

## **The Ethical Principle of Regard for People: Using Dewey's Ideas in Schools**

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### **Abstract**

In this study we analyze Dewey's writings and related literature in order to explain and utilize his ethical principle of regard for one's self, others and social groups. His reflections about consequences, the common good, accountability and responsibility undergo scrutiny too. Moreover, we probe his understanding of affections, interest and action to elucidate their interconnectedness with ethical reasoning and moral development. Our reflective paradigm, constructed from Dewey's thoughts, serves as an analytic tool to assist in the examination of a problematic ethical situation and to demonstrate its usefulness for educators and others. The conclusions reached include the claim that Dewey's principle of regard for people is a central feature of his reasoning process and encompasses a web of auxiliary principles which focus on raising questions about having regard for specific elements of life in particular contexts.

**Key Words:** John Dewey; Schools and Ethics; Educational Leadership; Ethical Science; Ethical Reasoning; Reflections, Affections and Actions

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## Introduction

Given the social and political contexts of many societies, ethical development has become a compelling interest of numerous groups and institutions, including many P-12 schools (Amstutz, 2013). Logically, an understanding of ethics by educators seems to be a prerequisite to constructing a school ethical development plan, whether focused on students, staff or both. But these two concerns—understanding ethics and engaging in ethical development—raise legitimate questions. In fact, a plethora of apprehensions connected to a seemingly simple question exist, e.g., Should educators be interested in ethical inquiry and moral development in schools (Campbell, 2003)? If the answer to this question is yes and the rationale is sufficiently strong, it appears judicious to ask how a study of ethics and the construction of an ethical development plan should be undertaken in particular contexts. Dewey (1916/1980a) inspires consideration of questions involving ways that educators may approach a study of ethics and the design of school emphases on ethical development, especially whether such a plan has a reasonable regard for the diversity of both students and colleagues.

In part, this study seeks to foster an understanding of a facet of John Dewey's ethics so that educators may determine whether the ideas examined merit additional inquiry and possible utilization. While a variety of approaches are available for studying ethical principles that promote ethical development, we focus on an aspect of Dewey's viewpoint that seems well suited for schools in pluralistic democracies (Apple, 2014). Briefly stated, we think this feature is an option, because it involves a far-reaching commitment to democratic values, including the ethical principle of regard for people in complex societies (Dewey, 1916/1980a). While pursuing his ideas, we examine them under the headings: Clarification of the Principle, Affective Dimension of Regard for People, Concreteness of Regard for People, and One School District's Ethical Situation. Each of these topics overlaps with and contributes to understanding the others.

Our study is primarily philosophical, even as we employ an actual ethical situation (One School District's Ethical Situation) to explicate and demonstrate Dewey's theory in two ways. The first use of the situation is to illustrate how people may miss and ignore signs of ethical problems and, thereby, compound them or they may identify and address problems and, thereby, enhance the ethical cultures of schools.

Second, the illustration clarifies how Dewey's proposed interdisciplinary ethical science that deals with human problems can be richer, especially for educators, than ethical study that is predominantly theoretical (Dewey & Tufts, 1932/1985; Welchman, 1995). Dewey's scientific focus is related to his belief that nearly anything learned in one's daily life (e.g., in familial, sport, cultural, spiritual, volunteer, professional and recreational engagements) and in one's academic field (e.g., in history, literature, biology, art, chemistry, law, psychology) may contribute to understanding and addressing problematic ethical situations (1932/1985; 1939/1988c). Thus he thought that educators qua persons and qua professionals are constantly involved in experiences and situations that may contribute to their understanding of ethics and ethical development. Predictably, Dewey (1916/1980a) claimed: "Interest in learning from all the contacts of life is the essential moral interest" (p. 370). Reflectively utilizing both informal experiential and professional information should become, in his opinion, a part of ethical inquiry and development. Our thesis is that utilizing Dewey's (1932/1985) ethical approach can be invaluable for educators and students.

### A Clarification of Regard for People

Seeking to understand Dewey's idea of regard for people draws attention to several benchmark statements. First, he (Dewey & Tufts, 1932/1985) observed that "[regard] for others like regard for self has a double meaning. It may signify [a] that action as a matter of fact contributes to the good of others, or it may mean [b] that the *thought* of others' good enters as a determining factor into the conscious aim" of people (p. 297). Second, he (1932/1985) added that a "more normal and complete interest" is "regard for the welfare and integrity of the social groups of which ... [one is] a part" (1932/1985, p. 299). Regard for people, then, involves two explicit meanings: (a) a general

meaning which indicates that having regard for people includes one's self, others and associated groups and (b) a dual meaning which indicates that having regard for people may involve both action that actually contributes to their good and may involve conscious reflection about others' good when decision making. But, third, Dewey added an implicit meaning: (c) a comprehensive meaning which indicates that the phrase is an umbrella-like concept that may involve the scope of his ethical ideals. These ideals are "forces which lead us to *think* of objects and consequences that would otherwise escape notice" (1932/1985, p. 300). Thus his panoramic lens provokes questions which connect to particular issues: Regard for who? Why? In what domains should one focus a regard? How will regard for people be operationalized in this situation? Related to these questions are others, involving the consequences of actions, the common good and the responsibilities of participants. While we distinguish these elements for clarity, Dewey commingled and integrated them. For him, they constituted a mosaic of interpenetrating conceptions.

The discussion of Dewey's ideas falls under several subheadings: General, Dual and Comprehensive Meanings; Consequences and the Common Good; and Accountability and Responsibility.

### **General, Dual and Comprehensive Meanings**

The idea of regard for others, social groups and one's self is a radical assertion when compared with the opinions of theoreticians who maintain that one should focus primarily or exclusively on the desires, needs or interests of (a) others, (b) a membership group or (c) one's self. A trichomous view of self, others and groups, Dewey alleged, is incongruent with an examination of what it means to live as a human being in interdependent social settings. He emphasized that having a regard for this threesome is necessary for social growth. Further, he contended (1932/1985) that the good of each person inextricably is interwoven with the good of others: "there can be no effective social interest unless there is ... an intelligent regard for our own well-being" (p. 300). Ignoring either organic realities or personal needs disadvantages everyone. To provide the developed abilities and opportunities necessary for meeting human needs—e.g., friendship, nourishment, healthcare, clothing, transportation, housing, education, recreation, employment and peace—is a basic step in enabling individuals to contribute to their own and others' wellbeing (1916/1980a; 1932/1985).

Dewey's second observation was that there is a dual meaning to the phrase regard for people. Specifically, the intentions of people and the consequences of their actions are important ways of understanding and analyzing a reflective and just practice of regard for people. That is, that the conscious intentions of a group or person to promote the good of others may be a crucial and essential factor in achieving social betterment, although repetitively asking about one's intentions can become unfruitful and moralistic (1932/1985). Admirable intentions should be among one's dispositions but are not the whole story, for the consequences of well-intentioned acts may be harmful, personally and collectively. Hence, consequences—probable, immediate, actual and cumulative ones—are considerations when estimating future and evaluating current choices and practices in schools (Dewey, 1922/1983b).

Dewey's third observation is that the use of the principle regard for identifies two intersecting and inseparable emphases: (a) a regard for persons or selves and (b) a regard for the desires and interests of people. That is, it identifies both who and what to regard. His regard-for panorama encompasses, among numerous other matters, a need to have regard for peace and justice (1922/1983b), individual rights (Dewey and Tufts, 1932/1985), cultural diversity (1916/1980a), freedom and kindness (1939/1988a), individuality (1916/1980a) and inquiry (Dewey and Bentley, 1949/1989c).

The signature importance of inquiry is appreciated better when it is understood that it is both (a) a factor to regard and (b) a means for identifying and deliberating about other regards. In complementary studies, Johnston (2009) demonstrated the indispensable role of inquiry in every aspect of life, and Garrison (1997) lamented a tragic consequence of disregarding it, stating "Those

who do not care [about matters] do not inquire” (p. 107). The case examined later illustrates the necessity of “caring for ... looking after, paying attention” to the details of particular situations (Dewey & Bentley, 1949/1989c, p. 247).

### **Consequences and the Common Good**

While intentions were significant for Dewey, his emphasis on consequences was substantially greater, especially when intended and actual consequences and the common good are considered (1932/1985). So both the prospective and the actual consequences of decisions along with the common good need to be appraised (Etzioni, 2006; Gouinlock, 1994). When the consequences of a proposed decision or act are largely unknown, Dewey (1922/1983b) argued that prospective outcomes should be evaluated by the probable effects of the tendencies of dispositions and habits, not by an individual act: “In cases of doubt, there is no recourse save to stick to ‘tendency,’ that is, to the probable effect in the long run” (p. 37). As Fesmire (2003) observed, Dewey (1908/1978a; 1922/1983b) offered dramatic rehearsal, a penetrating intellectual tool, to expedite the evaluation of the prospective outcomes of impending decisions.

Evaluating district, school and classroom policies and practices is useful in the ethical realm too. Collecting qualitative and quantitative data on targeted questions can help build an ethical knowledge base for school and district educators (1933/1986). On a daily basis, educators make decisions on the bases of existing knowledge bases, situational facts, legal insights, reflective codes and deliberations. When an educator is reprimanded (e.g., see the school situation) for alleged unprofessional conduct and the consequences are disturbing, Dewey would have likely said the situation should be reviewed to determine (a) where missteps were made, (b) how they can be corrected immediately and (c) how they can be avoided in the future.

When considering the common good, two emphases need attention as well. To begin, Dewey implied that schools need to foster the common good in and among school groups as well as among individuals (Dewey & Tufts, 1932/1985; Walling, 2004). To continue, Dewey was sensitive to having regard for people who are outside of one’s familiar settings, whether regional, national or international. Thus in order to think freely and reflectively and act ethically as individuals and groups, he reasoned that there is a need to democratize units of power. “[The] remaking of the social environment, economic, political, and international” (1932/1985, p. 260), he insisted, was critical to providing both external and internal school and societal conditions that facilitate the development of ethical regard for people. Consequently, Dewey (1932/1985) affirmed that the democratic criterion of “the greater good of all must be extended beyond” (p. 371) local and national borders into transnational arenas. Interest in the common good, then, involves an interest in everyone: “Interest in the social whole ... necessarily carries with it interest in one’s self” (1932/1985, p. 300). Moreover he accentuated the global relevance of scientific ethical theory: it does not stop with personal contacts or national borders but extends to “any possible neighbor in the wide stretches of time and space” (1915/1979b, p. 82). The need for international mindedness is evident (Dewey, 1927/1984a). These explanations raise additional questions, some of which appear explicitly below.

### **Accountability and Responsibility**

Hardly anyone revels in the thought of being liable, accountable and responsible. Yet Dewey (1922/1983b) tied together these concepts in a meaningful way: “Liability is the beginning of responsibility. We are held accountable by others for the consequences of our acts” (p. 217). But he interpreted these concepts as future, not merely past, oriented: “The individual is held accountable for what he *has* done in order that he may be responsive in what he is *going* to do” (p. 217). The aim of accountability and responsibility, he maintained, was primarily educative: “Intelligence becomes ours in the degree in which we use it and accept responsibility for consequences” (p. 216).

In reality, then, ethical development should stress that intelligence is a possession (a) to the extent that it is used and (b) to the degree learning from the consequences of life affect habit

formation. Responsibility, as seen by Dewey (1933/1986), requires that both individuals and groups are accountable for evaluating (a) their intellectual conclusions and their conclusions' potential outcomes and (b) the actual consequences that "follow reasonably from" (pp. 137-138) their thoughts. "[A] projected step" (1933/1986, p. 138) by a person entails taking intellectual responsibility for considering the step's likely consequences as much as a completed step requires responsibility for the actual outcomes. Reasonableness, Dewey emphasized, means: "think of consequences before acting" (1949/1989a, p. 312). In a nutshell, reflective pre-consideration informs decision makers of potential negative consequences (e.g., embarrassments and suspensions) as well as potential positive consequences (e.g., satisfactions and accomplishments).

Considering consequences, Dewey (1922/1983b) acknowledged, is a complex undertaking: the process entails leaders understanding that they are partially responsible for nurturing environments that enable desirable consequences and for treating people with regard when their behavior falls short of expectations. Also, as indicated above, Dewey's (1932/1985) goal was to maintain regard for one's self, others and the common good of, say, classes, clubs, teams and schools. Therefore, assuming responsibility is for both the individual and common good (Dewey, 1916/1980a). To illustrate from the business sphere, Dewey (1932/1985) argued that "the test of an industry is whether it serves the community as a whole, satisfying ...needs effectively and fairly, ...providing the means of livelihood and personal development to the individuals who carry it on" (p. 299). For the political realm, he asserted that democracy's moral ideal is measured by its participatory outcomes: "a social return ... [is] demanded of all and that opportunity for development of distinct capacities be afforded all" (1916/1980a, p. 129). From an educational perspective, the ultimate test of laws and institutions, Dewey (1932/1985) believed, is "what they do to awaken curiosity and inquiry ... what they do to render men and women more sensitive to beauty and truth; more disposed to act in creative ways; more skilled in voluntary cooperation" (p. 364). In school contexts, the common good may focus on a group, class, school, or district—and, perhaps, even the far reaches of the planet (1932/1985).

### **The Affective Dimension of Regard for People**

#### **Complexity of Affections**

That Dewey (1933/1986; 1939/1988c) included the affective in experiential learning, including the ethical, is clear. Foregrounding this element of his philosophy makes the organic relationship of the intellectual and the affective realms manifest. For instance, his conception of regard for is associated with both empathy and sympathy and their fusing with other impulses and desires (Simpson & Sacken, 2014). The collective emphasis he (1932/1985) placed on empathy and sympathy is on their being (a) "the most efficacious *intellectual* standpoint" (p. 270) and (b) the "surest guarantee" of moving beyond self-centered and favored-group decisions to a "concern for" the general welfare of people (p. 259). Similarly the affective dimension emerges when Dewey (1932/1985) asserted that while making moral decisions educators should manifest "benevolent regard of others" (p. 299). Because he (1939/1988c) stated that "valuation [or appraisal] *involves* desiring" (p. 204) and that impulses and interests form "a set" of affections that influence growth (1939/1988c, p. 207), there is little doubt that Dewey promoted a holistic engagement in inquiry and decision-making. Additionally Dewey's empathetically-and-sympathetically informed respect for people adds to the complexity of his thinking.

#### **Relationship to Respect**

Given Dewey's use of respect and regard for, it is advantageous to examine how he viewed their similarities and differences. Several patterns in his writings are noticeable. First, it is evident that neither concept is an arid intellectual endeavor although each involves a crucial cognitive side (1932/1985). Second, each is or becomes, if Dewey was right, a virtue in an interpenetrating network of habits where affections form a "unity [which] is the very idea of integrity of character" (1932/1985, p. 257). Third, each is connected to sympathy and empathy although sometimes in dissimilar ways: the *emotion* of "respect for the freedom of others" (1922/1983b, p. 136) helps keep sympathy and

empathy from becoming sentimentalized while regard for others is informed and energized by the pair (1932/1985).

Are there subtle shades of meaning that at times distinguish the two? Perhaps, he differentiated on occasions between the uses of the terms in slight but important ways. For example, the phrase respect for seems preferred when he discussed obligations, duties and law, when he implied a slightly richer cognitive quality and when he preceded the phrase by descriptors such as deepest (1891/1969), tremendous (1928/1984c) and profound (1949/1989b). He appeared to have a preference for regard for when discussing people and human betterment, when indicating a moderately warmer concept, when using prefixes such as affectionate (1914/1979a), sympathetic (1916/1980a), benevolent (1922/1983a) and when identifying it with caring for (1908/1978a), concern for (1932/1985) and consideration of (1932/1985). Dewey (1939/1988b) combined the two ideas on occasions to convey greater feeling and emphasis as when he claimed that the diverse peoples of world need “mutual respect and regard which constitute charity as the inspiration of peace and good will” (1949/1989b, p. 183).

Caution about Dewey’s usage of the two concepts is merited, nonetheless, because it is too nuanced to describe fully here. We note, all the same, Pappas’ (2008) position that Dewey’s emphases were a foreshadowing of aspects of contemporary feminist ethics and add that democratic school cultures, when infused with an ethic of regard for people, can help move schools beyond a rational ethic to an intelligent, flexible and demonstrative ethic that informs relationships. Interestingly, also, is Dillon’s (1992) assertion, much like Dewey’s (1932/1985), that respect and care are unifiable virtues.

### **Distortion of the Principle**

Although Dewey’s (1927/1984a) comments underscored the affective dimension of ethical thinking and action, he obviously recognized that the farther removed a person is from her usual interactions, the greater likelihood there is for what we tag a thinning of affections. But this prospect underlines the importance of developing sympathy and empathy for anyone within a person’s sphere of responsibility (Simpson & Sacken, 2014). On the other hand, there are distortions of the principle of regard for people that go in different directions, e.g., showing favoritism toward family, friends and social and professional groups (1916/1980b). He (1932/1985) warned too of the dangers of turning regard for people into pity and sentimentality, manipulating the concept for personal advantage and developing an overly “intense emotional regard for others” (p. 295).

### **The Concreteness of Regard for People**

One may ask: Concretely speaking, what are some indicators of self-, other- and group-regarding educators? Dewey gladly responded that “any concrete case” (1932/1985, p.290) of an educator’s engagement of students in an educative activity is an indicator. Thus the terms act, action, active, and activity point to relationships which are designed to change thinking, conduct and character. But these relationships, Dewey insisted, cannot be ones that the teacher considers of “nominal” interest or, worse, matters to which she is “indifferent, averse, not-interested” (1932/1985, pp. 290-291).

### **Interest and Action**

At this juncture Dewey’s emphasis on regard for and interest in needs foregrounding. His passionate declaration “Interest *is* regard, concern, solicitude, for an object [e.g., person, activity or end]; if it is not manifested in action it is unreal” was a provocative claim (1932/1985, p. 291). If accurate, an educator’s interest in or regard for a student is rooted in impulses and desires that propel him to act. Stated similarly, an interest, for Dewey, was “the dominant direction of activity, and in this activity desire is united with an object to be furthered” (p. 290). He added that without “impulse and desire ... enlisted, one has no heart for a course of conduct” (p. 290). If there is no heart for working with a particular student or a set of them, little concrete engagement will emerge. Hence the

teacher's so-called interest is "unreal" (1932/1985, p. 291). When educators have what Dewey (1932/1985) implied is a real interest, their impulses and desires coalesce and they have a "heart for" (p. 290) educating students. As Alexander (1995) noted, a heart saturated with democratic values is a prerequisite for genuine interest. Genuine interest, then, means a teacher "*cares for*" students (1932/1985, p. 290). Dewey remarked that this interest is "intellectual and practical, as well as emotional" (1907/1977, p. 274) and results from conjoining "benevolent impulse and intelligent reflection" (1932/1985, p. 298).

### **Indicators of Regard**

How, then, can self- and other-regarding educators be identified? What sets them apart? Earlier glimpses of concrete qualities and behaviors were implied, e.g., educators sympathizing and empathizing with students, feeling with and for their colleagues, developing students' abilities and making a regard for others' wellbeing a determining factor in choices. Highlighting the idea that a regard for people is manifested when educators consider the prospective and the actual consequences of decisions and actions regarding policy, practice and personnel is pertinent too. Moreover, people frequently recognize that when educators and students exhibit appreciation, kindness and care they manifest the behaviors Dewey associated with regard for and interest in. These examples are concrete in that they are part of experiential knowledge and may, rightly examined, become a part of experimental knowledge. Dewey also indicated (1932/1985) that immediate, near and delayed consequences demonstrate concrete individual and group betterment, e.g., evolving friendships, enhanced understanding, volunteer service, reflective assignments, group inclusions, leadership roles and intellectual openness. With a systematic but non-moralistic approach to interpreting related data, schools can participate in building a "moral science" (1920/1982, p. 221).

### **Analytical Paradigm**

Our analytical paradigm, A Reflective Regard for Responsible Relationships, now needs an introduction. The framework emerged from Dewey's ethical theory and may stimulate a variety of useful questions. Of course, the first area, reflection, is present in each of the four dimensions of the paradigm. The four elements and related questions are summarized as follows: (a) Reflection: Which particulars about a situation need clarification? Who is pursuing which desires, values and goods? Are there any known conditions that inhibit participants' regard for one another? How, as Garrison, Neubert & Reich (2012) suggested, can educators help reflection and inquiry flourish in the untouchable corners of school life? (b) Regard for: What backgrounds do participants have for enhancing their regard for the interests and rights of others? Are the involved parties interested in promoting outcomes for the common good as well as for personal wellbeing? How might research on feminist ethics, such as Edwards and Mauthner (2002) and Gilligan (2014) presented, enrich Deweyan studies about a regard for people? (c) Responsibility: Are participants aware of the responsibility for both potential and actual consequences in the spheres of social, cognitive and affective development? Do participants, following Pappas (2008), underscore the relationship of responsibility and agency? (d) Relationships: Are the questioned relationships largely between individuals or groups or both? Are teachers, students, parents, others or mixtures of people the leading influencers in the relationships? Are there people missing from some relationships? When, as Gouinlock (1994) suggested, do relationships lead to or militate against personal and social growth? Appendix A abridges this information.

### **One School District's Ethical Situation**

As we integrate the largely theoretical and descriptive with the largely situational and evaluative dimensions of the study, several thoughts are pertinent. As noted above, the anonymized situation illustrates and further clarifies Dewey's ethical thinking and its usefulness for educators and students. In the process some themes of inquiry are raised but, unfortunately, others are not. In any case, deliberation of the case is via a Synopsis of the Situation and an Analysis of the Situation. The latter angle utilizes our analytic paradigm to raise questions.

## Synopsis of the Situation

The incident at Eastern Middle School involved Austin Chapman, a student who reportedly was struck with a classroom pointer that was used by Mr. Clayton Adams, a teacher, in the presence of another student, Juan Ramirez. Immediately after Principal Graham Tinsley learned of the claim, he inquired into the matter and later concluded that Austin and Juan's descriptions of the event were essentially accurate. His letter to Mr. Adams concluded by stating that his behavior was unprofessional and, consequently, he would receive a five-day suspension without pay and a letter of reprimand. After receiving Principal Tinsley's letter, Mr. Adams appealed his decision to Assistant Superintendent Michele Sizemore. Six days after the appeal hearing Dr. Sizemore issued her decision, modifying Adams' punishment to a three-day suspension with pay plus a letter of reprimand. Upon receiving Dr. Sizemore's letter, Mr. Adams appealed this second decision to Superintendent Tara Rubenstein. Upon reflection, she decided to appoint Dr. Ibrahim Youssef, an external consultant, to represent her office as the new hearing officer. Dr. Youssef, upon inquiring into the matter and conducting the new hearing, concluded that the previous judgment merited a reversal and recommended that a plan of action, including a set of specific steps, was necessary to ensure "the welfare and integrity" of the district and its schools in the future (Dewey & Tufts, 1932/1985, p. 299).

Dr. Youssef's report clarified that his reexamination of all prior documents, conversations with key stakeholders and conducting the second appeal hearing led to his conclusion. He listed the names of the people and the data sources in his report. In particular he mentioned learning that (a) two students who were in Mr. Adams' class reported to Principal Tinsley that they had not observed any contact between Adams' pointer and Austin Chapman's chest; (b) Mr. Alberto Ramirez, Juan's father, wrote a letter to Principal Tinsley saying that his son had modified his account of the incident to clarify that the slight contact between the pointer and Chapman's chest could not have caused the deep laceration on his chest; (c) Ms. Eva Benitez, a teacher, had reported to Principal Tinsley that both Austin and Juan had separately recanted their claims to her soon after the alleged incident; (d) Mr. Adams' opinion of the incident had not been pursued by the principal and was first given at the initial appeal hearing; and (e) Principal Tinsley had not adequately followed procedures for the suspension and reprimand of Mr. Adams.

For unacceptable reasons, Dr. Ibrahim Youssef continued, district personnel appeared to give little credibility to the testimony of the teacher and the two students and the letter of the corroborating student's father. Perhaps concern over possible civil claims by the accuser's family panicked the district administration or it reached a decision of Mr. Adams' guilt because of his prior questionable behavior. Viewed favorably, one could argue that the district was being sensitive to Austin Chapman because his history at the school was problematic. Plus the district may have wanted to signal that every child's accusation deserved a careful and fair review. If so, it seems reasonable to ask why Mr. Adams was evaluated differently and not as presumptively innocent for he too had a problematic history at the school.

## Analysis of the Situation

Although many details are not given above, others are added below as the analytic framework—A Reflective Regard for Responsible Relationships—is utilized. Embedded in the discussion too are questions about the problematic situation under the subheadings: Reflection, Regard for, Responsibility and Relationships Questions.

Reflection Questions. The questions employed here clarify the district context, the desires of participants and their special challenges. The first question is: What needs to be clarified about the district situation? At the outset, it should be realized that the accusation against Mr. Austin Chapman, the teacher, is a serious statement of his disregard for a student and, if correct, a violation of many if not most educators' codes of ethics. For instance, in Texas (Texas Education Agency, 2014) striking a student with a pointer leading to visible injuries would violate the state's ethical code for educators:

“Standard 3.5: The educator shall not intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly engage in physical mistreatment, neglect, or abuse of a student or minor.”

Conversely, if the student accusers were dishonest about the teacher’s behavior, both would likely be subject to disciplinary action under the district’s student code of conduct. Furthermore, school and district administrators have a professional and ethical duty, much as Dewey and Bentley (1949/1989c) argued, to investigate and determine the truth in the situation as both or either parties could be in violation of policy and law. From a Deweyan (1979b) viewpoint, obvious queries are: Is it reasonable to think that the students showed a regard for the teacher if they lied about him and thereby threatened his position? Did the teacher have a regard for the wellbeing of his student? Did he have regard for himself?

In addition to policy and ethical concerns, one of the most important overlapping duties of U. S. educators in regard to students, described in U. S. Supreme Court doctrine as a “compelling state interest,” is to ensure the safe and efficient operation of public schools (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2013). Beyond the three persons directly involved, members of the school community have interests in being certain employees do not physically harm students and employees, and teachers need to know laws protect them against false claims lodged by students (Stader, 2007). Unfortunately the school as a safe environment encountered a challenge by Mr. Adams’ alleged action, and the administration had a duty to investigate, find the truth and act accordingly, while protecting the interests and reputations of the students and the teacher.

Thus, the procedure for fulfilling this investigatory duty is critical to preserving the belief in just treatment of community members, notwithstanding who they are, and as well is controlled by constitutional expectations of due process rights secured by the U. S. Bill of Rights to both students and employees. Before any guilt is determined, administrators must proceed in a manner that comports with constitutional protection and ethical duties. In so doing, they show regard for both parties and their right to a fair, thorough, disinterested process in pursuit of the truth. Hence, they can help sustain district and school cultures characterized by justice and peace (Dewey, 1922/1983b).

Although claims of a teacher assaulting students are relatively uncommon, they are not rare or beyond the expectations of possible events in a district. Certainly claims involving sexual assaults on students by teachers receive the broadest publicity and cause perhaps the greatest parental fears of any claims arising in public education (Timmerman, 2003). However, it is fair to say a claim such as the one made in this case carried dangers of disruption and intense public interest that the administrative staff was aware of immediately. From the principal and the superintendent’s perspectives, the student’s claim was a high stakes test of the district’s commitment to the physical safety of students. Irrespective of how it was resolved, there was likelihood of public criticism and heightened monitoring. If there was any intimation that the district was attempting to protect its teacher, the political fallout could be catastrophic. On the other hand, if the teachers’ union believed the district was sacrificing the teacher, their response could be disruptive district wide and be the source of public criticism too. Under such stress, it is not difficult to believe some administrators’ desires undermined their regard for the individuals involved. To the contrary, expediency and decisive leadership seemed to be the priorities.

Our second question—Who is pursuing which desires, values and goods?—is a means of identifying both the grounds of agreement and conflict of participants. The duties involved in the claim that educators should show regard for all participants required a focus on the importance of finding and acting fairly on the truth. This was a factually-based case, as so often occurs in teacher-student contretemps. In this situation there was a student witness as well as two student observers whose testimonies might have been useful. There was physical evidence—a laceration—on the accuser, but while relevant, not dispositive. In addition evidence regarding prior acts and conduct in other contexts existed, but may not have been admissible (although the rules of evidence in school administrative decisions are not as restrictive as in some court trials). Desires and goods depended in

part on whether one was the accused teacher, the accusing student, the principal, an observing student, a parent or an associated teacher.

Still, the duty to preserve a safe school was clearly the charge for the administrators, but the accused teacher carried that duty also. Thus the allegation against the teacher went to a critical duty shared by every educator at the building. But the process for resolving a claim which was in factual dispute between the two key actors is measured in part by the lack of sustained rational effort to uncover the truth of these events and then act to ensure the resolution was fair and just. Short of either party confessing their guilt, the process needed to embody the values of fairness, equitable treatment of individuals, and, most of all, a serious, systematic and cautious search for truth, a vital manifestation of regard for people (Dewey & Tufts, 1932/1985). An open inquiry was, perhaps, the only possible way to bring together the desires of everyone around a fair outcome, for students and employees alike depend on dispute resolution processes that are trustworthy. Perhaps the most important measure of safety in a school is that everyone is treated fairly and the truth protects everyone from false charges and punishment. A dispute such as this one, which is rarely private in the small town culture of a school, becomes a lasting curricular statement about how justice may operate in public institutions.

The initial hearing officer's decisions regarding such matters as (a) a right to confront and examine the accusers, (b) giving fair consideration to the corroborating witness' recanting to his father, (c) both boys recanting to their music teacher, and (d) the role of counsel during the hearing do not suggest a focused purpose of ferreting out the truth irrespective of possible consequences. In view of the seriousness of the charge, the decision maker's ambivalence about the teacher's guilt is suggested by the modest penalty for an assault on a student. It is worth asking what the penalty imposed on the teacher might have been had he assaulted one of the school's Becky Thatchers rather than a Huck Finn (Twain, 2008). Another way to explore this marginal punishment, given the accuser's claims, is to discuss whether the decision makers' central desire was to bury the episode quickly and quietly.

The building's teachers and the union, while anxious that a colleague not be unjustly punished, seemed equally desirous of making sure (a) that unprofessional colleagues did not get away with charges that could be brought against them and (b) that this case become a membership recruiting opportunity (i.e., that the union released the opinion of the second hearing officer identifying the involved adult parties to district teachers questioned their regard for the accused). In this matter, the union may not have regarded the formerly accused as highly as Dewey expected leaders to demonstrate regard for the fallen (1922/1983b).

Question three (Are there any known conditions that inhibit participants' regard for one another?) considers the possibility that there are prior interactions among participants that obstruct their regard for each other. One aspect of this case that undermined a regard-focused response by the parties was the general disregard school personnel had for both the teacher and the accusing student. Neither person entered this situation with a pristine reputation.

As for the teacher, it is interesting to speculate how the principal, other teachers and the district personnel would have reacted if he had had a sterling record. Thus it is easy to infer the principal might have believed the student's claim due to his preexisting beliefs about the teacher's behavior. His conduct towards the teacher at the early stages and his voiced opinions throughout the process made this inference seem closer to persuasive.

On the other hand, the accuser was widely viewed by teachers as equivalent of Wolcott's (2002) famous sneaky kid. As became clear, whatever the attitudes of the building's teachers towards their accused colleague, the accuser became a target of many teachers' volunteered description of him as a dishonest, troublemaking child. The most generous explanation for the solicitude and credibility the principal gave the child is that he sought to ensure the student's claims were considered fairly, a commendable desire if true for anyone.

However, what makes that fair-treatment explanation less compelling was the principal's disregard of the corroborating child's attempt to recant, as well as his father's effort to communicate his son's revised statement. In essence he *ex parte* discounted both individuals and failed to disclose the new statement regarding the corroborator's recanting to the accused teacher in timely fashion. Oddly, he assumed that while the corroborator had told him the truth, he had subsequently lied to his father. However, he had no direct contact or discussion with either and proceeded to his own judgment on the basis of the students' original two statements. His disquieting disregard for these two students, as well as for the teacher who now could offer statements from two witnesses exculpating the teacher was almost inexplicable.

Regard for Questions. These questions seek to gauge the commitment of participants to the wellbeing of others and the common good. What backgrounds do participants have for regarding the needs and desires of others is designed to focus on what participants displayed in the situation. Apart from the corroborator's father and the accuser's mother, the key participants in these events were professional educators and relatively young children. As to the latter, since the time of Jefferson's writing on public education, an asserted value of public schools has been to prepare children to act as responsible citizens (Pulliam & Van Patton, 2013). An enduring hope of the common schools was to forge a society where all members treated each other with respect and ensured everyone shared such rights and lived by principles as codified in the U. S. Constitution and its Bill of Rights. These are complex duties, suited for adults but the accompanying rights are granted in some portion to children. It seems a fair proposition that adults can expect from children only such regard for the needs and rights of others as would be developmentally appropriate. Their enjoyments of rights is limited proportionally due to age and maturity of thought, after all. In a case such as this one, were the children guilty of lying, any discipline is expected to be rehabilitative or, following Dewey (1922/1983b), educative and to promote growth; given a teacher could easily be decertified for the alleged conduct, the purpose of such a punishment would not ordinarily be rehabilitative. Decertification is a form of capital punishment to a teacher's career.

As for the administrators' conduct in the investigation of the event and conduct of the hearing, Dewey and Tufts' (1932/1985) earlier judgment may be accurate if severe: their general disinterest in the rights of their employee and the truth and in appropriate consequences for the guilty represent (a) a disregard for their employee and the two children (b) a disdain for fairness and principles associated with due process of law and (c) a denial of their claim to have a genuine interest in students and teachers. Their collateral curriculum, in Dewey's (1938/1988a) philosophy, is the subordination of democratic values to expedience and teaching how authorities and public systems too often work. Generally their conduct may breed a lack of faith in justice systems. Possibly, the one chance at redemption for the school system and affirmation of justice for the community members depended on both the procedure and the outcome of the adjudication. The administrators' disinterest in and distortion of that process may have almost fatally stained the system unless the superintendent's late actions initiated a reversal of perceptions and realities. Some administrators, it seems, failed to act on what Dewey (1932/1985) termed "an intelligent regard for their own well-being" (p. 300).

The other question (Are the involved individuals and groups interested in outcomes for both the common good and personal wellbeing?) is not easily answered. If anyone demonstrated this interest early in the process, it was probably the corroborator's father because he did what was expected of him as citizen and arguably as a respect-worthy father. Also, the teacher who came forward to say the boys had recanted to her was performing a professional and ethical duty. In other instances, whether the parties had any interest in the common good is indiscernible although it may be interesting to explore the question of whether the corroborator's recantation suggested a late developing reflective interest in himself and others.

Both the teacher and the boys could claim that their efforts were in support of ensuring safety and fair treatment for their group or even all in the school. However, the overall situation suggests a personal feud that escalated to competing versions of a story. That the accused teacher prompted the

boys' conduct by a harsh, unprofessional statement to them and that the accuser persuaded the corroborator to lie, which was against his own interests, once again suggests this was about people who disliked each other and acted out on those feelings.

Finally, the other groups—the union, building teachers and the district employees involved in the adjudications—ostensibly had mixed motives. While all could claim reasonably an interest in safe and efficient schools, professional conduct and protection from harm due to misconduct of individuals, some teachers showed little regard for the accuser by arguing prior misconduct should be influential in deciding his current claim and the union's superficial regard for their accused member is demonstrated by publicizing the charges made against him.

**Responsibility Questions.** In this sphere, the focus is one question: Is there a broad awareness of the need to be responsible for both potential and actual consequences? In respect to regard for the development of the two students, the conduct of the administrators, and, to a lesser degree, the building teachers and union, was incompatible with a broad perspective on their development. If these boys were lying from the first, a responsible leader—an interested person (Dewey and Tufts, 1932/1985)—would have acted to ensure these boys learned that lying has social and affective consequences for them and others. Even if the persons responsible for reaching a decision about the charge and consequences for the person(s) acting wrongly were not acting from self-interest or fear, they acted with relative indifference towards the effects of the casual lesson taught to the boys, as well as the message to all district employees regarding what faith they should have in the integrity of investigations and hearings in the future.

Schools, even districts, have a reputation as rumor mills (Johnson, & Johnson, 1996). However this case turned out for the three main figures, it would have been in the union's interest, self-servingly interpreted, to publicize the poorly conducted hearing and apparent apathy of the district in carefully conducted investigations. Such information could spread and engender grounds for ongoing conflict and distrust. Moreover, even for apolitical teachers, such a case can easily drive subtle wedges between them and their students, bringing a version of defensive teaching (McNeil, 1986; O'Neil, 2002).

As for the boys, bragging and social media ensured the dissemination of several versions of the story, indicating the accounts provided could be unbridled. One logical consequence would be to undercut respect for teachers' authority, but a second effect would be instilling cynicism about the ineffectuality of many systems of justice. The decisions to hasten the process, discount inconvenient evidence, and attempt to propound a decision neither party would contest somehow ignored the possible effects of this episode as it evolved into a cultural myth that lasted and spread across the district.

**Relationships Questions.** Two relationship questions center on whether individuals or groups or, perhaps, teachers, administrators or students are the foremost influencers of an ethical situation. A connected concern is whether anyone was missing from the situation's interactions and discussions.

The first question—Are the relationships largely between individuals or groups?—does not have a straightforward answer in the district situation. As a rule, conflicts between a student and a teacher are limited to those individuals and perhaps compatriots who must listen to the story. Indeed, most building-level conflicts do not escalate beyond the involvement of parents and a building administrator. Some may involve people from a central office or the parents' attorney. Even so, the issue rarely becomes defined by group identity as in this case. The accused teacher became a symbol for teachers in the building and the union regarding fair treatment and support of teachers. By the time of the first hearing, the conflict was as much between teachers as a group and the administrators of the building and district as it was about the accused teacher and the accusing child and his parent.

Public school administrators on the whole begin as teachers, and many (Westman & Etzion, 1999) note their movement from "we" as a member of the teaching occupation to "they" among prior

colleagues when they cross over to administration. The gap between the two groups is all the more formalized by the presence of teacher associations or unions. This case became a set piece for demonstrating that “they”—the administrators—did not have the teachers’ interests at heart and could not be trusted. No teacher spoke on behalf of any child in this matter, and little was said about the teacher’s competence or professionalism per se. Indeed, the district’s administrators turned a teacher that by all accounts was neither well-liked nor highly respected in his own building into a victim and sign of administrative injustice. Yet, the accused teacher’s colleagues would probably have cringed at his purportedly telling the two boys that they were incapable of passing a test in his class.

Are teachers, students or others the leading influencers in the relationships?, the second question, may appear readily known. The described events, however, may not have demonstrated the culture of the school or district with regard to matters of justice or regard for persons. Yet another way to view the events is that under stress, the system and people demonstrated the limits of their commitment to justice and ethical treatment of all persons. The results, nevertheless, were that leaders in this situation showed too little concern for providing procedural fairness or discovering the truth, no matter how embarrassing or dangerous. They appeared to choose expedience and to favor an effort to contain the events versus a meticulous process that weighed and protected the interests of the involved individuals. There were many points in this situation where someone in a position of authority could have demanded that the process embody values of ethical regard for the individuals, the truth, the school and the district. None made that choice—with the possible exception of the superintendent’s choosing to appoint of an external hearing officer near the end of the process—and their influence shaped the conduct of virtually every actor involved. The superintendent’s decision, if interpreted charitably, may be an admission that the district needed to identify its problems, address them and ensure better processes, thoroughgoing inquiries, fair outcomes and higher regard for honesty, individuals, schools and the district in the future. While her late public entrance into the situation may seem to belie this interpretation, she could have acted otherwise and, possibly, prolonged the situation.

Principals are often described as responsible for setting the culture of a school, as superintendents are the culture of a district (Sergiovanni, 1992). While there may have been little that the groups or individuals in this situation agreed upon, there appeared to be a collaboration in a process that placed political and institutional ends before individual and group interests, ethical principles or discovering the truth. Thus, those who were in a position to shape the messages generated—the lessons taught—by these events in the end disseminated a message that bred suspicion. The irony was that as little regard for the teacher or the truth as the two boys initially showed, their conduct in some respects anticipated the conduct of some adults as the process unfolded. The system seemed so influenced by a disregard for persons and ethical principles that the superintendent elected to alter the process by calling in a disinterested person to review and judge the events, including the administration process.

Our final question is candid: Are there any people missing from group relationships? Perhaps the most pragmatic recommendation for the district in the wake of these events would be to consider an ombudsman role in the district. Some organizations employ internal ethicists or committees to review policies and processes for compliance or concordance with the principles the organization needs. Whether such individuals can avoid being swept up in dangerous situations or being coopted by organizational pressures and interests is a question that merits study. Plainly few if any are immune to absorbing cultural norms.

While an outside hearing officer can be used, as here, to answer an appeal and apply intersecting legal and ethical standards to the organization’s conduct, she or he cannot change the culture of a system and the behaviors of its members prospectively. If the ultimate goal is to guide conduct and form conflict resolution around ethical norms, the impetus must be from within. What was missing here was even a single strong, unyielding voice of authority, as well as customs and traditions of ethical conduct, rigorously followed from the head to every member of the organization. Some influential person or people needed to demand (and follow) conduct that demonstrated due regard for persons and ethical principles. Yet, creating a sober, harsh and moralistic culture is

counterproductive. Indeed, such a culture is a betrayal of the democratic values that Dewey (1916/1980a) espoused.

### Conclusions

Our study of a regard-oriented democratic ethic can mean many things or have many foci, but we see it as an opportunity to explore and illustrate Dewey's belief that growth personally, organizationally and socially is a continuous process and arises from disequilibrium but becomes growth-producing only when the principles and the processes engaged are given equal attention and weight (Dewey, 1916/1980). The challenge of cultivating and securing "habits of affectionate and sympathetic watchfulness" that enable a "constructive interest in the well-being" of others (1916/1980, p. 50) in the midst of countless complexities and staggering individual growth encapsulates, in a sense, just a phase of life at school. So, along with the satisfactions and stresses of interacting with students, colleagues, guardians and others there are the added tensions that arise when we find ourselves in the midst of problematic ethical situations. Our promise to pursue truth or justice in such times can suddenly become empty if the processes are not guided by the ethical principles of inquiry, honesty and fairness and similar commodious values that are embedded in insight-filled national and international codes, constitutions and charters.

Dewey's understanding of equilibrium and disequilibrium, therefore, is involved in the growth of each person as regard for one's self, others and groups is developed. The tensions between having regard for one's self and for family, friends, colleagues, students, schools and others are considerable and unavoidable. Consequently seeking and finding and re-seeking and re-finding balance, as Pappas (2008) observed, is an ongoing condition of development and attending to the interests and desires of one another. Disequilibrium occurs at least episodically, and equilibrium is an ongoing pursuit. But the pursuit of personal and social equilibrium seems to be in part a byproduct of a collaborative pursuit: the common good, including a wide-ranging and flexible concern for individual betterment.

In keeping with Dewey, one of the ways ethical growth occurs is by learning from "all the contacts of life" (1916/ 1980a, p. 370). Ideally, reflective school life and examined ethical theory merge to illustrate why and how theory and experience are complementary. Without the enhancement of theoretical analysis of situations ethical analysis is likely superficial; without the enrichment of experiential realities ethical theory is unlikely to connect with the entire person. Without ethical reflection and enthusiastic people-regarding behavior, educators may forfeit their ethical responsibilities and opportunities, giving them de facto to outside experts, who while excellent in their roles, cannot substitute for the everyday educators who populate schools.

The school situation illuminates how Dewey's thinking about the comprehensive principle of regard for self, others and groups and its auxiliary ethical principles may contribute to the wellbeing of schools and districts. His thinking helps frame ethical questions, explore democratic processes and examine personal and social consequences. Reconstructing a school on Deweyan ethical grounds, therefore, offers a courageous, enduring vision of what a situation rooted in democratic ideals has to offer educators and students and, thereby, society. This vision is needed in societies, institutions and professions that are marked by growing inequities and restrictions on freedoms, not to mention the reduction of professional autonomy and responsibility.

## Appendix A

### A Reflective Regard for Responsible Relationships A Stimulus for Reflecting on Problematic Ethical Situations

Comments: The questions provided below are illustrative, not definitive. Other questions may be more meaningful to some. Revision of the appendix is encouraged.

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Reflection	Regard for	Responsibility	Relationships
What do we need to know and clarify about the general ethical situation? Who is pursuing which desires and goods? Are there any known conditions that inhibit participants' regard for one another?	What backgrounds do participants have for regarding the needs and rights of others? Do participants have regard for one another as persons as well as for each other's particular interests? Are parties interested in the common good as well as in personal wellbeing?	Is there an awareness of the need to be responsible for both potential and actual consequences? Does the desired responsibility attend to the past as well as serve as a means of enhancing future development?	Are the relationships largely between individuals or groups? Are educators, students or parents the leading influencers of the relationships? Are there any people missing from whole or small group relationships?

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