrealistic.

In his discussion of the personal in education, Ivan states that apart from child pornography, "I would not say that a teacher's use of pornography ... is a breach of personal ethics ... I am sure many readers will disagree with me" (p.86). He is probably right!

Privacy is an important aspect and Ivan's discussion is wide ranging, covering private spaces, private information subject to confidentiality, etc. One aspect not covered is the privacy of students' work. Students are entitled to keep individual work private from other students, including work books, tests and examinations. Students are rightly aggrieved if their privacy is invaded by other students who copy or cheat. Teachers need to be alert to this and take action to stop it.

What do I think of this book? It is written at a level that can be easily understood by teachers and undergraduate students. It covers a wide range of ethical issues of concern to teachers and student teachers. It is written in a clear, rigorous manner. It is one of very few introductory texts in philosophy of education. It is locally published and easily available. It is cheap to buy. These are among the reasons why I use it as a set text for a paper I teach on philosophy of education. More generally, it should be a book on the prescribed list for every pre-service teacher education student and should be read by every teacher. High recommendation indeed.



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