

Thinking Tools for Teaching Ethics Across the Curriculum

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Abstract:

Learning how to teach ethics may be one of the more important elements of a teacher's professional development. In an environment, such as primary and secondary schools, where the aim is a comprehensive education it makes sense to teach ethics in each of the curriculum areas. Teaching ethics across the curriculum is an idea whose time has come. But, is it worth doing, what outcomes can we realistically expect, and how do we teach it best? This paper puts the case for teaching moral thinking in the context of critical thinking generally. That is, we should teach people HOW to think, not WHAT to think.

With ethical decision-making as part of our critical thinking toolkit, we can challenge the dominance of instrumental reason - the sort of thinking that simply solves the problem of HOW something can be done. That sort of thinking is necessary, but is not sufficient.

The paper first discusses some of the evidence demonstrating that teaching ethics using philosophical tools is worthwhile before canvassing some questions on outcomes and offering a rough guide on this.

The paper argues that moral education should be reflective, should take account of recent work in brain and learning theory and should develop tools suitable for a range of thinking preferences. To this end, the paper emphasises the processes involved in thinking ethically and offers some philosophical tools that may be useful in a range of classroom situations. Chief among the tools is a set of graphic organisers that focus on the process of ethical decision-making. These graphic organisers will be the core of the workshop that accompanies the paper.