# FOCUS on EXCEPtIONAL children

## Ethics and Special Education

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Special education is under attack from outside the profession and is experiencing considerable dissention from inside as well. The challenges from outside are concerned with costs and accountability. Cost comparisons with other education services have led some to argue that the social benefits do not justify the costs of special education services (Dillon, 1994; Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, 1997). Dissention inside the profession involves longstanding differences in perspective regarding fully integrated versus pull-out service delivery models (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995; Shanker, 1994) and, increasingly, differences among researchers about the nature and representation of knowledge.

Ethical issues lurk sometimes subtly behind and sometimes boldly in front of professional challenges in special education interventions, policies, research, and teacher education. Special educators rely on a complex foundation of justifying reasons for what they do, and how they do it. Everything from how disability is defined to the educational objectives and the knowledge privileged as foundational for practice reflects *a priori* considerations saturated with values and cultural meaning.

It is surprising that a field so replete with such complexities of interests has devoted so little attention to the study and development of applied ethics. In a survey of doctoral programs in special education in 1995 only one required a course in ethics, although most said that ethics content was embedded in the content of different seminars (Paul, Kane, and Kane, 1996). A few respondents suggested that content in ethics was not needed in a Ph.D. program in special education.

We believe that lessons learned in professional psychology with respect to the study of ethics are instructive for special educators. Increasingly, over the past three decades, doctoral programs in psychology have required courses in ethics because the approach of embedding ethics content lacked a foundational perspective, lacked continuity, and, for teaching purposes, relied too much on ethical issues emerging randomly in class discussions and internships. Special education teachers, researchers, teacher educators, and policy-makers need more education and training in ethics to be able to address current moral dilemmas in assessment, instruction, curriculum, work with families, instructional competence, philosophy of service delivery, funding, and research. The articulation and application of ethical theory needed to support practice and policy development are critical to the future of special education.

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Rather than enumerate the myriad of ethical issues in special education and ethical theories to address them, we have elected to focus on four major ethical challenges to the field.

1. The need to examine the moral and political stories, and ethical frameworks within which to understand them.
2. The need for articulating character morality to complement the more familiar choice morality that is used to think about ethical dilemmas in special education.
3. The need to examine special education in the context of a liberal democracy.
4. The need to develop an ethical basis for discourse on the nature and representation of knowledge.

## THE HISTORY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION: HOW MORAL IS THE STORY?

Are special educators part of a moral story, doing good things for children and families? Or are we part of a story in which we, however unwittingly, bring harm to children with disabilities as a function of the roles we play and the cultural meaning of the story we are in? Or are we in a confused and complex story, intending good, yet knowing that some special education policies can harm children? One can find in the professional and popular literature alike an affirmative response to each question (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995; Johnson, 1969).

All of us would hope to be part of a moral story and certainly would affirm our intention to do good for children and their families. Special educators, after all, tend to be advocates and defenders of the rights of children with disabilities. The thought that we could participate in any way in anything harmful is appalling. Yet the narrative of special education suggests that we have, and that, in some ways, we still do. Although we do not participate by informed choice, the effects are the same. We will briefly describe selected issues in the modern history of special education and examples of tensions surrounding the nature of the story.

Special education is viewed in different ways depending on the political and social context. Some have viewed it as a valued set of programs with an empirically validated knowledge base for practice (Carnine, 1991), meeting the unmet needs of children in school who otherwise would be unserved in the general education system (Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995; Lieberman, 1992). Others have viewed special education as having served a purpose in the history of education but now as defeating the social egalitarian goals of education by keeping some students away from their age peers and the general education curriculum (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987; Pugach & Warger, 1996). Still others have been more harsh, damning it as a racist bureaucracy, stigmatizing and segregating African American boys, and violating the rights of children (Granger & Granger, 1986; Grossman 1998; Johnson 1969)—and ineffective at best (Van Doninck, 1983). So what is special education's story?

Special education is a morally and politically complex area of professional education, colored by both heroic advances and, however unintended, shameful misdeeds. Those involved in the advances as well as those involved in the misdeeds—in reality, many are involved in both—did not necessarily appreciate the moral story they were in at the time. The point here is not to denigrate the field of special education. Its critics have done that. Neither is it simply to tell the story of the good that special education has done and is doing. Leaders in the field have told that story many times and are continuing to tell it. Rather, our purpose here is to examine the moral complexity of the story and consider the value of retelling the story of the field in the contexts of discourses on ethics, politics, and social science in the beginning of the 21st century. A couple of examples will suffice to illustrate the moral tension in our history.

### The Example of Institutionalization

One moment in time involves the institutionalization of individuals with mental illness and those with mental retar-

dation. Psychiatric hospitals and centers for people with developmental disabilities have a strong history of advocates who were motivated by zeal and righteous indignation because of the lack of care for individuals with disabilities. The advocates were successful in gaining public support and developing institutions that later, in many instances, became monstrosities where people were abused and neglected in what came to be known as "snake pits" and "purgatory" (Blatt & Kaplan, 1966).

As far as we know, the revolutionary leaders who built institutions were good people doing what they believed were good things for persons in need—those with disabilities. When built, the institutions, improved the living circumstances of individuals with disabilities. Over time, however, they ran their course and fell apart both sociologically and morally (Lightner, 1999; Smith, 1995; Tomes, 1994). Improved by major reforms in the 1960s and 1970s, residential institutions continue to function today. Although the quality of care is controlled by strong accountability measures, their value as a system of care continues to be challenged by those who support community-based care (Coates, 1990).

In our young democracy, seeking to address the diversity in the mass immigration into the United States at the beginning of the 20th century, citizens differed philosophically and politically over how to care for individuals with disabilities. The institution-builders promoted an ethic of care translated as decent accommodations and treatment in residential facilities. Other forces promoted the social Darwinian perspective of Herbert Spencer, articulated so strongly in the United States by William Graham Sumner. They were less supportive of providing care for people with disabilities and more persuaded by the genetic perspective of nature knowing best and eliminating error in the process of evolution. They believed it unwise to invest economic resources in caring for those who are not able to thrive with typical care and potentially contribute to society as independent citizens. Not until after the middle of the 20th century did society begin to develop a more egalitarian ethic, as evidenced by the demise of eugenics boards and the development of national policies to reduce institutional dependency. These policies, reflecting a new vision of care and education, supported integrated community programs as alternatives to institutionalization, and inclusion in education as an alternative to pull-out programs.

The advocacy initiatives on behalf of persons with disabilities came, for the most part, from family members and friends with disabilities, and from professionals involved in medical, social, or educational services. Strong vocal and politically active disability constituencies were developed, and the social agenda of caregiving for persons with disabilities struck a responsive moral chord. Ultimately, constitutional arguments, especially the right to due process, became pivotal in successful litigation and the development of law and public policy. What did not happen, however, and what has not yet happened in professionalized caregiving in general, is the articulation of the moral agenda of special education or other specialized caregiving systems, with the prevailing political theory. This issue is discussed later, in the section on liberal democracy.

## The Example of Educating Children With Mild Mental Retardation

Another significant moment in the history of special education came in 1968 when Lloyd Dunn, one of the leaders in the field of special education, commented on the ineffectiveness of special education programs for children with mild mental retardation:

> I have been honored to be a past president of the Council for Exceptional Children. I have loyally supported and promoted special classes for the educable mentally retarded for most of the last 20 years, but with growing disaffection. In my view, much of our past and present practices are morally and educationally wrong. We have been living at the mercy of general educators who have referred their problem children to us. And we have been generally ill prepared and ineffective in educating these children. Let us stop being pressured into continuing and expanding a special education program that we know now to be undesirable for many of the children we are dedicated to serve. (Dunn, 1968, pp. 5–21)

Dunn implored professionals to be morally responsible for the failures: "The conscience of special educators needs to rub up against morality" (p. 19). By accepting "problem pupils" referred by teachers in general education classrooms, he argued, we enable these teachers to avoid dealing with individual differences. Emphasizing the moral culpability of special educators, Dunn added:

> We must face the reality—we are asked to take children others cannot teach, and a large percentage of these are from ethnically and/or economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Thus, much of special education will continue to be a sham of dreams unless we immerse ourselves into the total environment of our children from inadequate homes and backgrounds and insist on a comprehensive ecological push—with a quality educational program as part of it. (Dunn, 1968, p. 20)

Dunn's injunction, more than 30 years ago, that the conscience of special educators should "rub against morality" presupposes a collective sense of the morality of the mission of special education. It also anchors the need for a moral discourse in special education.

Viewed as a moral story, special education is a field in which "the good" intended by professionals is to improve the educational outcomes for children with disabilities. That commitment is manifested in implementing research-based

standards of practice and continuing to improve the knowledge foundation for all interventions. Viewed from the perspective of character morality, special education has been tainted by insensitive and harmful practices such as racially biased assessments and placement policies. Also, cruel practices, such as subjecting persons with disabilities to substandard conditions in institutions, group homes, and the like, and using harsh aversives such as electric shock and isolation as methods to control behavior, have been part of the history of special education.

Although these conditions certainly have improved over the last half of the 20th century, we always have known how to do better than we have done or are doing. Our practices never have been adequately guided by sound theory or fully informed by available research. Neither have they adequately reflected our values. This seems a logical conclusion when, for example, empirically validated practices are not widely implemented (Kauffman, 1999.).

We could list many reasons—such as local control of educational policies and the shortage of qualified special education teachers—for never quite reaching the mark, and these reasons may be valid. But tension between what we know and what we, as professional educators, researchers, and policymakers, are able to do will always exist. Differences between reasonable people about the nature of "approved" knowledge and the work to be done also will persist. A moral story for the field should include a valued and respected space for differences and openness to learn alternatives for keeping the tension productive, the voices respectful, and the discourses fair.

As special educators, we are challenged to employ an ethical theory that is defensible in the diverse contexts of our work. Next we will examine character morality as a complement to choice morality—the philosophy of ethics most commonly discussed in special education—as a way to address ethical questions in the field.

## ETHICAL THEORIES

> It is very common to imagine ethics as a kind of moral calculus for solving ethical dilemmas. All we need is the right formula and all of our problems can be resolved. It would be nice if it were really that simple. In the real world, however, life is complex, ambiguous, and often tragic—it does not readily yield to such a calculus. Ethics is not about being right as much as it is about being responsible. We must intend to discover what is right, but we can be mistaken and still be responsible. However, we can do this only if we are prepared to recognize both our own fallibility and our common humanity. (Fasching, 1997, p. 99)

### Choice Morality

In addressing ethical dilemmas, the theory most familiar to special educators might be called "choice morality." In it,

meaningful choice, and all it involves, is typically viewed as the cornerstone of responsibility. What we will call "choice moralists" (Kekes,1990) maintain, or simply assume, that a person can be legitimately held morally responsible only for those things he or she did as a result of having chosen to do them. Meaningful choice implies freedom of action. Choices that cannot affect what the chooser actually does would be vacuous, certainly not meaningful choices. Freedom of action is generally taken to entail that the actor has a range of actions from which to choose and that the act of choice is crucial to the deeds the actor actually performs. This idea typically is referred to in the philosophical literature as the *principle of alternate possibilities* (Fischer, 1986). The notion captured in the principle of alternate possibilities, that humans usually are free to do something other than what they actually do, is a metaphysical tenet, a cornerstone, of most theories of moral responsibility. Whether it is consistent with the way responsibility is actually ascribed is a matter of much philosophical dispute (Frankfurt, 1988.)

Another tenet of choice morality directly related to the first is the principle that "ought" implies "can." If a person cannot do something, what sense does it make to say that he or she ought to do it? If it makes no sense to say that he or she ought to do it, how can it make sense to hold him or her responsible for not doing it?

When these two tenets are conjoined, a picture of the basic requirements of holding someone morally responsible for his or her actions emerges. If one could not have chosen to do something other than what one did, it makes little or no sense either to say that one ought not to have done it or to hold him or her morally responsible for doing it. In the absence of the freedom to do other than what we do and the ability to choose a genuine alternative to the action we in fact perform, there seems to be no point to moral responsibility and little point to moral principles and rules that direct us to do some things rather than others.

Understood in this way, the foundations of choice morality appeal to many of our basic intuitions about accountability and responsibility. There can be little doubt that deeply ingrained in our thinking about responsibility is its dependence on, or assumption of, freedom of action. Little wonder that meaningful choice has been so important an idea in moral philosophy and that moral theorists typically conceive of a "moral situation or dilemma" as one in which a person must make a difficult choice, fully aware of the efficacy of choice with respect to action and, hence, affecting outcomes in human relations for good or ill.

A picture of the moral person in choice morality forms around a conception of what J.L. Austin called "the machinery of action" (Austin, 1961). The action that will be evaluated against moral standards may be envisioned as having

many parts or stages. These include planning, appreciating, deliberating, choosing, intending, and, of course, actually executing the action. Deliberation leading to choice emerges as central to the picture of the way a moral person acts. The picture takes something like the following form: Our moral person finds himself or herself confronted with a problem in which various alternative actions are possible, and he or she deliberates about the problem by weighing the salient moral features of the situation and the results that choosing one possible action rather than another should have. He or she then applies some moral principle, rule, or "calculus" to the problem, thereby determining a morally acceptable action in the circumstances, decides to act accordingly, and so acts.

On accounts like that suggested by Putnam (1978), the application of principles, rules, or a calculus stage may be replaced by nonlinear reasoning in the imagination of the moral person. Moral theorists—as different in other ways as Kantians and utilitarians—do share such a picture of the centrality of meaningful choice to moral responsibility and moral condemnation. Little wonder that so many moral theorists have struggled with the age-old problem of free will and determinism. If there is no way to make meaningful choice compatible with what appears to be the causal determinism of the world in which we act, the very idea of moral responsibility is in severe jeopardy of losing any sense whatsoever. Or at least it is in the choice moralist's conception of responsibility. (For a radically different view, see Frankfurt, 1988, and Fischer, 1986).

The idea that the freedom to meaningfully choose one's actions is the crucial element of moral responsibility promotes the idea that the capacity to choose is *the* identifying feature of moral agents, the subjects of morality and ethics. Some choice moralists maintain that, if someone is a moral agent by virtue of his or her ability to make meaningful choices, then all moral agents must have equal moral worth because they all evidence that capacity of choice with respect to their actions. These philosophers, then, are *worth egalitarians*. They maintain that moral worth is the baseline of moral personhood, the recognition of the intrinsic value of moral agents. It is quite distinct from moral merit, which is the gauge of whether a moral agent is a good or a bad person.

For many choice moralists, such as Immanuel Kant and John Rawls, the moral worth of a person is in no way related to what that person morally deserves or merits because of his or her behavior. Insofar as moral agents are understood to possess equal moral worth, they are to be treated with equal respect and should have an equal right to pursue their individual conceptions of the good.

Kant (1969) encapsulates that idea in his second formulation of the categorical imperative: "Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only" (Kant, 1969,

p. 54). This is a basic statement of worth egalitarianism. It entails that though people may act in ways that raise or lower their moral merit, they always must be treated with respect, as ends. No matter how bad their actions have been, there are things that must never be done to them. For example, we may not inflict "unnecessary pain" (to use Noddings', 1992, term) on them. What makes the inflicting of pain on a person necessary is, however, a major and unsettled question that should, and does, trouble serious choice moralists (French, 2001).

## Choice Morality and Educational Policy

Several authors writing about educational policy and ethics have emphasized the value of principle-based ethics (Howe & Miramontes, 1992), or what we are calling choice morality. Howe and Miramontes (1992) have written an important and influential text in which they distinguish between principle-based and virtue-based theories in their discussion of the ethics of special education They include a description of the process of ethical deliberation and special education-oriented cases. Noddings (1984, 1992), on the other hand, has provided strong arguments for employing an ethic of care in the adjudication of competing moral interests.

Dokecki & Zaner (1986 ) addressed ethical issues in the field of mental retardation. Paul, Gallagher, Kendricks, Thomas, and Young (1992) examined ethical issues in policy development in developmental disabilities and, in another work (Paul et al., 1997), ethical decision-making in local schools. These are concerned predominantly with moral choices.

Several other texts on education ethics, written during the past decade, have particular relevance for special education. Nash's (1996) work on "real world ethics" includes a useful perspective and approach to ethical analysis. Starratt (1994) provides an insightful discussion of building ethical schools that offers guidance for those who are willing to consider the moral culture in a school when thinking about the inclusion of children with disabilities in general education classrooms.

We will not attempt to summarize these or other works, or to extend the arguments for choice morality. The appeal of choice morality to many of our basic intuitions about moral responsibility is evident and powerful. Within the choice moralist's conception of ethics, the role of the ethical educator is to make, and to prepare students to make, morally permissible choices while understanding and protecting individual interests. Ascriptions of moral responsibility rest on the determination that actions are freely chosen. Skill in choosing from the moral point of view when operating one's machinery of action is the condition for moral agency and is the primary goal of moral education from this perspective.

## Character Morality

There are, however, ways other than choice-based theories to conceive of morality, and these suggest rather different and fundamental implications for special education. The intuitions about responsibility and moral accountability to which they appeal are radically different from those that make choice morality attractive. One such alternative theory has been called "character morality" (see Kekes, 1990). Character morality, however, should not be confused with the character education movement currently popular in education. Most of the character education programs currently touted in K–12 circles are versions of applied choice morality. Their models are deliberative, dominated by the conception of the moral person as meaningful chooser over a range of possible actions.

Nor does character morality, as we will use the term, exhaust what is called virtue ethics. Many, if not most, of the recent virtue theorists are choice moralists. They are distinct from the traditional choice moralists in adopting concepts such as care as more basic than, for example, justice, and in eschewing the central role of rules and principles in moral deliberation that typically are found in choice theories. But choice still occupies the key position in their accounts.

As we will use the term, character moralists (for example, John Kekes) begin to examine the moral situation at quite a different place than the choice moralists do. Character moralists claim to be looking at how humans actually behave and the results of that behavior rather than constructing linear deliberation/decision models. They maintain that observation of humans reveals that most human behavior is not chosen deliberatively. Rather, it is habitual or the result of ingrained character traits that were not solely, if at all, formed by conscious choices. They note that character traits may, and typically do, have roots in culture, tradition, training, custom, ritual, convention, routine, and folklore. Character moralists will tell us that people, more often than not act "in character." What they then do, whether good or evil, may not be the result of their choices. It is just what they do. To try to fit the pattern of their actions into deliberative linear models (or even nonlinear imagination models such as Putnam, 1978, suggests) may miss the mark by a rather wide margin in a vast majority of cases.

Further, in a realistic sense, when acting in character, people might not have genuine alternative possibilities of action in many, possibly most, circumstances. When hearing such a suggestion, choice moralists may well argue that it is always at least logically possible for people to choose to act in ways other than they do when they act in character. There is always a possible world in which the person could have made a choice different from the one he or she actually made.

The character moralist may grant that this is true. But when viewed realistically, the character moralist argues, the possible world may be so remote from the real world that to hang a judgment of moral responsibility on it must seem highly suspect to most ordinary folks. It has the look of a desperate move to save a theory in the face of the facts. When we say that someone really could not have done otherwise under the circumstances, we generally don't mean that it is logically impossible that he or she could not have done something else. We might well mean that it would take quite a different person to behave differently or even to have considered alternative possibilities of action in the circumstances.

Choice moralists, following in the footsteps of Aristotle, might argue alternatively that a person's character traits are the result of previous conscious choices the person has made, and that the person, by virtue of a causal chain back to those choices, should be held responsible for his or her character and the actions that result from it even though those actions at the time are not directly the result of a choice.

Character moralists will respond that only some, perhaps a rather small portion, of a person's character traits may have been developed by the choice method. The others, the great majority, are the result of what Kekes calls "unconscious habituation." There is nothing reflective or deliberative about the acquisition process.

## Character Moralists Versus Choice Moralists

Though not a character moralist, Barbara Herman (2000) has expressed views with which the character moralists can agree. She writes:

> For morality to perform its central function of securing routine action, moral concepts and features of character need to be acquired in the ongoing process of moral education so that a morally literate agent is able to recognize and respond to what is morally salient in the routine circumstances she encounters. . . . This is, for the most part, nondeliberative. Like the spatially competent agent's ability to move through ordinary doorways without performing any geometric calculations, morally literate agents move among persons without the need to think whether they should or could shove them aside, use their body parts for this or that good cause, or tell the truth when asked for the time of day. (Herman, 2000, p. 31)

To grasp a crucial difference between choice and character moralists, it is instructive to think of people whose morally indefensible characters were formed and nurtured in cultures imbued with racial, cultural, and other forms of bigotry. As examples, think of white American Southerners during the slavery period, KKK members and other white racists, witch hunters in Europe and America in the 17th century, medieval crusaders, ethnic-cleansing Serbs, German Nazis, and a wide variety of others who have been

raised in cultures of hate, bigotry, intolerance, and fanaticism. These examples, of course, are radical, and not subtle.

Other examples may be more subtle but no less unsavory. Suppose we grant with the character moralist that such people, or at least the vast majority of them, probably do not choose to be racial and ethnic bigots. Their preferences, and so their characters, are not, or are not fully or at least with respect to their bigotry, matters of choice. And they do not typically deliberate about what they are doing when their actions display those characters, when they, acting in character, do terrible things to other human beings. Shouldn't they be held responsible for the harm they cause? Choice moralists—unless they deny the basic premise that the characters of such people were not the result of conscious or meaningful choices those people made, that their evil actions "follow from their unchosen vices, … are symptomatic of enduring dispositions, and …occur when they act naturally and spontaneously, in accordance with vices they have developed but without choosing to develop them" (Kekes, 1990, p. 66)—should not hold them morally responsible for their bigoted characters and their actions that express their characters. But character moralists will hold them responsible for those actions despite evidence that they were unchosen, that their actions were the byproduct of their characters (see Kekes, 1990, p. 70).

This is not the forum to explore how people come to have morally perverse characters. We suspect that they adopt them unconsciously because they grow up in prejudiced, intolerant, and bigoted communities where the vast majority of the members, including those in positions of authority, regularly express and act on a singular set of pernicious views. Certainly, in such an environment the consideration of questions about the veracity and the morality of the dominant views can be virtually unthinkable for most community members. It takes a special person with uncommon insight to raise the appropriate moral concerns.

It also is likely that the members of these communities do not have actual opportunities to alter the course of their character development, "since doing so would have required of them a sustained effort to act contrary to their own predispositions and to the social context that favored their development in a particular direction" (Kekes, 1990, p. 75). The very virtues that might have stood them in good moral stead and withstood the pressures of their culture are exactly the ones that they lack because they never were encouraged or trained in them. Their cultures, their upbringings, are inhospitable to the sort of critical reflection that might encourage them to question the inbred and ingrained preferences they have, to examine and adopt better moral preferences. Their personal and social identities, as well as their self-appraisals and those they make of others, are grounded in those preferences. But still, even in the face of such an account, our moral intuitions counsel holding such people responsible for the harm they cause, the undeserved pain they inflict, choice or no choice. Character moralists build their theories on those intuitions, on the contention that the primary task of morality is to minimize the evil that people do to each other, regardless of whether the perpetrators chose it.

Kekes (1990) writes: "Character morality . . . requires both curbing evil, which makes good lives possible, and the pursuit of good, which gives good lives their content" (p. 145). If the only evil that can be attacked legitimately by moral principles is that which results from meaningful choices of moral agents, because that is the only evil for which people can be held responsible, morality will be virtually impotent in responding to its primary task. Most of the undeserved harm inflicted on people by those acting in character (Kekes calls it "unchosen evil") will lie outside of the boundaries of moral responsibility. Character morality attempts to bring the control of evil-producing characters under the authority of morality.

To do that, the character moralist must deny that the principle that "ought" implies "can" is the unassailable base of moral responsibility. The character moralist also attacks the worth-egalitarianism of choice morality. Desert—that is, what is deserved—not worth, character moralists argue, should govern our moral evaluations of people and their actions. For them, people are not equal with respect to their moral worth. Moral worth is a function of moral merit. The ideal of character morality is that people ought to get what they deserve and desert depends on moral merit, and that depends on what people actually do, not on the capacities they are presumed to possess. We may gain or lose moral merit (a point on which the choice and character moralists agree). But, for the character moralist, moral merit and moral worth are identical. Consequently, restraints on the treatment of persons do not necessarily apply across the human board. Those lacking in moral merit because of their behavior do not deserve to be treated as having moral worth equal to those who behave meritoriously.

These tenets of character morality support its contention that people who perform evil deeds still might be held morally accountable if their harm-causing behavior is the result of inculcated character traits. Character traits, though not the result of linear deliberative processes, that evidence themselves in inflicting undeserved harm on people are serious moral flaws. The *raison d'etre* of morality must be to identify and address such flaws, which involves holding people responsible for what they do, seeing that people get what they deserve, what they merit because of their behavior, and trying to effect changes in character so that people may resist whatever evil dispositions they have during their interactions with others. Doing so may or may not involve developing deliberative skills, but, in any case, outcome is what matters.

Perhaps the most basic difference between choice and character morality is that the character moralist maintains that our moral merit depends on the amount of evil we cause and not on whether we chose to do the things that caused the evil. Insofar as our characters and our circumstances are typically different, we do not have the same moral merit. Further, because the character moralist equates moral merit with moral worth, we do not all have the same moral worth. Consequently, we do not all deserve the same things. If social institutions are going to minimize evil and contribute to flourishing of the conditions in which good lives can be lived, they must be structured so the inequality of desert is acknowledged and becomes a fundamental principle of the distribution of goods.

Simply, the character moralist maintains, things ought to be arranged so that everyone gets what he or she deserves. The world we inhabit, however, is not so arranged. Good people suffer and wicked people prosper. Character moralists take that to be indisputable evidence that we must bring moral order to our lives and our institutions. Human institutions should be constructed so that they are more likely to discourage the development of bad character traits, especially those productive of undeserved harm, and so that people will get what they are due—that the good are rewarded and the wicked punished.

To achieve this, those institutions—of which education is arguably the most important—must concentrate on not encouraging evil character development and on positively altering the traits of those who evidence bad moral characters. The social engineering problem of forming institutions that will achieve the ends of character morality is its major challenge.

One difference between the choice moralist's perspective on the role of education and that of the character moralist is that the former sees education as preparing students to make choices without reference to the content of those choices. The choice moralist sees education as preparing students to make choices that will be consistent with their achieving their individual conceptions of the good, regardless of what those conceptions may be. These typically are referred to as informed or "educated" choices. The character moralist is more concerned with the development of traits of character compatible with maintaining a community that minimizes inflicting undeserved harm, and, if the character moralist is also a communitarian democrat, promulgates a shared conception of the good and informs the habits of behavior of the citizens.

Although it is not clear what sorts of regimens are morally permissible in character inculcation, a character moralist likely would be willing to sanction a wider selection of techniques than a choice moralist would. Inflicting unwarranted pain, of course, would not be allowed, but the character education process in the classroom would have to mirror, in some large measure, the inculcation processes outside the classroom that incubate the character traits being combated. Most of those are assimilated outside of a linear deliberative process. They are picked up through experience in a social climate that is hospitable to them and inhospitable to other traits. The task of the character moralist as educator is to create and sustain an environment that rewards morally appropriate character traits and is uncongenial to morally unacceptable ones, while not assuming that choice, or even the capacity to choose, underlies character and character development.

Although character morality and choice morality have been separated in the present discussion, so as to examine issues in special education, ethicists recognize the risk of overdrawing the distinction. Similarly, most experienced educators recognize the risk of overdrawing the distinction between character and choice when discussing the goals of teaching, counseling, or therapy. Although interventions focusing on helping students make better choices certainly have been far more efficacious than attempts to change character, the issue here is not the goal of interventions but, rather, the moralities of education and care. The negative outcome data on changing character come more from clinical literature in studies of psychopathology than studies of character formation and education.

## SPECIAL EDUCATION AND CHARACTER: SELECTED ISSUES

Leading humanistic special educators and psychologists in the 20th century focused on character morality as well as choice morality. Fritz Redl talked about "massaging numb values." Bill Morse similarly argued that special education teachers must be able to care effectively about their students. Nicholas Hobbs wrote eloquently about the requirement that teachers of "disturbed children" be decent adults, able to nurture children. Teachers are models—moral as well as academic. Modeling is important in developing character, and the teacher as a model is part of a larger social ecology within which other models influence the development of character in a student's life.

### Teacher Qualities

The education of teachers has not substantially addressed the issue of the nonacademic qualities required of teachers. It is difficult to address because we do not have adequate ways of thinking about counseling adults out of teacher education when we believe, based on their participation in our classes and in internships, that they would not be good models for children. Our approach at the University of South Florida is to assign beginning teacher education students to

small cohorts and to have faculty members and doctoral students follow those students throughout their program and into their first year of teaching. The cohorts meet 1 hour weekly and focus on self, diversity, ethics, and teaching in successive semesters.

An important reason for putting these cohorts together in this way is to get to know the students very well from the beginning of their training and to provide guidance to all, including those who need another career. This is done in a time-intensive interpersonal context with safeguards built in to minimize error in counseling students out of the program. Judgment is, of course, involved; no part of education is amoral. Teacher character and values matter. The teachers who graduate from our program will be judging their students every day. This is not science. It is the activity of an ethics-conscious community of teacher educators, admittedly political, attempting to negotiate among critical moral issues and interests.

### Teacher Education Curricula and Texts

Academic subjects hold center stage in discussions of the school reform agenda; not character education. Behavior, as forecast by Dunn, has tended to hold center stage in special education. In part, the absence of substantial attention to ethics in special education is the result of the complexity of the issues. It is also a consequence of the fact that ethics is not a specific and valued part of the teacher education curriculum or of the doctoral curriculum.

Neither general special education nor specific disability-focused textbooks typically address ethics or morality directly. In the area of behavior disorders, the prevailing narratives have been psychodynamic, behavioral, neuropsychological, ecological, or sociological. Behavior is interpreted within these narratives or theories. Professionals are trained and most comfortable thinking, working, and talking within such a conceptual and linguistic context.

Ethics, on the other hand, is more difficult. Perhaps this accounts, at least in part, for the absence of discussion of morality in special education and why these discussions typically end with a tacit acceptance of relativism. And the discussion of moral responsibility has tended to focus on the ways in which individuals are less than responsible for their behavior because of pathology, social circumstances, or defeating habits. In discussing ethics and morality, we are cautious for fear of moralizing and passing judgment. Yet, the presumption that those who teach children ought to adopt an amoral stance is untenable.

The development and reinforcement of character traits or virtues ought not to be factored out of a special education program. In fact, it might be crucial to success in the field. The behavior we would change in a student has meaning in his or her moral construction of self and others. The question

is not whether special educators are involved in character education; it is whether there is awareness of that involvement and willingness to make character education an explicit part of the curriculum.

Another aspect of the issue of character morality has to do with the culture of the classroom and the school. Starratt (1994) has described the process of building an ethical school. Discussions of full inclusion, as opposed to pull-out programs, could go differently if they were cast in the context of an ethical school, one in which ethical qualities of character and place were addressed directly in building and nurturing a caring and learning school culture.

There is, however, a rather serious block to the success of a character morality-based educational approach. There is a tension in contemporary Western societies between the way the social/political process operates actually and theoretically and the social climate that character moralists seem inclined to favor.

## DEMOCRACY AND SPECIAL EDUCATION

Schools prepare students to participate in a democracy and make informed decisions that affect themselves and people in their community. In our current system of liberal democracy, decisions generally are made based on the will of the majority with the understanding that there is no privileged conception of the good. Within such a system, special education asks for an exception to accommodate the individual needs of the minority of children who bear special education labels, including those who may be incapable of effectively representing their own interests. Needless to say, this position produces ethical dilemmas including the questions: "Who speaks for this minority?" "How can the interests of special education students and their families best be negotiated in our schools and communities?" "How much can we expect the majority to concede in accommodating this minority?"

The Western philosophical tradition, reflecting the current dichotomy of conceptions, has two rather different stories about democracy: liberalism and communitarianism (or Athenian-style democracy).

### Athenian Model

The Athenian (communitarian) model is what Barber (1994) calls a "strong democracy," whereas the liberal democratic conception requires a rather "thin" democratic political structure. Athenian-style democracy is conceptually thick, building political order and structure out of the very meaning of the term "democracy." It is radically participatory for those who are considered citizens. Government is carried on through institutions designed to facilitate civic participation in agenda-setting, deliberation, and implementation of

policy. The Athenian model is characterized by the transformation of multiple individual conceptions of the good into a commonly held, and rather singular, communal conception of the good toward whose achievement and/or maintenance political processes are directed.

The Athenian conception derives its strength from the fact that the citizens' individual interests are seen to orbit around their shared conception of the good, tending by exclusion to produce a homogeneous population. In the Athenian-style democracy, citizens in the participatory process of governing formulate the public ends toward which their community strives and thereby defines itself.

Communitarian democracy amateurizes politics and government, creating a community out of a collective. That community transforms the individual while it sustains itself. It educates its citizens to become effective public participants and to appreciate and adopt its values, its shared vision and purpose. Sustaining the "strong" democracy requires nurturing an abiding sense of civic responsibility in the members, developed through training in the arts of citizenship.

### Liberal Democrat Model

Other than sharing some of the basic descriptive terminology of democracy, the Athenian communitarian democratic ideal has little in common with the liberal democrat conception that has dominated the political scene in the West for the past three or four centuries. The liberal democrat's roots are planted firmly in the individualism that has marked political philosophy in the West since at least the 17th century. Liberal democracy embraces individual autonomy, and its political stance is the politic of individual interests and interest groups composed of individuals. The liberal democratic process, thus, is an adversarial encounter of factions, individuals associated into loosely confederated groups that generally are united only with respect to a single issue, likely with quite distinct conceptions of the good, collectively and individually, each seeking majority support. Its basic conception of government is that of decision making between competing points of view. Though it may seek consensus, the liberal democratic process is not interested in the formative project of citizenship. It radically disassociates the public from the private sphere.

The liberal democrat conceives of the decision—whether it be made by the single voter in the booth choosing among a list of candidates or casting a vote as a representative in the halls of the legislature—as the heart and soul of the political process. The vote is what matters, not the discussion of the issue. The majority rules, and its rule is not constrained with respect to the outcomes to be reached, except that it cannot infringe upon the constitutionally established political freedoms of its citizens.

This view of liberal democracy, however, generates a paradox, as Gutmann (1993) notes, "in the tension between the popular will and the conditions of maintaining the popular will over time." A liberal democrat should oppose any decision of the majority that restricts any of the basic liberties because it would not be democratic to restrict those freedoms, but the same liberal democrat should support the majority's decision because not doing so would be undemocratic.

What, then, should the liberal democrat do if the majority votes, for example, to restrict the freedom to practice religion by excluding from protection any religion that forbids its practitioners from seeking medical treatment for their ill children? So liberal democrats can discover themselves trapped in their own rhetoric once they start using theoretical stratagems to salvage majority rule from its illiberal and undemocratic tendencies.

Communitarian democracy is deliberation-oriented, and the deliberation is about how the social world, the community, is to be formed and sustained. It is, crucially, involved in persuasion and the critical examination of options. It is what Barry (1965) calls "decision by discussion of merits." It leads, of course, to the vote, but the vote is not the be-all and end-all of the democratic process, though it embodies the sense of urgency that marks the process as political.

Choice-oriented liberal democrats who see the political process as combat between various individual and group preferences can only stave off what could easily become an "anarchy of adversary politics" with the principle of majority rule, despite its potential paradoxes. "Majoritarianism," Barber (1994) bemoans, "is a tribute to the failure of democracy." That is not really accurate. It is the failure of communitarian democracy to sustain itself in the modern world. It is not the failure of liberal democracy, which is prepared to live with the paradoxes in the name of getting to closure on an issue.

The foundations of liberal democracy are built on the theory of rational choice. Independent rational preference based on one's conception of one's own best interests drives the political and the economic theory. Political arrangements and choices are the result of aggregated individual choices. Compromise—sometimes called the art of politics—is typically understood as the Pareto optimal choice when one cannot maximize one's preferences, where preferences and their orderings are prepolitical and independent of communal relationships and commitments, even unchosen commitments such as those embedded in culture and heritage. The need for compromise arises, of course, when conflicts of interests arise in the social world. Such conflicts are bargainable, but they do not disappear in the compromise. They are set aside as the competing individuals or groups settle for something less than the realization of their interests in total.

The communitarian democrat requires that citizens develop and practice conversational techniques that allow the forging of a common vision and a plan of action for the community. These techniques are not conducive to a pluralistic or diverse citizenry. But that is exactly the sort of citizenry that dominates modern Western democracies. Rather narrow bands of conversational proficiency are typical of people in the contemporary world, and that works against anything like the communitarian's common vision-oriented ideal.

The communitarian ideal of democracy is, first and foremost, a story of place, a narrative of a people in a place. Commitment to that narrative drives the communal conscience to sustain the institutions of self-government. No such narrative is possible in the pluralistic social world of contemporary Western democracies such as the United States. That is not to say that we have no stories or that we have no sense of place. Rather, with the help and urging of the liberal democrat, we have come to the realization, though probably regretfully, that it is impossible to compose a single coherent narrative that, for most of the people, would make interpretive sense of their current conditions, explain their commonality, and bring order and a sense of place to their lives. The story of America has far too many strands for the communitarian storyteller to weave a coherent communal identity that would provide the exemplar for the formative project of communitarian democracy. The liberal conception of procedural democracy, on the other hand, requires little by way of narrative, but it has a propensity to morph into a Kafkaesque bureaucracy.

### Relevance to Special Education

For special education, the issues of ethics and political theory are especially important because children with disabilities are a minority. The interests of children are always juxtaposed with majority interests. Principles supporting the allocation of disproportionate resources and the view that individual needs rather than equality should drive educational policy are ethical matters. The political process sustaining the interests of children with disabilities in federal policy is dynamic, and moral perspectives are transient. Attempts in 1980 and 1981 to reduce federal responsibility by not fully funding PL 94–142 is a vivid example.

In a classic study of the American character, Bellah and his colleagues (1985) described the tension between the focus on individuals and the focus on the community. The scales are tipped, they found, clearly in the direction of individualism. The deep tradition of liberal democracy with its emphasis on individualism, privacy, and rational choice does not fit the communitarian image we typically conjure up when thinking about the "disability community" and the special needs of minorities, including those with disabilities.

The ethical implications of the tension between liberal democratic and communitarian political theories are important for special education. The moral defense of inclusion depends in part on the vision we have for the society we hope to be and the purpose of education in supporting that vision. The debates we have about the relative efficacy of various service delivery systems in meeting the needs of children with disabilities in schools are important. The argument that we should not harm children by denying them the best education we know how to provide is sound. It becomes more complicated, however, when we are forced to think in a finite fiscal context and the issue is the relative harm distributed among all children. It also is complicated by the kinds of data used to make the efficacy argument. We will explore some aspects of that issue next.

### ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN KNOWLEDGE AND REPRESENTATION

One obvious response to whether children with disabilities are better served in special education programs or not is: What do the data show? The empirical case has been debated pro and con (Danforth, 1997; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995; Carnine, 1991; Gartner & Lipsky, 1987; Stainback & Stainback, 1992; Kauffman, 1999). Although the empirical response is necessarily part of an answer, it is far from sufficient. One has to be concerned about the outcomes to be considered in assessing the success of the program. How does the program impact children's lives? Are the social costs less than the gains for the children served?

Although considerable strides have been made in empirically validating practices (Carnine, 1991), how to implement those practices in local contexts and how to specify meaningful dependent variables continue to challenge researchers in special education. The psychological models driving the specification of variables and the positivist epistemology of most of the research in special education have not led researchers into investigations, for example, of ethics and curriculum, ethics and teaching, or the development of moral community.

### The Debate

This is a complex area of thought. Controversy surrounds claims and counter-claims about the nature and privileging of knowledge. Arguments center on different philosophies of science, with positivism being the traditional and still prevailing paradigm of the mainstream research community in special education, and the politics of knowledge, again with claims and counter-claims about the use or abuse of power in privileging a perspective. The context of this debate has changed dramatically during the past three decades. Different kinds of questions are being raised now, including not

just what we know but also how we know it (Gallagher, 1998).

Do local school cultures and teachers vary so widely that generalizable interventions or procedures are unrealistic? Can an adequate account of a child's success in school be given in objective terms, or is it so embedded in experience and culture that only narrative accounts are meaningful? These and other epistemological questions have been raised in limited ways within special education over the past decade (Danforth, 1995; Gallagher, 1998; Kauffman, 1999; Reid, Robinson, & Bunsen, 1995) and debates have been difficult and, at times, even rancorous. Those defending more traditional positivist understandings are concerned about relativism and the practical implications of nonpositivist epistemologies for teaching children with disabilities (Kauffman, 1999; Sasso, 2001).

## The Research

Those challenging positivist positions have different epistemological views as well as concerns about the control and limitations that journal editors are placing on scholarly debate and resistance of federal funding agencies to support nonpositivist research.

The tension between views that seek to keep the faith with established epistemological traditions and those that seek a more pluralistic discourse about knowledge is reflected in contrasting statements about editorial policies in *Behavior Disorders* and *Mental Retardation*. Kauffman and Brigham (1999), editors of *Behavior Disorder*s, wrote:

> Our conceptual orientation, like that of our predecessors, is scientific and positivistic. We believe this orientation best serves not only the profession but also the children and families for whom we advocate. . . . We will . . . do our utmost to discriminate legitimate from nonlegitimate claims to knowledge. . . . In our view, the field will progress most assuredly (and we believe that progress is both possible and desirable) by noting how scientific understanding is built by the slow, often painstaking accretion of reliable and replicable findings, often beginning with the homeliest of topics and questions.

Taylor (2000), editor of *Mental Retardation*, wrote:

> The role of journal editors in our field is not to silence new voices—or theories, methodologies, and modes of exposition, for that matter—but to allow opportunities for reasoned argument, discussion, and debate. If, indeed, we can believe in progress, this is how it can occur.

The sociology and politics of knowledge are well illustrated by the contrast of these two editorial policies. We are not suggesting that either position is unethical. Rather, we are raising the question about how best to construct ethical arguments about the control of knowledge. Each position is stated in good faith and predicated on different understandings of knowledge. Critical theorists worry about the privileging of the positivist voice in the *Behavior Disorders* policy. Positivists may worry about the quality, and even the legitimacy, of the view of knowledge reflected in the *Mental Retardation* policy.

Extensive literature on epistemology in the social sciences has appeared during the last two decades. The differences between policy positions of the editors of *Behavior Disorders* and the editors of *Mental Retardation* reflect differences found in that literature.

In our view, the adversarial debates in special education have not been so much about epistemological issues such as objectivity or the existence of an observer-independent reality—although these are points of disagreement—but, rather, of the rights of ideologically minority voices. The tensions are about control and fairness in the exercise of professional duties of editors in the illustrations provided here. We do not have legitimate ways to adjudicate these issues, and serious differences have emerged among good people. This is not a problem only in special education. It is a problem in the multiple discourse communities in the social sciences where the politics of voice transcend disciplinary boundaries.

### Epistemological Racism

Notwithstanding the strong convictions about epistemology held by different members of the professional special education community, the issues cut deep into the conversation about the ethical defense of philosophies of research. Scheurich & Young (1997) reference scholars of color (Banks, 1993, 1995; Gordon, Miller, & Rollock, 1990; Stanfield, 1985, 1993, 1994) who have suggested that the "modern" epistemologies used in educational research—positivism, postpositivism, neorealism, interpretivism, constructivism, critical theory, and postmodernism/poststructuralism—may be racially biased. They have argued that epistemologies, not our use of them, are racist. They point out that epistemological debates focus on issues such as quantitative versus qualitative research (e.g., Cizek, 1995), objectivity versus subjectivity (e.g. Heshusius, 1994), validity (e.g., Lenzo, 1995; Moss, 1994), or paradigmatic issues in general (e.g. Bereiter, 1994; Delandshere & Petrosky, 1994; Gage, 1989) but they do not address the issue of race. Scheurich and Young (1997) argue that the lack of response to the charge of epistemological racism is a function of researchers' not understanding "how race is a critically significant epistemological problem in educational research" (p. 4).

Although this is a significant problem in social science research in general, the issue has particular relevance to special education, where the story has included racist practices in the assessment and placement of children with disabilities. Claims of objectivity do not remove researchers from culpability. The research knowledge base for practice is no

better than the moral integrity of the research enterprise. The implication of epistemological racism—the lack of attention to race in our understanding of knowledge and knowing—has profound ethical implications in special education, where African American males are placed disproportionately in special education programs. To the extent that the social science tools we use to know and to legitimize our knowledge are insensitive to race, we may have institutionalized a systematic negation of legitimate interests of minorities.

## The Practice of Special Education

Working in an applied area, special educators are interested in understanding the needs and improving the lives of children with disabilities. As in general education, there is more interest in established and, as much as possible, empirically validated practices—what to do and how to do it—than in philosophical deliberations about the moral justifications for practice. Professional preparation programs at all levels, typically, give relatively little attention to moral foundations of practice.

The same is true in graduate education, whether in educating teachers or researchers. The focus in training researchers, for example, is on methods of inquiry, with little or no attention given to the epistemological foundations of research or the ethics, politics, or sociology of knowledge. The result is that discussions of practice or research tend to focus on methods based on experience and/or research, while philosophical discussions of the justifying reasons for those methods—moral or epistemological—can be rather thin at best, or even incoherent.

## Challenges to Traditional Positions

While special education was growing up in the last half of the 20th century, radical changes were taking place in the physical and social sciences and in technology. As special education researchers and policy makers were developing and extending the knowledge bases for practice and policy, the philosophy of science was changing and creating a complex conversation about the nature of knowledge. The traditional positivism that had guided many of the social sciences, and certainly had a pervasive influence on special education philosophy and research in the form of behaviorism, has been severely challenged by philosophers of science (Popper, 1974).

By the end of the century, the conventional positivist-based assumptions about objectivity and certainty had changed and alternative understandings of knowledge occupied a prominent position in the scholarship of different social sciences and humanities. The "new" discourses on research in the social sciences and humanities have focused more on topics such as the nature and power of language (Rorty, 1989), the assumptions about common realities, the connection of observers and observations, ethics, and meaning (Foucault, 1972; Rorty, 1989; Gadamer, 1976; Goodman 1978).

Changes in the philosophies of social science contributed to a loss of consensus in understanding and interpreting education research, and multiple discourses emerged as reflected in the literature in the 1990's (Cizek, 1995; Danforth, 1995; Garrison, 1994; Heshusius, 1994; Skrtic, 1991). Having grown out of psychology and medicine, special education researchers were concerned with the learning and behavioral characteristics of children and interventions to address their needs. Notwithstanding, some important work dating back to the 1980s (Iano, 1986; Heshusius, 1989) and early 1990s (Skrtic, 1991) challenging the dominant philosophy of research in special education, most special education researchers, especially in the fields of behavior disorders and learning disabilities, generally have maintained a strong commitment to a positivist epistemology (Kauffman, 1999; Sasso, 2001)

Special education researchers, guided by a well developed and robust philosophy of behavior, generated a substantial knowledge base of technologies for defining and engineering change in behavior. The behavioral philosophy served the field well in the late 1960s, 1970s, and into the 1980s (and many would argue that it continues to serve the field well). Special education grew to a multibillion dollar service industry and became predictably self-referenced. That is, special education researchers relied increasingly on the growing knowledge base about special education policies and practices and less on knowledge in the social science disciplines. It lost the deep relationship with disciplines such as psychology that had guided much of its earlier work (Paul et al., 1992). One consequence of this history is that the changing epistemological perspectives in the social sciences have not been reflected in mainstream special education research.

The general question is not only whether gains in special education research, and the epistemology guiding that research, are valid and useful. Rather, a more basic question is whether there is a justifiable reason for limiting research and scholarship in special education to a positivist perspective. Ethical issues are relevant in the manner in which the freedom of scholarship is supported or curtailed. They also are relevant in defending principles, including principles of scholarship.

The ethical issue in the politics of knowledge is complicated by the fluid state of arguments about knowledge in the social sciences. The resolution should occur in informed communities of scholars who are sensitive to the limits on what we know at the present time and appreciate the need for an open ethical discourse to enable us to learn from those who hold different views.

## CONCLUDING PERSPECTIVE

Since the development of the modern field of special education in the middle of the 20th century, the pressure to identify and provide an appropriate education for children with disabilities has occupied the full attention of special educators. It is unfortunate that, in this context, "special education training programs regarding collegial relationships, research projects, and policy-making processes have given only superficial attention to how we might best resolve our ethical problems" (Howe & Miramontes, 1992, p. xiii).

The growth of special education as a useful and valued set of programs has been limited by several realities. Facts are blunted by fictions about disabilities, the vision of education as science or as art has been clouded by philosophical differences among educators, and the research agenda has been thwarted by a lack of consensus on a philosophy of inquiry. Accountability measures burden practitioners with excessive paper, and policy makers continue to be conflicted in justifying the escalating costs in view of the perceived social benefit of special education practices.

The absence of training and research in ethics has been a regrettable omission. However efficacious the interventions, however credible the research, and however informed the policies, the education of children with disabilities is a morally complex set of activities with many ethical challenges. Both the political theory within which special education policies are rationalized and the ethical justifications for practice require thoughtful attention in fashioning the psychological foundations that will bear the weight of challenges to the field.

Our teacher education and doctoral programs should prepare teachers and potential leaders in the field to understand and respect the complexities of different epistemological traditions and to engage in ethical as well as technical analyses of issues in research and practice. These are policy issues that should engage the interests and imaginations of special education as a field and not be limited to the preferences of a few.

Special education is in a place unlike any in its history. It is being attacked in the media, condemned by unaccountable assertions of inefficacy or, worse, unethical practices. For all we know about the power of the context in shaping behavior, we must take care in interpreting current signals about the professional standing of special education.

We are in an age of deep transformation, when disciplinary boundaries are frayed and traditions are coming to terms with competing understandings of knowledge and different moral visions of education. Neither a bunker mentality designed to protect hard-won gains nor a position that gives equal standing to all views, irrespective of ethical and epistemological content, is going to serve the interest of the field in the future. The maturity of the professional discourse found in the *American Psychologist* or in the AERA journals would seem to be appropriate models. These journals, while clearly anchored in established discipline-based traditions, include diverse views and the scholarly work of different discourse communities.

Three issues stand out as among the most critical to sustaining the work of special educators.

1. We must recognize the implications of the minority status of students with disabilities in a liberal democracy. The tension between the conservative and liberal understandings of the society's obligation to provide appropriate education and care for all citizens is a central issue in the formation of public policy. Modern-day special education began in the 1960s, when advocacy for minorities (African Americans, women, children, persons with disabilities, and others) had a strong footing in the cultural zietgeist of the era. The minority status of these groups was a positive feature that legitimized the advocacy movement on their behalf. Things have changed. The rights of those who are less able to compete, and those with gifts less likely to be acknowledged in the competitive marketplace of public education, now must be defended on new terms. The present environment pits teachers against teachers, schools against schools, and children against children in competing for public resources. The present political context is fraught with hazzards for those who need special supports to succeed, including students with disabilities.

2. The inclusion of all children in general education programs is an ethical as well as an empirical matter. Determining the ethical interest of the child is a matter that must be considered in the presence of information about how and where the child's needs are best met. Although the educational policy issue turns on a consideration of the rights and interests of all children, the understanding of rights and interests is constrained by the educational imagination of the policy makers. Those who make policies and those who implement them function in social contexts in which their judgments are confounded by political forces that have moral meaning. Examples include preoccupation with high-stakes testing, mythologies about disability, unchallenged and uninformed mindsets about what education is and how it occurs, race, gender, and class-biased models of what a classroom and a school should look like. The inclusion debate is a major special education policy issue with significant ethical implications, but it is not a special education issue alone. The ethical issues are, perhaps, most dramatically evident in the practical interface of special and general education where children being "included" live their

lives. The quality of their lives is impacted directly by the outcomes of debates that can overlook the real dependent variables essential to the social, emotional, and spiritual well-being of children.

3. The debate about what counts for knowledge must be open and respectful. The issues are of vital interest to the field and, more important, to the children whom special educators serve. Andrews et al. (2000) distinguished between *incremental reformers* and *substantial reconceptualists* in special education. Incremental reformers emphasize the positive, known features of special education and support systematic improvement of practice through established approaches. Substantial reconceptualists take more of a critical perspective and see more serious problems in the knowledge and ethical foundations of special education. They support more fundamental changes in the field.

Andrews and his colleagues, including the first author of the present article, advocate bridging the divide. They comment: "We need to push ahead with traditional and nontraditional research for improving knowledge and practice about enhancing individual student capacity and promoting a caring school culture in which the lines between student categories meld. Our shared goal is the welfare of students with disabilities and all children" (p. 267). They acknowledge the challenge and affirm an optimism that the field can bridge the divide. The present authors share the hope that the divide can be bridged with respectful appreciation of different points of view and an affirmation of the values of a diverse academic community of special educators.

Multiple discourses are required to instantiate the complexities of ethics and knowledge in special education, but neither essentialist dogma nor relativist ideology is likely to spawn sites of mutual respect and understanding. Both the art and the social science of educating all children must occupy a prominent place at tables where the moral vision of care and education, as well as the instrumental efficacy of instructional practices and schooling, are imagined and formed. Differences in perspective between individuals or groups who hold positions at variance with others, no matter how well established and anchored in precedent or interesting and different, need not be divisive or defeat legitimate professional purposes.

The lack of knowledge among the wisest of us and the lack of humility among those of us who are most audacious have left all of us without a shared vision of leadership that connects us to the common moral purpose of improving the lives of children with disabilities and their families. Special education is not lacking intellectual capital; however, the press of the discontinuity between the outcomes of practice and the promises of the law has created urgency in defending the entire project of educational support for children

with disabilities. Struggles over control of voice have, in some instances, created a culture of rancor and cynicism. Hope for a rapprochement that enables productive scholarship and advancement of the field rests, in part, on the courage and good will, as well as the perspicacity, of leaders who influence doctoral education programs, research funding priorities, and journal policies.

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