Phronesis : A Model for Pedagogical Reflection

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PHRONESIS
A MODEL FOR PEDAGOGICAL REFLECTION

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The purpose of this article is to describe a paradigm of reflection that explicitly synthesizes varied perspectives of reflection into a coherent model grounded on the ancient conception of virtue. Previous conceptions of reflection have considered its moral implications and connections but have stopped short of claiming that reflection is essentially of moral value. This model identifies reflection with the classical moral virtue phronesis *by merging contemporary work on reflection in teaching with philosophical work on phronesis. The article concludes with an account of the value and utility of conceptualizing reflection as phronesis.*

Keywords: *reflection;* phronesis*; ethics; virtue theory*

The conceptualization of reflection in teaching has expanded and developed in many ways since the 1980s when it first became a prevalent construct in teaching and teacher education. Much of the early theoretical work on reflection (Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1983, 1987; van Manen, 1977) remains a solid and salient foundation for more current research. However, after many years of work, the concept of reflection is still an amorphous, loosely aligned group of perspectives. Although the dominance of this explicitly perspective-driven way of thinking about reflection implies that reflection in teaching is whatever a (reflective) person makes of it, the very existence of this body of research implies something else—that there is an idea of reflection in teaching that can be distinguished from other ideas about teaching. There must be something that holds this body of research together.

The purpose of this article is to describe a paradigm of reflection that explicitly synthesizes varied perspectives of reflection into a coherent, multifaceted model. This approach differs significantly from those of other authors in that it does not offer yet another perspective on reflection nor does it critique the body of previously constructed perspectives to build a new and improved model in its place. If any critique can be offered, it is the rather mundane criticism that the previously constructed perspectives are incomplete. The value of this model is that it takes a synthetic rather than analytic approach to the issue. Recall the ancient Indian fable of the blind men and the elephant. One man, feeling the elephant's trunk, said it was a snake. Another, feeling its tusk, claimed it was a spear. Still another, feeling the elephant's leg, declared it was a tree. Although various parts of the elephant had important similarities with a snake, a spear, and a tree, the animal as a whole was something essentially different. Likewise, even though many different elements of reflection can be identified, reflection itself is essentially different from any one of them.

The model I propose is grounded in the ancient conception of virtue, which was given its first systematic development by Aristotle. In

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the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1999), Aristotle argues that moral value is located primarily within a person in a certain set of character traits known as the virtues. He describes one of these virtues in particular—*phronesis*—as a unifying and essential habit of the mind. In what follows, I shall argue that this virtue embodies the many perspectives and elements of reflection that have been developed in the literature. Just as the mysterious and complex creature encountered by the blind men in the fable was essentially an elephant, reflection, I believe, is more than the sum of its parts; it is essentially the virtue phronesis.

Again, the key criticism of previous conceptions of reflection is that they are incomplete, representing elements of reflection without encompassing the whole. As a virtue, phronesis is essentially moral. Previous conceptions of reflection have considered its moral implications and inferences but have stopped short of claiming that reflection is essentially of moral value. Beginning with Dewey's (1933) descriptions of the moral dispositions of wholeheartedness, openmindedness, and responsibility, which he holds necessary for reflective thought, and moving through the development of critical reflection and its moral implications (E. W. Ross & Hannay, 1986; Zeichner & Liston, 1985), many moral aspects of reflection have been explored. However, reflection itself has been characterized as morally neutral (Korthagen, 1985; LaBoskey, 1989; Taggart & Wilson, 1998). The model of reflection being built here differs in that its essence is moral; in particular, it is essentially the virtue phronesis.

The following four sections will each review a quality of phronesis as it appears in philosophical literature and then merge this philosophical thought with contemporary work on reflection in teaching. Following, an account of the value and utility of conceptualizing reflection as phronesis will be presented.

PHRONESIS AND STATES OF MIND

Aristotle (1999) defines *phronesis* as "a state of grasping the truth, involving reason, concerned with action about things that are good or bad for a human being" (p. 89). *Phronesis* has been translated as *practical intelligence*, *practical wisdom*, or *prudence*, which involves "knowing how to apply general principles in particular situations. . . . It is the ability to act so that principle will take a concrete form" (MacIntyre, 1966, p. 74). In the work of Aquinas (1966), phronesis is described as "right reasoning about what is to be done" (p. 73).

As a virtue of the mind, phronesis is different from a state of mind, a process of thinking, or a way of knowing. Aristotle draws this distinction by contrasting phronesis with other mental states. The first of these is *episteme*, translated *scientific knowledge*, which Aristotle considers to be about things that are necessarily true and which "does not even admit of being otherwise" (Aristotle, 1999, p. 88). In contemporary work, episteme is considered to be a form of expert propositional knowledge, which is claimed to be true, provable, or at least consistent with a given theory, formulated in abstract terms, fully cognitive, and transmittable from one person to another (Kessels & Korthagen, 1996, p. 18). Episteme is the form of knowledge taken by educational theory.

Second, Aristotle (1999) distinguishes phronesis from *techne*, translated *craft* or *craft knowledge*, "a state involving true reason concerned with production" (p. 88). In teaching, techne is the condition of possessing knowledge about the means to reach a given end—for example, how to increase students' test scores or how to maintain an orderly classroom. Techne does not deal with the nature of the goal, only with the most effective means to reach the goal. In fact, Aristotle does not even consider techne to be a virtue because "there is virtue [or vice in the use] of craft" (p. 90). In other words, techne can be used to promote moral or immoral ends, so it has no intrinsic moral value itself.

Techne is similar to van Manen's (1977) first level of reflectivity—technical rationality—which he identifies with empirical-analytic science:

> Empirical-analytic science develops theoretic knowledge such as a behavioral theory of learning that is, for purposes of practical action, technically exploitable. In other words, if theory can explain and predict learning to take place under controlled and

> controllable conditions, then this theory can be put to practical use *in making students learn*. (p. 225)

Van Manen points out that this way of thinking about teaching and learning is limited:

> This instrumental-practical preoccupation of curriculum prevents more consequential questions from being asked: the question of determining what is, in fact, most worth the students' while, with respect both to purposes and experiences provided by the curriculum. Empirical-analytic science cannot deal with the issue of worthwhileness of educational objectives or with the quality of educational experience. (p. 209)

In contrast to episteme and techne, phronesis is "a state of grasping the truth, involving reason, concerned with action about what is good or bad for a human being" (Aristotle, 1999, p. 89). Furthermore,

> prudence, by contrast, is about human concerns, about things open to deliberation. For we say that deliberating well is the function of the prudent person more than anyone else; but no one deliberates about things that cannot be otherwise [the domain of episteme] or about things lacking any goal that is a good achievable in action [the domain of techne]. . . . Nor is prudence about universals only [again, the domain of episteme]. It must also acquire knowledge of particulars, since it is concerned with action and action is about particulars. (Aristole, 1999, pp. 91-92)

In an educational context, Kessels and Korthagen (1996) explain that phronesis has to do with "the understanding of specific concrete cases and complex or ambiguous situations" (p. 19). Phronesis is situated in the particulars of a specific time and place and is concerned with specific events and persons. Episteme, in the form of educational theory can inform phronesis, but phronesis is not the simple application of educational theory, for educational situations are much too complex, ambiguous, and unpredictable to comply with an algorithmic application of educational theory. The knowing and thinking that phronesis calls for is concerned foremost with the particulars of the situation. This quality of phronesis is echoed in Schön's (1992) seminal work on reflection, in which he coins the terms *knowing-in-action*, *reflection-in-action*, and *conversation with the situation* to characterize the process of reflection.

A mental state that Aristotle (1986) describes in another work, *De Anima*, is *phantasia*, translated *imagination*. As is the case with episteme and techne, phantasia is distinct from phronesis; however, phantasia is an important contributor to phronesis. Noel (1999) makes three points about this relationship. First, through phantasia, teachers are able mentally to produce and compare possibilities for the future as they consider the different ends that may be achieved in their teaching so they may choose the goals that most promote human good. Furthermore, phantasia enables teachers to identify the particulars of real situations as promoting or hindering the moral good. Finally, phantasia is most actively linked to phronesis when teachers remain openminded to the possibilities that phantasia provides. Although Noel focuses on the mental processes involved in phronesis, she does recognize phronesis as an element of moral character and not simply a morally neutral form of thinking. In fact, Noel identifies these relationships between phronesis and phantasia to broaden a previously presented conception of phronesis as a practical syllogism (Fenstermacher, 1986), which was criticized as too narrow to capture the complexities of interactive teacher thinking.

Resonating this work of Noel on phronesis and phantasia, contemporary writers have explored the relationships between reflection and other affective and cognitive mental states and qualities. For example, LaBoskey (1989) worked with a group of preservice teachers who exemplified qualities consistent with reflection. Besides possessing the general qualities of wholeheartedness, openmindedness, and responsibility (Dewey, 1933), she found that her "alert novices" were self-confident, had a "passionate creed" that they sought to follow in their teaching, and tended to ask "why" questions as well as "what" and "how" questions. Korthagen (2001) found that in the development of reflection, a sense of personal safety is important for preservice teachers to learn to take responsibility and that doubt is a starting point for teachers to begin to inquire into educational theory for help. Reflection is also enhanced by a depth of content knowledge and

a breadth of understanding of what is happening in the classroom (Houston & Clift, 1990). On the negative side, in an examination of impediments to reflective teaching, Cole (1997) identifies how anxiety, fear, helplessness, loneliness, meaninglessness, and hostility are constructed in the culture of schools. Teachers who have come to possess these dispositions are prevented from being fully reflective.

Much of the contemporary research on reflection has focused on the thinking and knowing of educators, analyzing these constructs in an attempt to describe the cognitive aspects of reflective thinking. Indeed, as Cole (1997) points out, the study of teacher reflection originated in the field of teacher thinking. Some researchers (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Zeichner & Liston, 1985) analyze the content of reflective thinking using a type of hierarchy that is similar to van Manen's (1977) three categories of technical rationality, practical reflection, and critical reflection. Others explore the developmental processes of growth in reflective thinking (Kitchener & King, 1981; D. D. Ross, 1989; Valli, 1997). Korthagen (2001) extends the model of reflection as a systematic, rational, language-based, decision-making process to include nonrational, gestalt-type thinking as an important and prevalent way that reflective teachers think.

Reflective thinking is a necessary component of reflection, but it is not sufficient. Even Dewey (1933), who wrote perhaps the most commonly cited definition of reflective thinking—"active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends"(p. 9)—maintains that being reflective involves more than thinking reflectively. Although reflection is driven by reflective thought on what is good and how to achieve it, reflection includes attitudes and actions as well for "there can be no such thing as reflective morality where there is not solicitude for the ends to which action is directed" (Dewey, 1932, p. 30). Similarly, Korthagen (1985) characterizes reflection as a cycle of thinking and acting—the ALACT model—consisting of the following five phases: action, looking back on the action, awareness of essential aspects, creating alternative methods of action, and trial. Schön (1983, 1987) builds a model of reflection in which knowing and thinking are inextricably bound up in action, emphasizing the terms *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action*.

Just as an analysis of the intellectual states related to phronesis plays a significant role in Aristotle's and others' descriptions of phronesis, research on reflective thinking comprises a substantial portion of the work on reflection. However, its prevalence should not be taken to imply that thinking and knowing are the whole of reflection or even its heart. A distinction must be made between reflection and reflective thinking. Although the term *reflection* is often used to describe the mental action of thinking reflectively, the cognitive aspects of reflection are only a part of the whole picture.

PHRONESIS AND ACTIONS

Virtue-centered ethics holds that moral value is centered within a person who is performing moral actions rather than within the actions themselves, a subtle yet important distinction. Actions are related to virtue, but they are secondary to and derive from virtue as indications and natural outgrowths of a virtuous character. If moral actions are not present, then one can say that moral virtue is not being expressed. Aristotle (1999) draws the following analogy:

> The many, however, do not do these [virtuous] actions. They take refuge in arguments, thinking that they are doing philosophy, and that this is the way to become excellent people. They are like a sick person who listens attentively to the doctor, but acts on none of his instructions. Such a course of treatment will not improve the state of the sick person's body; any more than will the many improve the state of their souls by this attitude to philosophy. (p. 22)

As a virtue, then, reflection is centered in the personal character of the individual, but it is expressed in actions such as critically evaluating instructional goals, caring for students, and ensuring just treatment for students, families, and colleagues.

In a book published 15 years after his earlier influential paper, van Manen (1991) calls the

capacity for virtuous, thoughtful action *pedagogical tact*, a moral way of being with children, which, in many ways, closely resembles the virtue of phronesis. "To exercise tact means to *see* a situation calling for sensitivity, to *understand* the meaning of what is seen, to *sense the significance* of this situation, and to actually *do* something right" (p. 146). This seeing, understanding, sensing, and doing are the actions that naturally flow from pedagogical tact. They are not pedagogical tact itself, but if none of these actions occur, one could say that the virtue of pedagogical tact is not present; pedagogically tactful action is an expression of the disposition of pedagogical tact. To use the language of Aristotle, the moral actions of teachers are expressions of virtue.

Not only does virtue give birth to action, action, in turn, builds virtue. Aristotle wrote that the way to become virtuous is to imitate a virtuous person. Eventually, the thoughtful performance of virtuous actions will lead to the development of virtue itself. This reciprocal relationship between virtue and action is elaborated by Dewey (1932) in *Theory of the Moral Life* in which he develops an ethical system he calls *reflective morality*. In this system, reflection is the central virtue that cements the relationship between action and character. He argues that every action, even a seemingly trivial action, is potentially of moral import because it is connected to other actions. Actions join together to form conduct; thus, no action stands alone. Conduct, in turn, leaves an "enduring impress" (p. 13) on the character of the actor. More important than an action itself is the lasting impression it leaves on character, for actions bound together into conduct are what form the habits of character. Furthermore, habit is not simply a tendency to repeat certain actions. In fact, habit "reaches even more significantly down into the very structure of the self" (p. 13).

In turn, the habitual nature of character leads to

> the permanence of the personal disposition which is the real cause of the outer acts and of their resemblance to one another. Acts are not linked up together to form conduct in and of themselves, but because of their common relation to an enduring and single condition—the self or character as the abiding unity in which different acts leave their lasting traces. (Dewey, 1932, pp. 13, 14)

Thus, "conduct and character are strictly correlative" (p. 15). In Dewey's system, reflection guides an individual into virtue, and virtue is expressed in virtuous action. Reflection is not an action itself; rather, it leads to actions, and actions, in turn, lead to the establishment of moral character, including the virtue of reflection.

In the work of Dewey on reflective morality, the work of Schön on reflection-in-action, and Korthagen's ALACT model of reflection, action is a necessary component of reflection. The conceptualization of reflection as phronesis adds clarity to the nature of the relationship between reflection and actions—that is, actions are derived from reflection, and reflection is built through the practice of reflective actions. Furthermore, the commonalities shared by the relationship between action and reflection and the relationship between action and phronesis support the identification of reflection as phronesis.

PHRONESIS AND PRINCIPLES

All but the most technical conceptions of reflection (see Cruickshank, 1985) hold that the application of theory, rules, principles, skills, and procedures do not constitute reflection. Particular teaching contexts are much too complex and specific to confine reflection to the application of principles and regulations. In fact, the limitations of principles and regulations are just what make reflection important. Rather than defining a specific situation as a simple instance of an abstract principle, reflection begins with the concrete intricacies of the characters and histories of the persons involved. Of course, a reflective teacher learns from past experiences and comes into a situation with expectations and anticipations but not with a rigid mental rule book, for

> what we do depends not upon rules, or at least not wholly on rules—not upon a prior determination of what is fair or equitable—but upon a constellation of conditions that is viewed through both the eyes of the one-caring and the eyes of the cared-for. (Noddings, 1984, p. 13)

Although principles are not equivalent to reflection, principles are relevant to reflection. For instance, key principles of educational theories, such as constructivism or critical theory, can be derived by means of reflection. Conversely, principles can be used to teach, define, or point the way to reflection, as a teacher who studies a book on constructivist approaches to teaching mathematics may develop in reflection as well as in knowledge of constructivist principles. Even Cruickshank's (1985) strategies for developing reflection, which have been criticized for being oriented toward technical and narrow questions of teaching (Gore, 1987), can be characterized as a scaffolding, "a basis for providing tools which will enable other forms of reflection to develop" (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p. 35).

Moral principles are important in a morally dilemmatic situation or in a conflict that must be resolved by a third party. As in Habermas's (1990) discourse ethics, principles of justice are important when the values of different groups conflict. In educational institutions, principles of justice may promote fairness in situations of conflict, especially when the moral habit of fairness is not being expressed by one or more participants in the conflict. Virtue is still central, however, because a commitment to a core of moral dispositions makes such a moral conflict approachable, allowing participants to identify personal bias and make sound judgments (Jordan & Meara, 1990; Zeichner & Liston, 1987). A commitment to the virtue of reflection enables educators to examine and evaluate conflicting beliefs "in light of the grounds that support [them] and the further conclusions to which [they] tend" (Dewey, 1933, p. 9) so that difficult moral problems can be analyzed and resolved more clearly than would be the case if the participants' thinking were habitually rigid, superficial, or careless.

One of the criticisms commonly leveled at virtue-centered ethics is that it is a system that is too vague, too subject to interpretation, not easily enough pinned down, and thus, not useful in resolving complicated moral dilemmas or identifying appropriate moral actions and solutions (Pojman, 1990). Indeed, the primacy of virtues may appear to preclude the process of analyzing varying perspectives and arguing for logical conclusions to a morally complex situation. Instead, if someone were to ask, "What should I do?" a virtue-centered ethicist would reply, "Do what a virtuous person would do." The questioner may respond, "Who is the virtuous person?" which would be answered, "The person who does what is right." Although this imprecision is often regarded as a limitation of the virtue-centered approach, proponents of virtue-centered ethics view it as a strength for it accurately reflects the uncertainties involved in living a moral life.

Reflection, similarly, is not easily pinned down. In fact, educators have spent more than two decades just trying to describe it. Nevertheless, it is embodied in the reflective educator. A student teacher may ask, "What is the reflective thing to do?" to which a reflective teacher educator would reply, "Do what a reflective teacher would do." The student teacher responds, "Who is the reflective teacher?" which is answered, "The teacher who practices reflectively." As unsatisfying as this dialogue may be to some searching for a precise mapping out of the domain of reflection (not to mention the student teacher looking for a quick answer), it is nevertheless expressive of the obscure nature that is shared by reflection and phronesis.

PHRONESIS AS A UNIFYING VIRTUE

Aristotle (1999) presents phronesis as the keystone of all virtues, a virtue of thought that is essential for the development and maintenance of a person's moral character. In fact, he argues that "we cannot be fully good without prudence or prudent without virtue of character" (p. 99). The unity of actions, motivations, and dispositions is central in virtue-centered ethics; moral goodness is conceived of as a holistic way of being. In Aristotle's description of specific virtues, phronesis functions as a unifying concept, necessary and sufficient for a person to be considered fully virtuous, "for one has all the virtues if and only if one has prudence, which is a single state" (p. 99). In other words, phronesis both requires and encompasses other virtues of character. MacIntyre (1966) explains,

> Without it [prudence] . . . one cannot be virtuous. . . . A man may have excellent principles, but not act on them. Or he may perform just or courageous actions, but not be just or courageous, having acted through fear of punishment, say. In each case he lacks prudence, . . . the virtue which is manifested in acting so that one's adherence to other virtues is exemplified in one's actions. (p. 74)

Just as phronesis is necessary for complete virtue, virtues of character, such as bravery and generosity, are necessary for phronesis. Whereas phronesis ensures correct reasoning about particular actions, virtues of character ensure that the ends to which those actions are directed are good. For instance, the reasoning of a cowardly person will be distorted by cowardice, and the reasoning of an avaricious person will be influenced by greed. Conversely, a person with fully developed moral dispositions, including bravery and generosity, will not entertain reasoning about cowardly, greedy, or other immoral ends. In other words, an individual's goals are morally good only if the individual is virtuous. Thus, the virtuous person is one whose moral character embodies both moral values and correct reasoning, accompanied by appropriate actions. "The decision will not be correct without prudence or without virtue—for [virtue] makes us achieve the end, whereas [prudence] makes us achieve the things that promote the end" (Aristotle, 1999, p. 99). In the writings of Aristotle (1999), phronesis is the "eye of the soul" (p. 98) on which the quality of a person's character depends.

Just as phronesis is essential for virtue of character and virtue of character is essential for phronesis, reflection is inextricably bound together with other moral dispositions. This reciprocal relationship precludes the possibility of reflection toward immoral ends because a reflective person would necessarily possess the virtues of character that ensure that reflection considers virtuous goals.

This unity can be found in Dewey's (1933) writing on reflection, where actions, attitudes, habits, and thinking are inseparably intertwined. For instance, in *How We Think*, along with a discussion of the rational processes and phases involved in reflective thinking, Dewey devotes attention to three attitudes that he calls "essential constituents of the general readiness" (p. 34) for reflective thinking: openmindedness, wholeheartedness, and responsibility. Dewey recognizes these and other moral dispositions as crucial for reflective thinking, so important to the development of reflection that Dewey declares,

> If we were compelled to make a choice between these personal attitudes and knowledge about the principles of logical reasoning together with some degree of technical skill in manipulating special logical processes, we should decide for the former. Fortunately no such choice has to be made, because there is no opposition between personal attitudes and logical processes. We only need to bear in mind that, with respect to the aims of education, no separation can be made between impersonal, abstract principles of logic and moral qualities of character. What is needed is to weave them into unity. (p. 34)

Zagzebski's (1996) examination of the theoretical importance of phronesis in a virtue-centered theory of ethics further clarifies the nature of the unity between reflection and other virtues of character. She argues that one function of phronesis is to determine the virtuous mean in particular concrete cases. For instance, phronesis is needed to tell how much evidence is enough to support a belief. If a person believes a claim on too little evidence or requires an excessive amount of evidence before believing a claim, then this person is at the extreme of deficiency or excess when it comes to a virtue of intellectual carefulness. The practical wisdom of phronesis is necessary to find the virtuous mean in a variety of contexts in which the mean will vary depending on the particulars of the situation and the people who are involved. "It takes phronesis to know *how persevering* one should be to be persevering, *how careful* one should be to be careful, *how self-sufficient* one should be to be autonomous" (p. 221).

Likewise, phronesis is needed to determine the virtuous mean in educational contexts—for instance, in regard to Dewey's recommended attitudes of wholeheartedness, openmindedness, and responsibility. These attitudes are virtues of character that are means between extremes, and phronesis is the intellectual virtue that enables a person to find these virtuous means in the contexts of particular situations.

First, wholeheartedness is a genuine, consistent, and continuous devotion to an idea or interest, which "buoys [the] mind up and gives an onward impetus to thinking" (Dewey, 1933, p. 32). Furthermore,

> sincerity is another name for the same quality, for it signifies that devotion to an object is unmixed and undiluted. . . . Wholeheartedness is something quite different from immediate enthusiasm and ardor, . . . for it requires consistency, continuity, and community of purpose and effort. (Dewey, 1932, pp. 113-114)

If a person is deficient in wholeheartedness, we would say this person is apathetic. Certainly, teachers face the risk of becoming apathetic when, for instance, chronic constraints diminish teaching into a tedious, monotonous, and exhausting technical activity. If a person possesses an excess of wholeheartedness, we would say this person is obsessive. Exceedingly intense teachers experience difficulty letting go of teaching concerns, such as the needs of their students, the effectiveness of their teaching, or the opinions of their colleagues. When wholeheartedness becomes obsession, it pushes a teacher's life out of balance and risks a self-centered view of teaching. Phronesis enables a teacher to find the means of wholeheartedness, avoiding a fall into apathy and, at the same time, maintaining a healthy and realistic perspective on one's vocation and importance.

Second, Dewey (1933) describes openmindedness as "freedom from prejudice, partisanship, and such other habits as close the mind and make it unwilling to consider new problems and entertain new ideas" (p. 30). Dewey lists three hindrances to openmindedness: mental sluggishness, self-conceit, and unconscious fears. If a person is excessively openminded, we would say this person is impulsive—too enchanted by new possibilities, too ready to advocate change, too distracted by novelty. An impulsive teacher unreflectively embraces new strategies, materials, and ideas simply because they are new. Conversely, if a person is deficient in openmindedness, we would say this person is close-minded or rigid, unquestioningly maintaining the status quo, suspicious of anything new simply because it is new, "guided primarily by tradition, external authority, and circumstance" (Zeichner & Liston, 1987). The routine-bound teacher may teach the same curriculum in the same way year after year despite cultural shifts and students' changing needs, resisting the possibility that new ideas may be warranted. Indeed, Dewey writes that one value of reflective thought is that

> it emancipates us from merely impulsive and merely routine activity. Put in positive terms, [reflective] thinking enables us to direct our activities with foresight and to plan according to ends-in-view, or purposes of which we are aware. It enables us to act in deliberate and intentional fashion to attain future objects or to come into command of what is now distant and lacking. . . . It converts action that is merely appetitive, blind, and impulsive into intelligent action. (Dewey, 1933, p. 17)

In other words, phronesis enables a teacher to hold to the mean of openmindedness and avoid the extremes of impulsiveness and rigidity.

Finally, Dewey (1933) describes intellectual responsibility as the quality that secures integrity, consistency, and harmony in belief. "To be intellectually responsible is to consider the consequences of a projected step; it means to be willing to adopt these consequences when they follow reasonably from any position already taken" (p. 32). Obviously, the deficiency of responsibility is irresponsibility. An irresponsible teacher may, for example, treat students inconsistently, use forms of discipline that produce undesirable long-term effects, or choose instructional strategies that undermine students' development. The excess of responsibility would be undue control, not only of the teacher's own beliefs and actions but also those of others, including students, parents, and colleagues. Phronesis is needed for a teacher to understand the consequences of beliefs and follow through with appropriate actions without unnecessarily restricting the freedom of self and others.

The second function of phronesis, according to Zagzebski (1996), is to mediate between conflicting virtues. For instance, a particular situation may have some features that call for fairness and others that call for compassion.

Phronesis is necessary to choose between or somehow combine these two virtues. Imagine a teacher who has a stated policy of informing a student's parent when the student breaks classroom rules frequently or egregiously. The teacher has followed this policy consistently throughout the school year. However, the teacher believes that a parent of one student responds inappropriately when notified of misbehavior. How should the teacher handle the misbehavior of this student? How should the teacher communicate with this parent? How should the teacher deal with the stated policy? In this case, phronesis mediates between fairness and compassion, considering these particular individuals, these particular relationships, and these particular events.

Zagzebski (1996) writes that the third function of phronesis is to "coordinate various virtues into a single line of action or line of thought leading up to an act, in the first case, or a belief, in the second" (p. 224). This function of phronesis is reminiscent of Dewey's notion of intellectual responsibility as described above. This is a specific example of the reciprocal relationship between phronesis and a virtue of character. As the moral virtue of responsibility is essential for phronesis, phronesis, in turn, ensures responsibility. To paraphrase Zagzebski (p. 224), on a typical day, a teacher may encounter propositions about such diverse matters as the consequences of various school budget initiatives, the guilt or innocence of an accused playground aggressor, the trustworthiness of an administrator, the place of phonics in reading instruction, and the weather forecast on a field trip day. To be honest, there may be no available necessarily conclusive evidence for most positions on these matters. Many human activities, teaching and learning foremost among them, "can be neither fully described nor evaluated in terms of the following of a set of known procedures or rules" (p. 225). In fulfilling this function, phronesis allows teachers to "learn how and when to trust certain feelings, and they develop habits of attitude and feeling that enable them to reliably make good judgments without being aware of following a procedure" (p. 226), guiding virtues of character and virtues of thought into virtuous actions in a wide variety and large number of concrete situations. Phronesis, therefore, is a unifying virtue, pervading all other virtues and requiring all other virtues.

THE VALUE OF PHRONESIS

No doubt the construct of reflection has been helpful in teacher education. What good would it do to retool reflection as phronesis? In my own work, this change has fueled my thinking and has sharpened the focus of my practice in four recognizable ways.

First, consideration of phronesis has required that I recognize and validate the personal elements of teaching (Birmingham, 2003). Although institutional policies, state requirements, and federal programs create much of the context and constraints of teaching and learning in schools and universities, much of what happens in schools happens in the personal interactions among teachers and students. Likewise, much of what happens in the development of a teacher is more akin to personal development than professional development. I recall a student teacher sitting in my office and sobbing after receiving a poor evaluation: "All these things I got marked down for are part of my personality. I don't feel like a bad teacher. I feel like a bad person!" The very word *reflection* is a metaphor that suggests an act of private, personal, and intimate examination of oneself in a mirror. Thus, phronesis has the potential to broaden the moral vision of teaching to include explicitly the personal as well as the institutional.

Second, phronesis recognizes the importance of community in teacher education and school settings. According to Aristotle, a virtuous life is necessary for a happy life, and living a happy and virtuous life depends a great deal on the community in which one lives. In fact, the work traditionally titled *Nicomachean Ethics* is declared by Aristotle to be about politics, a description of the political and social structures that (in the context of the Greek city-state) are

important for human beings to live happy and virtuous lives. Just as ancient Greek politics was important for developing ancient Greek virtue, the educational community is essential for the development of reflection (Cinnamond & Zimphir, 1990). Teacher education communities can promote reflection in student teachers in many well-documented ways (Korthagen, 2001; Posner, 2000; Taggart & Wilson, 1998). School cultures can promote teachers' development of reflection as well. Unfortunately, Cole (1997) finds school working conditions to be just the opposite. "Listening to teachers talk about their work we hear frustration, anger, stress, despair, and weariness—states of mind prepared more for survival than deep thinking and learning" (p. 21). She calls for researchers of teaching to collaborate with teachers and become advocates for institutional changes that will promote rather than inhibit reflection. Thus, even though reflection is fundamentally a personal virtue, it can thrive only in a supportive community.

Third, in a time when success in education is often reduced to a quantifiable measurement, the consideration of phronesis reminds me, as it may other educators and policy makers, that "measurable outcomes may be the least significant results of learning" (McNeil, 1986). Because phronesis is explicitly a complex personal virtue bound to the particulars of situations and embedded in a community, it resists being reduced to a concrete measure of certainty. As Pieper (1966) explains, "The prudent man does not expect certainty where it cannot exist, nor on the other hand does he deceive himself by false certainties" (p. 18). Reflection is not a technical skill that can be institutionalized conveniently or formatted into a checklist. In fact, in the accountability-oriented schooling system, reflection "has garnered little institutional support as a legitimate form of professional development, possibly because it is more difficult to control" (Cole, 1997, p. 17). Difficult to control as it is, phronesis is essential to a morally responsive educational system.

Fourth, if reflection is identified as phronesis, abstract concepts translate quickly into important practical concerns that pervade my work as a teacher educator. Foremost, how shall we promote phronesis? Aristotle proposed that the way to become virtuous is to observe a virtuous person and imitate virtuous ways of being. Teacher educators, then, must provide that model for, as E. W. Ross and Hannay (1986) challenge, "If university instructors, while overtly advocating reflective inquiry, model passive and expository instructional techniques, then how can change be facilitated?" (p. 12). In teacher education, the construction of knowledge—and, likewise, the promotion of phronesis—happens largely through modeling. Classroom interactions, interpretations of written texts, conferences with student teachers, and relationships with students and colleagues are all opportunities to model phronesis in a way that is explicit and accessible to student teachers. Being a model of phronesis is a tall moral order, resistant to institutional mandate and even to institutional suggestion, but perhaps it is within the bounds of institutional support. If teacher educators are responsible for creating the community in which phronesis may develop, teacher educators, in turn, benefit when the university community supports its own development of phronesis by providing the freedom, security, time, and space to take risks and ask important questions.

As always, a most important question regarding the value of any educational concept is Will it improve the quality of schooling for children and youth? Although it may be possible to garner evidence for the value of phronesis through empirical studies, I believe that the most compelling argument for the value of phronesis is philosophical. As the purpose of morality is to promote human welfare, the purpose of phronesis in this context is to promote the welfare of all involved in teaching and learning. In a time when society's moral questions are polarizing, emotionally laden, and associated with partisan politics, phronesis speaks as an alternative voice for the place of ethics in education.

Phronesis is not a moral panacea. It will not obliterate moral dilemmas, erase moral quandaries, or undo the damage that has been caused by immoral or incompetent decisions.

However, the moral complexity of teaching requires phronesis to achieve moral goodness, promote excellence in teaching and learning, and advance human flourishing. Reflection—as phronesis—is both essentially moral and morally essential.

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