

Educational Ethics: A Field-Launching Conference

Harvard Graduate School of Education

May 1-2, 2020

THURSDAY, APRIL 30: Pre-Conference Setting the Stage

- 9:30-3:30 **Graduate student workshop** (led by Randall Curren and Harry Brighthouse)
- 4:30-6:00 **HGSE Centennial Askwith Forum: Higher Education Ethics in a Global Context** (Invitees: Elizabeth Kiss, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and Beverly Daniel Tatum)
- 7:00-9:00 **Welcome dinner** for Askwith Forum speakers + conference panelists who are available + graduate fellows

FRIDAY, MAY 1: Defining the Space

- 8:15-9:00 **Breakfast + Registration**
- 9:00-9:30 **Welcome and Framing the Conference**
- 9:30-11:00 **Framing Educational Ethics**
What are some key questions in educational ethics that parents, policy makers, school and district leaders, university leaders and faculty, and/or teachers have been contending with? Why aren't they sufficiently answered by more general moral and political philosophy, by extant philosophy of education, or by codes of professional ethics? What would be helpful?
- Neema Avashia, Eighth Grade Civics Teacher, Boston Public Schools
Yuli Tamir, President, Shenkar College, Tel Aviv
John Silvanus Wilson, Senior Advisor and Strategist to the President, Harvard University; 11th President, Morehouse College
Terri Wilson, Assistant Professor in the School of Education, UC-Boulder
Moderator: Meira Levinson, Professor of Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education
- 11:00-11:30 **Break**
- 11:30-1:00 **Educational Ethics in Context 1: Schools and universities in society**
How should we think about educational ethics in relation to other social institutions such as politics or economics, and in relation to the historical and cultural context in which educational institutions are constructed and sit? When and how is it appropriate to take the larger context for granted (as much as we may wish it were different) and figure out the ethical demands for educators, schools, educational systems, etc. within that context? Alternatively, when and how

should we challenge or question the context itself in considering questions of educational ethics? Relatedly, what defines an ethical question as “educational” rather than economic, political, sociological, or more broadly one of social justice?

Danielle Allen, James Bryant Conant University Professor and Director, Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics, Harvard University

Jarvis Givens, Assistant Professor of Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education

Jal Mehta, Professor of Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education

Gina Schouten, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Harvard University

Moderator: Lawrence Blum, Distinguished Professor of Liberal Arts and Education and Professor of Philosophy, UMass Boston

1:00-2:15 **Lunch**

2:15-3:45 **Educational Ethics in Context 2: Schools and children**

How should we think about educational ethics in relation to other (perhaps broader, perhaps more narrow) ethical quandaries related to caring for and supporting children in their development? To what extent are schools simply one of many places in which ethical questions about paternalism, rights to child rearing, adaptive preferences, childhood goods, etc., play out? Is it even possible to theorize about educational ethics prior to having a well-developed ethics of childhood? Alternatively, are there some kinds of questions—say, focused on the aims of education or policies around inclusion—that are either specific to educational ethics or at least not confined to/entailed by childhood ethics? How do changing notions of childhood itself impact our framing of and answers to these questions?

Harry Brighouse, Mildred Fish Harnack Professor of Philosophy and Carol Dickson Bascom Professor of the Humanities, UW-Madison

Paula Fass, Margaret Byrne Professor of History Emerita, UC-Berkeley

Tamar Schapiro, Associate Professor of Philosophy, MIT

Moderator: Winston Thompson, Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Studies, The Ohio State University

3:45-4:15 **Break**

4:15-5:45 **Professional Ethics**

Under what circumstances, if any, have professional ethics in other fields been powerful and positive levers for change? Under what circumstances, if any, have professional ethics in other fields made those fields worse? What impediments should educational ethicists be aware of, and what opportunities should they seize? Should we reconceive the relationship between ethics and the professions altogether—and if so, what would that look like?

Howard Gardner, Hobbs Research Professor of Cognition and Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education

Kathy Pham, Fellow, Berkman-Klein Center for Internet and Society, Harvard University

Susan Reverby, Marion Butler McLean Professor Emerita in the History of Ideas and
Professor Emerita of Women's and Gender Studies, Wellesley College

David Wilkins, Lester Kissel Professor of Law and Director, Center on the Legal
Profession, Harvard Law School

Moderator: Randall Curren, Professor of Philosophy and Chair of the Department,
University of Rochester

6:30-9:00 **Dinner for Speakers + Grad Student workshop participants**

SATURDAY, MAY 2: New Directions

There are numerous topics in educational ethics that have been well-defined and (at least fairly) well studied: e.g. aims of education, ethics of confessional religious education, equal vs. adequate distribution of educational resources or outcomes, policies around diversity and inclusion, compulsory attendance policies, regulation of public and private schools, education vs. indoctrination, and teacher and student speech (among many other topics). These topics remain important and continued scholarship in these areas is essential as both educational policy and political and moral philosophy continue to change, demanding new inquiries into old questions.

At the same time, there are other pathways—even possible whole subfields—within educational ethics that are only just starting to be identified and mapped. The purpose of today's panels is to travel down three such pathways. The first focuses on a set of practices that are only just coming into existence thanks to novel technologies. Although many of the ethical issues (e.g. ethics of surveillance, liberty, autonomy, state power) may already be well mapped, the specific forms they take are new. The second panel focuses on a concept (triage) that is well developed in medical ethics and bioethics but has barely appeared in the educational ethics literature despite the fact that students and even schools are regularly triaged, and have been so for generations. The problem is thus not new in practice, but it constitutes a potential new theoretical direction in educational ethics. Finally, the third panel takes an old problem—the question of who should exercise power over children's learning—that has also been the subject of robust theorizing with regard to the respective authority of the parent, state, and child. I suggest that the panel may provide us a new direction, however, as we grapple with the wide variety of additional actors that exercise practical (even if not legal) authority over children's education.

8:30-9:00 **Breakfast + Check-in**

9:00-10:15 **Educational Ethics in a Digital Age**

In what ways do digital technologies create new opportunities as well as new challenges for ethical decision making by educators and policymakers? How should we think about innovations such as algorithmic policy implementation, automated content analysis of student work, digital surveillance of students' and teachers' movements (e.g. RFIDs, facial recognition, eye tracking), integration of big data sets in education with social welfare or criminal justice data, and hyperpersonalized learning platforms? Are the questions raised by these technologies simply old ones in new wrapping, or does the digital revolution in education raise legitimately novel ethical risks and affordances? Furthermore, to what extent can answers to ethical

questions about algorithmic decision-making and big data use in other fields be applied directly to education, and to what extent does our ethical analysis need to be education-specific?

Benjamin Herold, Spencer Journalism Fellow, Columbia University and Staff Writer,
Education Week

Sarah Igo, Andrew Jackson Professor of History, Director of the Program in American
Studies, and Faculty Head, E. Bronson Ingram College, Vanderbilt University

Elizabeth Laird, Senior Fellow of Student Privacy, Center for Democracy and
Technology

Desmond Patton, Associate Professor of Social Work, Columbia School of Social Work

Moderator: TBD

10:15-10:45 **Break**

10:45-12:00 **Triage and Rationing**

The idea of triaging students (or teachers, schools, or districts) is anathema to educators and policy makers; the idea that “every child can learn” is a fundamental ethical commitment within education. At the same time, educators and policy makers triage on a regular basis. They decide to allow some students to keep their headphones on and their heads down on the desk so long as they don’t bother others, to assign strong teachers to AP classes and newbies or “burnouts” to the “low-level” classes, to spend resources on the “bubble kids” whose scores are just over or under a high-stakes cutoff and neglect those who are reliably on one side of the line or the other, to close schools that have been deemed “failing” or “underutilized,” to expel a child who seems to threaten other students’ well-being. How can work on triage and rationing in bioethics and medical ethics shed light on triage in education? What insights are gained, if any, from fleshing out the concept of triage in educational ethics?

Andrew Ho, Charles William Eliot Professor of Education, Harvard Graduate School of
Education

Jennifer L. Jennings, Professor of Sociology and Public Affairs, Woodrow Wilson School
and Director of the Education Research Section, Princeton University

Govind Persad, Assistant Professor, Sturm College of Law, University of Denver

Ashley Taylor, Assistant Professor of Educational Studies, Colgate University

Moderator: Sigal Ben-Porath, Professor of Education, Penn Graduate School of
Education

12:00-1:30 **Lunch + Optional Pedagogy Strand**

Facilitator: Jacob Fay, Postdoctoral Fellow, Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics, Harvard
University

1:30-2:45 **Beyond the State-Family-Child Triangle: What Roles Should Advocacy
Groups, Philanthropies, Unions, NGOs, and other bodies play?**

Philosophers have been concerned for centuries with the question of who should have the authority to direct children's learning: the family, the state, or the child him/her/themselves. In contemporary times, however, a much broader range of actors exercises significant power over the context, conditions, and circumstances of children's learning. These include large textbook and assessment publishers such as Pearson, philanthropies such as Gates and Broad, multinational organizations such as UNHCR for millions of migrant children, teachers' unions, and many others. How should we think about the ethical dimensions of these distributions of power? What are the philosophical and practical implications of expanding the analytic state-family-child "triangle" to include these other actors?

Sarah Dryden-Peterson, Associate Professor of Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education

Bruce Fuller, Professor of Education and Public Policy, UC-Berkeley

Emma Saunders-Hastings, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Ohio State University

Invited: Elisa Villanueva Beard, CEO, Teach for America

Moderator: Michael Hand, Professor of Philosophy of Education, University of Birmingham (England)

2:45-3:00 **Closing Remarks**

3:15-4:15 **Assessing Success and Failure (or Where Next?)**

Closed session for organizing committee + panelists + graduate fellows

Sunday and Monday, MAY 3-4: Moving Ahead

International Normative Case Study Workshop and Network Initiative

Sunday, May 3 @ 4 pm – Monday, May 4, ending at 3:30pm

This workshop and network initiative (which will require separate registration and a fee to cover costs) is designed to capitalize on the gathering of people from around the world at the Educational Ethics conference who are also interested in normative case study (NCS) research, writing, and teaching. Jacob Fay and Meira Levinson (in conjunction with some additional faculty TBD) will bring together people from U.S. and international contexts who are using NCS in their research and teaching. This initiative has three aims:

1. *Sharing*: How are people around the globe using normative case studies in their own research and classrooms?
2. *Skill Development*: What does it take to research and write effective normative case studies? How can normative case studies meet or expand the pedagogical aims of classrooms or professional development spaces?
3. *Networking*: What might an international network of NCS researchers, writers, and teachers look like/aim to do? What institutional supports could we develop?