EDITORIAL

Ethics in education

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As the idea of university education becomes more directly aligned to post-university employment (for better or for worse) questions of whether it is possible to teach capabilities like critical thinking, or ethical reflection and action, and how they might be taught, require new discussion. Such questions go to the heart of what a university education should be. Too great a focus on disciplinary content, knowledge acquisition, or the application of skills might become an instrumentalist form of higher education that does not condition students to be ethically or critically reflective. Some faculty, however, question whether teaching ethics (or indeed other general graduate capabilities) falls within their role as disciplinary experts.

In this issue of *JNUSTA* we directly address the question of teaching ethics in higher education. The centrepiece of the issue is an article by **Jeffrey Chan** concerning teaching ethics in architecture. Following Chan's article is a series of responses from faculty from different disciplines (medicine, engineering, education, business) to questions raised by Chan's article. What comes from the issue is a sense of the difficulties teaching ethics poses in the modern university, but also a rich sense of the possible strategies and approaches taken across the disciplines.

Implicit in the way we have structured this issue of *JNUSTA* around disciplinary responses is the question of the relationship between ethics (as a general category of human thought and action) and disciplinary specific thought and action. The great critical thinking debate that has been going on over the last thirty or more years in the USA as to whether critical thinking can be taught as a form of informal logic, or whether it can only be fostered within specific (disciplinary) forms of thinking, also applies to ethics. Indeed, as the lead article in this issue points out, ethics might be considered an advanced form of critical thinking. Perhaps the most significant question raised in the issue is just how ethics might be taught. Are there pedagogies that foster ethical reflection and decision-making, or even pedagogies that inhibit or preclude them?

Chan begins by considering the age-old question of whether virtue can be taught, and if so, whose responsibility it is. A general sense of virtue and ethics are seen as the responsibility of the family and religion. So what role does the specialised modern research university play in moral education? He also broaches the question of whether the claims of moral relativism arising from

contemporary social diversity and pluralism weaken any authority to teach ethics. Chan argues that in spite of the barriers, some form of ethical education is essential for future leaders who must advise others and judge competing claims. He further argues that teaching ethics within the discipline will help students address ethical questions they are not equipped to face from the perspective of traditional morality or norms. His final introductory point suggests that architecture students are both "interested and disposed to act morally, but they do not know how".

The body of Chan's article is a consideration of different approaches (or different teaching 'locations') for explicitly teaching ethics in architecture – the design studio, the professional practice seminar, and the design jury. These can offer both implicit and explicit ethical education, but which is most effective? The traditional design studio offers the opportunity for the student to resolve ethical issues in the process of working on design problems, but there remains a question as to whether ethical considerations remain tacit. Nevertheless, the design studio provides one way of students facing real-world ethical issues through the process of design.

He next turns to seminars on professional practice. Here, lectures on ethical practice occur, but a distinction needs to be made between professional codes of conduct and ethical reasoning. Drawing on Ryle's distinction between "knowing how" and "knowing that", he provides a number of reasons for suggesting that while professional codes of conduct are necessary in the student's understanding, they are not sufficient for the development of ethical thinking.

Finally, Chan considers the design jury, which he suggests is an as-yet unexplored location for the development of ethical reasoning. In the design jury, a panel of professors and external practitioners evaluate and judge students' designs. What this forum offers is an explicit, open and transparent approach to ethical issues. Chan proposes four pedagogical strategies that are necessary for teaching ethics through the design jury, and this includes the teacher's self-education.

In his response to Chan, **Ang Eng Tat** gives support to Chan's call for more explicit ethics education in architecture by acknowledging he had not previously thought of ethics as necessary to a school of architecture. His own disciplinary field, medicine, naturally invokes ethics because it deals with human life. Medical students are asked to think through scenarios that imitate real medical practice. Ethics are approached both through seminar presentations and case scenarios. Like Chan, Ang raises the issue of the need to raise students' awareness to ethical issues and increase their sensitivity to them. Students also learn through the modeling of teachers.

Laksh Samavedham outlines in his response to Chan how "professional, ethical and moral responsibility" are central to the requirements of the formal accreditation processes for the engineering curriculum. Samavedham further raises the important question of teaching students research integrity, and being honest and transparent with data. Here, ethics cannot be separated from the work of a sound engineer. He outlines other explicit approaches to teaching ethics and concludes that teaching ethics in engineering is ultimately both implicit and explicit.

Taking a broad view of values as influences by culture, tradition and religion, **Alex Ip** begins in his response to the question of how ethics could best be taught in schools by suggesting that teaching is about the development of the emotional and spiritual domains as well as about intellectual development. This leads him to argue against didactic/rote learning as a suitable way to teach ethics which must also be grounded in "concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation". Ip further argues strongly for the necessity of developing higher order thinking in students to enable them to make conscious ethical decisions. Ethical responsibility involves decision-making, rather than reflexive behaviour.

Cheah Kok Ming, like Chan, a teacher of architecture, believes that the question of ethics in architecture needs to be set in a broader perspective where morality influences design decisions which in turn are evaluated for their ethical outcomes. Cheah argues that first we must establish a framework for understanding ethical dimensions in architecture and design education. Ultimately, ethics must be taught explicitly, but Cheah believes that this requires rethinking the structure of the overall curriculum.

As with Ip's stress on higher-order decision-making, **Teo Chua Tee** places emphasis on the development of moral reasoning as an imperative in higher education. This requires an understanding of how human beings across the world are interconnected. Like Chan, Teo believes that the teacher cannot teach ethics without being well-grounded in ethics himself or herself. Trainee teachers at the National Institute of Education are therefore explicitly exposed to moral theories and ethical systems. They must become models for their students.

Ethics-related modules in business are approached by **Audrey Chia** through presenting students with frameworks that problematise ethical issues and the contexts in which decisions are made. She sees ethical issues as best approached from multiple perspectives, invoking the perspectives of a number of different disciplines. What Chia further introduces into her response to Chan is the possibility that students should be introduced to ethics as to some degree context dependent. This requires a form of teaching through situations and scenarios and where ethics become part of negotiated dealings in complex situations.