

Between You and Me: A Comparison of Proximity Ethics and Process Education

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Abstract

The ethics of proximity defines the locus of ethical choices and action as situated in the relationships we have with one another. While this model is most frequently applied to relationships of physical or emotional caring such as occur between a healthcare professional and a patient, the relationship between educator and student is also ideally one of caring. It is the authors' contention that the fundamental concepts of proximity ethics as set forward by Martin Buber, Emmanuel Levinas, and Knud Løgstrup provide an ethical model that is not only amenable to use by a Process Educator, but also serves to legitimize and corroborate some of the core principles and practices of Process Education.

Introduction

In order to effectively compare the principles of proximity ethics with those of Process Education, we must first identify or define not only proximity ethics itself, but the context in which its principles can be said to pertain. Proximity ethics is not as easily defined as other branches of ethics and has actually been referred to as an “ethics of ethics” (Jacques Derrida on the work of Levinas, 1967). Proximity ethics often indicates occasions upon which the practices and principles of *other* ethical fields ought to be considered. As such, an overview of ethics or moral philosophy itself will prove instructive and fruitfully frame proximity ethics in such a way as to make its principles more accessible to readers unfamiliar with this ethical field.

An Ethical Universe

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that deals with moral principles. More specifically, it deals with systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong behavior (“ethics,” n.d.). While there are many different ways to categorize and subdivide the field of ethics, we will follow that of Henriksen and Vetlesen (1997) and focus on four of the most familiar types of ethics: virtue/action ethics, duty ethics (deontology), utility ethics (utilitarianism), and discourse ethics. Each of these sub-fields is concerned with human behavior (what constitutes good or right action) and relationships (how we behave toward and interact with one another). The following table offers additional information about each of these ethical sub-fields.

Table 1 A Comparison of Ethical Approaches

	Core Principles	Associated Philosopher(s)	Key Terms	Bumper Sticker (shorthand)
Virtue Ethics	Ethical problems are framed by culture (what is right in one culture may be wrong in another). Virtue is an attitude or desire to do good; it is a habit that can be acquired like courage, sincerity, generosity, etc. Negative virtues can also be ingrained; these are vices. Prudence is the highest virtue.	Aristotle	actions, virtues, vices	To be good, do good.
“. . . to know what virtue is is not enough; we must endeavor to possess and to practice it, or in some other manner actually ourselves to become good.” —Aristotle				

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Table 1 (continued)

	Core Principles	Associated Philosopher(s)	Key Terms	Bumper Sticker (shorthand)
Duty Ethics	We have obligations and responsibilities to ourselves and to others. Obligations, rights, and permissions are rules-based and the rules can be universal; these rules define what is right or wrong to do. Obligations are identifiable and motivational.	Immanuel Kant	rights, duties/ obligations, permissions, responsibility	To be good, do your duty. Or To be good, follow the rules.
	<i>"Perfect duty" is to "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end."</i> —Kant			
Utility Ethics	We make moral judgments based on the consequences of actions. Maximizing the good is the overriding goal ("the calculation of happiness").	Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill	goals, consequences, benefits	The greatest good for the greatest number
	<i>"It is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong."</i> —Bentham			
Discourse Ethics	Everyone is of equal worth and deserving of respect. Everyone has the right to be part of discussions about issues that concern them. A standard or rule is only valid if all stakeholders, through discussion, endorse the rule (use of the dialectic method).	Jürgen Habermas, Karl-Otto Apel	discussion, communication, dialectic	Something is good because everyone it affects agrees it is good.
	<i>"Norms appearing in the form of law entitle actors to exercise their rights or liberties. However, one cannot determine which of these laws are legitimate simply by looking at the form of individual rights. Only by bringing in the discourse principle can one show that each person is owed a right to the greatest possible measure of equal liberties that are mutually compatible."</i> —Habermas			

It is demonstrative to apply these four types of ethics to a typical classroom scenario where a student has turned in an assignment and an instructor is responsible for giving a grade for that assignment.

Table 2 Ethics in the Classroom

Scenario	
Virtue Ethics	The instructor assigns a grade based on what values he/she or the institution seeks to cultivate in the student. An otherwise perfectly written paper may be given a grade of "F" if it is late (if promptness is the virtue sought), or if it was not a collaborative work (if collaboration is the virtue sought), etc.
Duty Ethics	The instructor assigns a grade based on the rubric for the assignment that was published in the course syllabus. A creative and otherwise masterful work that is in a format <i>other</i> than what the assignment specified may be given a grade of "F", despite it demonstrating great learning on the part of the student.

Scenario	
Utility Ethics	The instructor may choose to assign a grade better than the quality of the work would seem to warrant, if that grade allows the student to keep a scholarship and continue in school and to improve. Similarly, an instructor may choose to assign a lower grade in order to challenge a student who shows greater promise, if doing so motivates the student to try harder.
Discourse Ethics	The instructor assesses the paper and meets with the student. They discuss the work and, based on any rubrics, the work the student has done, and the goals each has for the course, decide jointly on the grade for the assignment.

These scenarios are intriguing and potentially allow for an “A-HA!” moment or two where we are surprised to be able to identify where our own ethical actions and preferences may be found on the ethical map; but any one of these ethical approaches, when taken alone, seems to be somewhat lacking when it comes to constructing a satisfying interaction between instructor and student, at least as recommended by Process Education™. Henriksen and Vetlesen (1997) suggest that the experiences human beings have with one another are marked by several theoretical concepts: duty, responsibility, care, and respect. It is not coincidental that these are the concepts found in the four ethical sub-fields noted here.

Another Alternative: Proximity Ethics

A more satisfying ethical school would then be one that combined the concepts of responsibility, care, and respect as they can be identified in the four ethical sub-fields, while eschewing any aspects that countermanded these same concepts. This places us firmly in the realm of the human and allows us to avoid the most dehumanizing aspects of the “good” in duty ethics (where rules are sometimes rated as a higher virtue than human beings) and utility ethics (where the suffering of human beings is often merely a statistic, and phrases like “collateral damage” show no human face at all).

Figure 1



Caring (also) refers to the relationship between student and teacher, not just the person who cares...as teachers work closely with students, we will be moved by their different needs and interests. The claim to care must not be based on a one-time virtuous decision but an ongoing interest in the student’s welfare (Noddings, 1999).

This other ethical alternative goes by several names: the ethics of caring, *nærhetsetikk* (literally, “nearness / closeness ethics” in Norwegian), and proximity ethics. It is not as commonly known as the other branches of ethics offered here; neither it is as tidy as the other ethical sub-fields with which it shares some of its core ideas. It is increasingly linked with the field of nursing, especially hospice and palliative care, though there are voices calling for it to be recognized as key to a philosophy of education that emphasizes the importance and potentially transformative nature of instructor-as-mentor where the student is to be treated with respect and caring (Figure 1). At first blush, this alternative ethics would seem to suit Process Education very well. An exploration of what constitutes proximity ethics should help us determine the nature of the fit between the two...and to do that, we must briefly survey the core ideas contributed by the philosophers and thinkers most closely associated with proximity ethics.

The Founders of Proximity Ethics

Martin Buber (1878–1965)

“Relation is mutual. My Thou affects me, as I affect it. We are moulded by our pupils and built up by our works. We live our lives inscrutably included within the streaming mutual life of the universe” (Buber, 1996).

While there are several philosophers who are generally considered to belong in the somewhat nebulous field of proximity ethics, perhaps the most well-known is Martin Buber. While also known for his organizational work with Zionism and in the field of Jewish philosophy, it is his seminal work in the philosophy of dialogue, with which we are most concerned, *Ich und Du*, published in 1923. This title is generally rendered as “I and Thou” in English, though the authors of this article wish to recognize the more informal nature of the German “*Du*,” where the more formal “*Sie*” could just as easily have been used, and instead suggest *I* and *You* as a more accessible alternative to the modern reader of English. It should be noted that Ronald Gregor Smith, a translator of Buber, argues for

retaining “Thou,” because of its continued use in the language of prayer (Buber, 1958a). The authors of this article are familiar with that practice, but believe that the goal of this particular article is to illuminate an ethical philosophy of which Buber was one of the clearest voices, not to help readers come to a holistic appreciation of Buber’s complete philosophy.

One of Buber’s most well-known quotes is, “All real living is meeting” (1958b). While there is much more to his philosophy, this distillation of the primacy of human relationships and our interactions with one another is authentic Buber and truly only underscored by everything else he wrote. Taking this idea — that life is defined by our coming together with one another — together with the notion of *mutuality* (noted in the first quote), Buber is most concerned with how we meet and treat one another; how my *I* interacts with *You*. That we are compelled to respond, with words or actions, when approached (met) by the Other, is what creates our responsibility to the Other. It is only through dialogue that I and You can relate and fully meet.

While much of Buber’s work is aimed at refuting ideologies and rules insofar as they say anything about how we should treat one another (“...I do not accept any absolute formulas for living. No preconceived code can see ahead to everything that can happen in a man’s life...We should be open to this adventure in heightened awareness of living...” as cited in Hodes, 1971), he does seem to follow somewhat in the footsteps of Kant with respect to the point that other individuals should not be automatically seen as an “it” (according to Kant, “Perfect duty” is to “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end” from Table 2), but, whenever possible, as a You. Put more simply, full respect and full humanity must be granted to the You when we meet and when we interact. You should not be only an object to me and should never, echoing Kant’s categorical imperative, be merely the means to an end. To treat You objectively is to dismiss your humanity, individuality — your very face. Just as I am a forever a subject to myself, so should I always ensure that You are treated with the caring implicit in mutual subjectivity; the mutual aspect of this is made clear when I stop to consider that you are your own I, and I, your You!

Further, as noted by Eide, Grelland, Kristiansen, Sævareid & Aasland (2011), when we meet the Other (when my I encounters your You), we are presented

with a choice of whether or not to risk ourselves. To invest one’s self in the Other means to lose a measure of control over the ensuing dialog and its direction. To take this risk is to embrace living, as Buber defined it; it is to accept that when we invest in the Other — when we care — we accept a measure of moral responsibility for that Other in a way that can never be predetermined by rules or procedures. You, after all, is as complex as I am; in the words of Walt Whitman, “I am large, I contain multitudes” (2012).

This is not as all-or-nothing as it might sound; Buber appreciated that we vacillate between I-You and I-It relationships constantly; I-You is unsustainable as a permanent condition. We inevitably step back, look away, or end our dialogue. The unique and individual You can become, as is necessary, a student, a teacher, a friend, a family member (Table 3). But once we are a You to each other, though we may recede to the status of It for a time, it will always be possible for us to experience the subjective relation of I-You again (Buber, 1958b).

What matters is that we appreciate that to invest in the Other is to take the risk and give up some of our control and meet the Other as another human being — a You, and accept whatever is our share of responsibility for the Other, in that moment, in that meeting, and during that dialogue.

Note that I-It relations are typically how we deal with groups and categories of people. It is eminently possible, however, to engage in a one-on-one encounter where the objective I-It relationship is retained. Consider, for example, the kind of interaction you share with a cashier at a grocery store, a teller at a bank, or the person who delivers your pizza.

Table 3 I-You and I-It Contrasted

I-You (subject-subject)	I-It (subject-object)
I and...Heather Nehring <i>(for example, who is a real and specific individual with both a name and a face into which I may look and with whom I can engage in a mutual relationship)</i>	I and...a student a professor a colleague/peer a friend a family member

Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995)

Though probably best known for writings on transcendence and phenomenology (very much in the same vein as Husserl and Heidegger, at least

until his later age), Levinas gradually worked to craft an ethics of relation or proximity that escaped the worst and most inhuman aspects of deontology and utility ethics, where the ends can be used to justify the means and individuals seen and treated as instruments. The motivation for Levinas' work may well have something to do with the fact that he was arrested and imprisoned by the Nazis and his Lithuanian family members executed, while his wife and daughter were hidden in France in order to escape the same fate (Bergo, 2014). In order to create such an ethics, Levinas had to conceive of an approach to ethical behavior that was grounded in *relational experience* that had nothing to do with control, prediction, or manipulation (Bergo, 2014). That relational experience was defined by Levinas as the face-to-face meeting, an "intrinsic relationality, at once a social and ethical experience rather than intellectual, aesthetic, or merely physical" (Young, 2007).

Far from being an object, the face of the Other affects us before we even have time to reflect upon it; in Levinas' terminology, the face of the Other "interrupts us." He explains,

The expression of the face is dual: it is command and summons. The face, in its nudity and defenselessness, signifies: "Do not kill me." This defenseless nudity is therefore a passive resistance to the desire that is my freedom...The face opens the primordial discourse whose first word is obligation (Levinas, 1969).

This foundational obligation that results from the meeting of two individuals, face-to-face, is not rational; it occurs prior to our reflecting upon the situation vis-a-vis the Other or even the status or particular circumstances of the Other. It is one of the most basic mechanisms that occur in and between human beings. The obligation is present, even should we elect not to honor it; in Levinas' words, "I am not free to ignore the meaningful world into which the face of the Other has introduced me...it is irrecusable" (1969; see also Figure 2).

Irrecusable, but perhaps not unavoidable, for as the American philosopher Christine Korsgaard astutely, if somewhat humorously notes, "When you feel pity for someone, why does it strike you as a reason to help him? Why don't you just take a tranquilizer?" (1996). German philosopher Hans Jonas gets at the fundamental nature of this obligation in a more serious way, citing the case of the newborn whose mere

breathing addresses an *ought* to the world around, namely, to take care of him. Jonas admits that this ought is not irresistible, though it is uncontradictable, as any ought can be resisted (Burckhart & Gordon, 2014).



Figure 2 A demonstration of the interruption we experience when confronted with a human face (CC0 Public Domain image, pixabay)

The asymmetrical nature of this relationship is worth noting, with the "defenseless nudity" of the Other's face on one side and my position, will, and ability to choose my actions on the other side. I can indeed choose to respond to the obligation his need places on me by refusing to see it or taking a tranquilizer. I can desensitize myself and deny that there is humanity behind the face of the Other, no matter my initial reaction. While "the presence of the face commits me to human fraternity" (Levinas, 1969), I can, with choice and action, behave otherwise, as Levinas' personal experiences would attest. The greater the asymmetry of the relationship (the greater my power with respect to the Other whether socially, economically, or physically), the greater is my obligation to him, to treat him in a way that is not based on control, prediction, or manipulation: to engage in my side of our implicit dialogue with respect before we even begin to speak.

With respect to the relationship of the one (I) to the many (multiple yous), for Levinas, we look into one face at a time; to look at many is to see a crowd, a face, another face, and yet another face. We do not have relationships with the many in the same visceral and fundamental way we do with the one (1969).

Knud Løgstrup (1905–1981)

“The one has more or less of the other’s life in his hands” (1956, translated from the Danish by the authors).

The work of Løgstrup, a Danish theologian and philosopher, is not nearly as well-known as that of Levinas, at least outside of Scandinavia, but the two may be fruitfully compared, since they arrive at very similar positions regarding human relationships and our fundamental obligation one to another. Løgstrup’s own words express this most poignantly.

Our life is so constituted that it cannot be lived except as one person lays him or herself open to another person and puts him or herself into that person’s hands either by showing or claiming trust. By our very attitude to another we help to shape that person’s world. By our attitude to the other person we help to determine the scope and hue of his or her world; we make it large or small, bright or drab, rich or dull, threatening or secure. We help to shape his or her world not by theories and views but by our very attitude towards him or her. Herein lies the unarticulated and one might say anonymous demand that we take care of the life which trust has placed in our hands (1997).

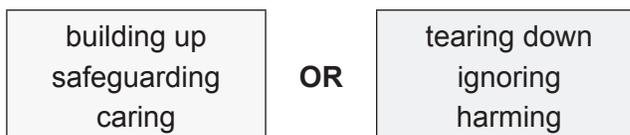
Løgstrup claims that for a long period of time, and especially thanks to Kant’s influence, the sole focus of ethics was that of respect for the Other’s independence (1956). In this context, every person is seen as a world to himself. According to Løgstrup, this is an insufficient view of the human condition. Our dependence of others is unavoidable; our lives are tangled up in each other’s, and ethics cannot only consist of “live and let live.” By our actions we contribute to the quality of the Other’s life — this is what Løgstrup means by having some of the other’s life in our hands. What of his life is in our hands can range from an ephemeral influence to his whole fate. It is interesting to extend this metaphor in light of the so-called Michelangelo phenomenon, wherein interdependent individuals have been shown to hold the power to positively influence or “sculpt” one another toward their own conception of their ideal selves (Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumashiro, 2009; Leise, 2011).

While it was the human face that triggered this reaction for Levinas, Løgstrup places critical emphasis on the function of speech as that which knits us together in human relationships. To say anything

at all is to tell of ourselves, more or less, but always something; even our tone, whether in anger or humor, opens ourselves up to the Other (Eide, et al., 2011). It is important to note that one of the terms Løgstrup used for speech, “*ytring*” connotes both verbal and non-verbal communication.

The ethical demand is based on our most fundamental human relationships — husband and wife, parent and child, teacher and student, manager and employee — because that is where we experience our obligations to one another; “they are all forms for the basic terms of which the ethical demand acquires content” (1956, translated from the Danish by the authors). For Løgstrup, there is no *a priori* ethical rule ordering these relationships and the obligation of caring and justice we find in each; to come at any of them with a preconception for how we ought to behave is to ignore the Other and what he may need from us at any given time. We must take our cues from the Other and respond ethically to further his welfare.

According to Løgstrup, our response to the ethical demand we experience upon meeting the Other can take one of two forms:



There is no third alternative: if we do not choose to build up, safeguard, and care for the Other, we have chosen to tear down, ignore, and destroy him; our moral relationships can never be neutral (Eide, 2011). And because it is in our relationships that we have the power to promote or inhibit the Others’ life expression or life options, it is critical that we recognize our own power and work to ensure that our responses to meeting the Other are with his benefit in mind rather than our own (Løgstrup, 1997).

It is important to appreciate that for Løgstrup, just as for Levinas, we should not respond to our obligation to the Other by prolonging his need or powerlessness vis-a-vis our own. Doing good is not necessarily doing what the Other wishes. Meeting the Other’s wishes rather than his or her needs is to show, in Løgstrup’s view, permissiveness/appeasement and irresponsibility (Andersen, 1996 translated from the Danish by the authors). The ethical demand is a demand for independent action; I should act in the way that I, given my background and experience, consider best for you. Because this view can easily lead to paternalism and a misuse of the power we hold

over the Other in our relationship with him, Løgstrup takes pains to identify what should be the limit of our power vis-a-vis the other: “The responsibility we have for the other can never compromise his responsibility for himself” (1969, translated from the Danish by the authors). To do for the Other what he or she can do for him or herself is to lessen their autonomy and to prolong their relative powerlessness. The goal is for there to be no ethical demand; for the Other to be able to meet us as an equal, self-capable and able to promote his own life expression. The asymmetry of our relationships is not a preferred state; it is simply how we begin when we meet and for those of us in relationships of caring (such as nursing or education), how we continue for a period of time. To want good for the Other is to want to contribute to make room for the Other’s autonomy; the caregiver’s position of power within the asymmetrical relationship has, as its goal, to be replaced by the receiver’s autonomy. Equally critical is recognition that being responsible for the Other is not the same as accepting the Other’s responsibility as our own (Henriksen & Vetlesen, 1997).

Proximity Ethics Distilled

Now that we have surveyed the key contributions of the putative founders of proximity ethics, we can distill some of the core ideas relevant for the educational context that all three offered and shared. It is critical to note that rather than offering a set of norms, proximity ethics instead describes the foundation upon which moral behavior rests — namely, the interactions between individuals. According to the social philosopher and author Zygmunt Bauman, this is the original contribution Levinas and Løgstrup have given us: They are both silent about reward and punishment, but take us back to the original human condition: our meeting face to face, and our vulnerability and dependence (1996). Every meeting is an ethical situation that demands that we make a choice between doing either good or bad; there is no third option. So, what do proximity ethics say about what constitutes good action? While there are no prescriptive rules, some general principles or guidelines can be identified from our previous survey. This gives us Table 4. Revisiting the scenario of the student and teacher, we find a much more satisfying array of possible resolutions (Table 5).

Table 4 Core Principles of Proximity Ethics

Proximity Ethics	Core Principles		
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When interacting with another, we have an ethical obligation to help the other. 2. What constitutes “helping” can be defined through discourse but must always respect the other’s self-determination. 3. To interact authentically with the other is to risk ourselves and give up some of our control over where the dialogue between us takes us. 4. Do what works in the particular situation, taking from any other ethical field (especially discourse ethics, but also virtue, utility, or duty) but always respecting the other as the primary virtue. 5. In bringing preconceptions and prejudgments to our interaction with the other, we dismiss his needs. 6. When in a position of power over another, we are obliged to act in his best interest, not our own. 7. A relationship of caring has as its goal that of helping the other to gain his autonomy. 		
	Associated Philosopher	Key Terms	Bumper Sticker (shorthand)
	Martin Buber, Emmanuel Levinas, Knud Løgstrup	respect, obligation to the other, caring, humanity	Good is that which respects the other, builds him up, and does not manipulate him or use him for our own ends
	<p><i>“By our attitude to the other person we help to determine the scope and hue of his or her world; we make it large or small, bright or drab, rich or dull, threatening or secure. We help to shape his or her world not by theories and views but by our very attitude towards him or her. Herein lies the unarticulated and one might say anonymous demand that we take care of the life which trust has placed in our hands.” —Løgstrup</i></p>		

Table 5 Proximity Ethics in the Classroom

The course syllabus makes clear what values are sought and should be created by the course.	virtue ethics
The syllabus also contains a rubric or guide for how student assignments will be handled and the level of performance sought.	utility ethics
The instructor has created a robust course assessment system so that he or she is able to work together with the student to help the him or her improve and meet the desired level of performance; the system is dialogue-based with the student encouraged to give feedback as well, with the instructor using that feedback to improve his or her own ability to help the student.	discourse ethics
The instructor will use the rubric as a guide in grading the student's assignment, but will be cognizant of the student's unique situation and needs, adjusting the grade when necessary to best help the student continue to learn and grow.	utility ethics

While the general lack of dogmatism of proximity ethics might prove frustrating to carers (including educators) who prefer ethical directives, the benefit is that it unties our hands so that we are not bound by one-size-fits-all rules as we work with the Other to find the best way to help him. Our toolbox of ethical options is almost infinitely large, with its size determined by our competency and experience.

Proximity Ethics and Process Education

With the core principles of proximity ethics (as distilled from the writings of Buber, Levinas, and Løgstrup) now laid out and enumerated, we can examine to what degree they agree with the principles and practices of Process Education. (The Process Education responses or correlates to each of the seven principles of proximity ethics are encapsulated in Table 6.)

Principle 1: When interacting with another, we have an ethical obligation to help the Other.

Working with the first principle gives us an opportunity to define our terms both for the relationship and the participants. For the interactions as covered by this paper (and Process Education), we are assuming a relationship between the “giver of care” and “receiver of care”; in the classroom, this relationship is generally comprised of educator and student. Thus “we” is the educator and “the Other” is the student. Rephrasing this principle as it would apply in the classroom gives us,

When interacting with a student, educators have an ethical obligation to help him/her.

While there is no equivalent of a Hippocratic Oath for educators, one of the foundational principles of Process Education states, “Faculty must fully accept responsibility for facilitating student success” (Beyerlein,

Schlesinger, & Apple, 2007). This places responsibility for facilitating the student’s success (making his or her success possible) firmly in the hands of the educator.

Is responsibility the same as an ethical obligation? According to Tronto in *An Ethic of Care*,

In order to care, we must take it upon ourselves, thus responsibility... Obligation is often if not already tied to pre-established societal and cultural norms and roles. Responsibility is ambiguous, whereas obligation refers to situations where action or reaction is due, such as the case of a legal contract (2005).

But because caring is not an explicit part of a teaching contract or the job description of an educator, we cannot state that the educator has a legal or even professional obligation to care. Any obligation to care must then be self-chosen on the part of the educator and could therefore be more accurately termed a responsibility. The difference might not matter, if the exhortation to choose and accept this obligation is strong enough. The perspective of proximity ethics on this potential distinction is clear: it does not exist. Every meeting with the Other is an ethical situation which places us in a situation of choosing between acting good or bad. The demand is unavoidable. And I am obligated to act.

It is important to note that accepting responsibility for the Other (his or her success, in this case) is not the same as assuming what responsibility the Other has for him- or herself; the ethical responsibility is to make the success *possible*, not to achieve it for them. Achieving the possible requires active participation of the Other.

The ethical responsibility of an educator to help a student may run even more deeply than a principle

of Process Education; it can be argued that the very definition of a modern educator includes this ethical responsibility, more or less explicitly. The Profile of a Quality Faculty Member (Collins & Apple, 2007) defines one of the roles of a high-quality faculty member as a mentor. According to Leise (2007a), “An effective mentor follows a servant leadership model by providing much value to another without receiving extrinsic rewards.” Thus, a high-quality faculty member is a mentor who follows the model of servant leadership. Robert Greenleaf, generally acknowledged as the founder of the servant-leadership movement, defines a servant leader as one who takes care to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being met (1970). If the educator is a mentor, then he or she is also responsible for ensuring that the needs of the student are met. It is interesting to note that nowhere in the literature of Process Education is the educator’s responsibility seen to pertain only to the student’s academic success. On the contrary, the personal growth of the student/Other is noted by both Greenleaf and Process Education as being a central part of that ethical responsibility:

“Mentoring is an important strategy for enhancing specific areas of growth... that are likely to support future success in a mentee’s career or personal life” (Leise, 2007a).

“The best test (of servant leadership), and difficult to administer is: Do those served grow as persons?” (Greenleaf, 1970).

Principle 2: What constitutes “helping” can be defined through discourse but must always respect the Other’s self-determination.

Smith and Beyerlein note that the shared commitment that allows optimal learning to occur in the classroom is something that must be negotiated (arrived at through dialogue or discourse) between the student and faculty member; they must “accept a shared vision in a cooperative venture” (2007).

More generally, Process Education seeks an educational culture in which student-centered/learner-centered teaching is an active value.

“In this mode of instruction, the teacher seeks to understand, respect, and respond to the differences among the learners they encounter—cultural differences, various learning styles, diverse personal circumstances, or disabilities—enabling students to become highly engaged in the learning experience” (Pacific Crest, 2007).

The Transformation of Education (Hintze, Beyerlein, Apple, & Holmes, 2011) offers 14 different aspects of an educational environment (context as well as practices), many of which are of particular interest from a proximity ethics perspective. With respect to Principle 2, the Transformation of Education aspect **Control**, the locus of power/authority for the optimal learning situation or experience is learner-centered (as opposed to either faculty- or learning-centered). Among the characteristics of this transformed educational context are that an educator is able to hold student assumptions or perspectives, knows that learner engagement is critical for successful learning, and views him or herself as a facilitator of learning.

This view furthermore places a clear responsibility on the student. The educator is responsible for understanding, respecting, and facilitating student learning, but the students must actively “define their own learning objectives, performance expectations, and action plans so that they can realize their personal and professional development outcomes” (Collins & Apple, 2007). The student’s role is that of active participant, and more demanding in terms of increasing his ability to self-regulate and self-motivate. After all, learning and teaching are most effective when they support the learner’s life vision (Schlesinger & Apple, 2007).

This respect not only for a student’s difference, but his or her own learning objectives, expectations, plans, personal/professional outcomes, and life vision certainly seems to align with the second principle of proximity ethics.

Principle 3: To interact authentically with the Other is to risk ourselves and give up some of our control over where the dialogue between us takes us.

In traditional western educational contexts, the locus of control in the classroom rested with the educator, who was presumed to be the expert in the subject field, at least in comparison to the student. Process Education, and specifically the aspect of **Control** (the locus of power/authority) in the Transformation of Education, speaks directly to this value of proximity ethics.

The giving up of control, with the educator letting go and allowing a useful measure of control to rest with the student also applies to other characteristics of Process Education. Specifically **Design** in the Transformation of Education, where the purposeful arrangement of instructional environment, materials, and experience

in support of student learning are recommended to be responsive (rather than rigid or modular). As Hintze et al. noted, an educator using a responsive design makes changes based on shifting needs and context, meeting the needs of different audiences and learners (2011); this is a deliberate sharing of control to the benefit of the student.

The aspect of *Delivery*, also within the Transformation of Education, holds active learning as the optimal means by which information/knowledge is obtained by learners (instead of presentation or, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, even discussion). In an active learning situation, the educator is the facilitator of learning but it is the student's curiosity and discovery that motivates his or her learning. This mode of education presupposes a sharing of control within the classroom, with the educator serving as guide rather than the proverbial fount of wisdom (Hintze, Beyerlein, Apple, & Holmes, 2011).

Social Orientation, the aspect of the Transformation of Education which has to do with the investment, interdependence, and responsibility for learning throughout a community, recommends a communal orientation for the learning context (rather than individual or collaborative). In a communal learning context, interdependence, co operation, and teamwork are considered to be positive values (Hintze, et al., 2011). Educators who implement learning environments that are at least collaborative, "must shift some authority and trust to the students" (Van Der Karr & Burke, 2007).

The final way in which Process Education advocates at least a sharing of control between educator and student is with assessment-based feedback; most specifically, assessment sought by the educator, as in the practice of mid-term assessment which "shifts ownership for learning towards students" (Armstrong, 2007). The educator who takes the risk of asking his or her students to assess the classroom practices and then acts, based upon the feedback given, is interested in improving his or her own performance and understands that there is always room for improvement, no matter one's age or expertise (Hintze et al., 2011; Baehr & Beyerlein, 2007). When an educator works to develop the mindset of an assessor, he or she gives the student more ownership within the context of a course (Jensen, 2007).

As Buber says, relation is mutual, and this mutuality and interdependence is one of the basic conditions in human life. Meetings with the Other, in Buber's meaning of the word, necessitate that we give up control. This places us in a vulnerable situation, and we must accept this vulnerability in order to interact

authentically with the Other. Proximity ethics tells us that authentic interaction always involves uncertainty, risk, and giving up control.

While the goal of the Process Education educator may not be described as "authentic" interaction with the student, it would seem that the myriad ways in which the educator is encouraged to cede a measure of control to the student, in the design, implementation, and ongoing improvement of curriculum, meets the conditions of this value of proximity ethics such that authentic interaction between educator and student is almost unavoidable. While there is some degree of risk for the educator who is willing to turn over a degree of control to the student, the potential gains are great and the context and relationships comprising education are given energy beyond what the educator can him or herself generate. New and interesting things can happen, not least of which is the continual development of the educator.

Principle 4: **Do what works in the particular situation, taking from any other ethical field (especially discourse ethics, but also virtue, utility, or duty ethics) but always respecting the Other as the primary virtue.**

This aspect of proximity ethics is probably the most contentious, as "what works" must be decided with respect not just to the Other and his or her needs, but also with respect to the context of meeting, both in time and place. Consider for example an emergency and life-saving amputation on a battlefield as opposed to careful surgery in a hospital environment where the limb can be saved through microsurgery and extensive rehabilitation. What works and is best for the Other is not solely dependent upon his or her needs or even the competence of the carer. There are also nearly always overriding rules or strictures in place for an environment of caring, whether it is a hospital or a school: there are protocols, cultural practices, and even laws. For the educator meeting the student as the Other, "what works" is constrained or bounded in multiple dimensions by things such as the curriculum, the physical classroom, the amount of time both are together, and the moral, legal, and cultural standards to which both the student and educator are expected to perform. Many of those conditions are not in the educator's hands, but rather in the hands of the society, at one level or another. Nonetheless, with respect to the remaining freedom or options available to the carer, proximity ethics recommends a kind of pragmatism and flexibility where the actions of the carer are those which

are most effective, always checked to ensure that they respect the Other.

Revisiting Principle 2, we recall that Process Education advocates student-centered education where respect for the student is not only assumed, but actively practiced by the high-quality faculty member.

In order to determine whether the theory and practices of Process Education are in accordance with Principle 4, we thus need to determine to what extent Process Education recommends that the educator do that which “works.” We will define “what works” as that which is effective and best meets the goals of any specific educational context; for a learning activity, for example, this would mean the students meeting the learning objectives.

With respect to curricula, its flexibility and responsiveness has already been noted as the preferred approach to curricula design; Davis concisely notes that “Quality instructional design is flexible to allow the teacher to adjust the design to meet student needs” (2007). Put slightly differently, this is doing what works, with respect to curricular design, in service of meeting the needs of the student.

Beyond the design of curricula, we should also follow our earlier example and examine its implementation and ongoing improvement in order to thoroughly determine how and where the Process Educator can and should do “what works.”

Perhaps the best place to see the implementation of curricula is in the context of a learning activity. “What works” would then be under the purview of facilitation. According to Smith in “Overview of Facilitation,” a quality facilitator has a plan for facilitating an activity but the plan is enhanced by a set of resources and tools for making on-the-spot changes (2007b). There are a variety of facilitation tools, and Minderhout and Smith provide both a partial inventory and strategies for implementing new facilitation tools and assessing to what degree they “work” (2007). This recommendation to assess what works and to improve effectiveness applies to all aspects of facilitation, not just facilitation tools; the facilitator should perform continuous real-time assessment where he or she will “determine which needs are being met and how to meet those that are not” (Smith, 2007b).

When it comes to facilitator interventions, Smith and Leise (2007) offer a “toolkit” for facilitators, acknowledging that there are “so many potential constructive interventions.”

It is the responsibility of the educator to design and facilitate in a way that most effectively meets student needs; precisely how to do that is left to the judgment of the educator. “Do what works” certainly seems to be the recommendation of Process Education to the educator; while The Knowledge Table for Process Education (Schlesinger & Apple, 2007) offers a wide variety of processes, tools, and contexts for the educator to consider (as does the *Student Success Toolbox*), it is ultimately the concepts of mentoring and shared respect and their artful contextualization in the Way of Being for a Process Educator (i.e., wants to see growth in others, trusts and respects students, is willing to shift control to students, etc.), that might be most critical. According to Natvig in *Sykepleie—Etikk*,

It is the personal qualities and knowledge, together with the situation and context, that are the essential elements in the relationship between individuals. The most important tool one has is therefore one’s self, and the ethics of caring may not depend ultimately on *what* one does but *how* one does it (2004, translated from Norwegian by the authors).

Put more directly, perhaps an educator needs to first practice the Way of Being of a Process Educator; doing so would virtually ensure that whatever tools, contexts, and processes the educator elected to use would be done for the benefit of the learner. It is worthy of noting that this aligns with Løgstrup’s perspective that rules and principles can structure and give guidance to our actions, but must never be the first priority (Eide & Skorstad, 2008).

Principle 5: In bringing preconceptions and prejudgments to our interaction with the Other, we dismiss his needs

The work by Darley and Gross, as documented in their paper, *A Hypothesis-Confirming Bias in Labeling Effects*, gives us perhaps the clearest example of how preconceptions can cause an educator not only to miss the needs of a student but to actually dismiss them, even without intending to do so. In their study, two groups of subjects were given information about a child; one group was told that the child was from a high socioeconomic background; the other was told she was from a lower-class background. Both groups were shown identical video of the child taking a test. When asked to rate her performance, the group who believed she was from a higher socioeconomic background rated her as performing above grade level. Those told that her background was from a low socioeconomic class rated her as performing below grade level. As Darley and Gross note,

“Both groups cited evidence from the ability test to support their conflicting conclusions” (1983).

The general term for this is *confirmation bias* and can be rephrased: we see what we expect to see.

In determining whether Process Education agrees with Principle 5, we must ask: to what degree does Process Education recognize the very human tendency to see what we expect and how does it recommend that educators might avoid or compensate for that tendency?

The danger of negatively affecting the success of learners by prejudging is set out in no fewer than three different modules of the *Faculty Guidebook*.

Step 2 of the Methodology for Creating a Quality Learning Environment advises educators to “start with no prejudging,” as an environment without prejudice helps relationships among students as well as between the educator and student (Apple & Smith, 2007). In “Establishing Initial Respect without Prejudging,” the module based on Step 2 of the methodology, the danger of prejudgment by faculty is made even more explicit: “If participants think they are being judged before they have had an opportunity to perform, they will not be able to trust the facilitator” (Smith, 2007a). This lack of trust will vitiate creation of a successful learning environment, possibly even leading to student withdrawal (Apple & Smith, 2007).

The third step of the Methodology for Creating a Quality Learning Environment states that educators should obtain shared commitment (Apple & Smith, 2007). As Burke (2007) points out, trust is one of the most critical components to achieving student buy-in. Among the faculty behaviors most likely to violate that trust is that of educators making assumptions about students.

In each instance in which educators are advised against prejudging students, the distinction is made between prejudging and preassessing. Assessing where students are, performance-wise, when a course begins, is a way of gathering information with the future purpose of determining the best way to help the student. As Smith warns, “When facilitators do not prejudge participants, this does not mean that they ignore information that they may know about them; it means that the facilitators do not let this information create prejudicial attitudes towards students” (2007a).

In addition to Process Education’s advocacy of assessment as a preferred strategy to prejudgment, Smith offers a number of helpful tools and techniques for establishing initial respect without prejudging (2007a). It

should not be surprising that many of the suggestions he offers serve to humanize the educator and student to one another and create an environment amenable to I-You experiences. “Setting the Stage” gives students an environment in which they meet and begin to relate to one another, face to face. “Two Truths and a Lie” asks each student to tell three things about himself, only two of which are true. Others ask questions and attempt to, in a matter of speaking, discern his true face and authentic identity.

Leise takes the injunction against prejudging a scholarly and helpful step further by sharing a comprehensive list of biases (cognitive, social, and affective) in “A Process Model of Judging and Deciding” (2013). The implication is that the performance of judgment and decision-making correlates to the ability to identify and correct for biases. There is a world of difference between prejudging and judging; as Leise notes, preparing an SII assessment is an example of judgment (2013). For an educator to judge rather than prejudge, he must be aware of (identify) his own biases, consciously correcting for them.

The Transformation of Education aspect *Relationship* recommends that educators be emotionally invested in their students (instead of being emotionally distant or even emotionally available). The emotionally invested educator understands that he or she is working to help a whole person, including his or her social and emotional dimensions. These educators are not dispassionate; on the contrary, they are very passionate about the potential and capacity of their students and project positive feelings toward all students, regardless of background or past performance (Hintze, et al., 2011). This is the educator to whom students respond, as “personal relationships are what students document as the most profound and memorable aspects of their college experience” (Lang, 2015).

Process Education does not simply admonish the educator not to prejudge: it asks that educators invest emotionally in their students and make that belief felt. It also makes explicit the difference between the helpful (and assuredly non-judgmental) act of assessing and the extreme danger of prejudging as an act that may make a quality learning environment impossible).

Principle 6: When in a position of power over another, we are obliged to act in his best interest, not our own.

In addition to all that has been shared about Process Education calling for a student-centered approach to

education, where all that happens in the classroom is guided by what is in the best interest of the student, it could be argued that the ultimate goal of Process Education is the creation of an “enriched learning environment,” in which students, faculty, and institutions are all empowered and have expanded ability and support to act. One of the cultural characteristics of the enriched learning environment is servant leadership.

For servant leaders, serving the greater needs of others is the primary goal of leadership, and they view each individual as having great worth and capability. They are interested in using their authority to pursue collaboration, trust, and mutual respect among those under their guidance. Servant leaders also focus on the well-being of each person under their stewardship, using professional development to more deeply engage these individuals in the mission of the organization or community (Pacific Crest, 2007).

That this is a characteristic of the very type of environment or culture that Process Education aims to create indicates that this principle of proximity ethics is foundational to Process Education.

Principle 7: A relationship of caring has as its goal that of helping the Other to gain his autonomy.

The second principle of Process Education states, “Although everyone requires help with learning at times, the goal is to become a capable, self-sufficient, lifelong learner” (Beyerlein, Schlesinger, & Apple, 2007). Taken together with the fifth principle of Process Education (previously discussed) where educators must fully accept the responsibility for facilitating student success, we can say that in the relationship of caring between Process Educator and student, helping the student achieve complete and abiding learning autonomy is the goal.

This autonomy of learning is put into clear context in the aspect of *Challenge* in the Transformation of Education, where the educator is encouraged to empower the student (rather than enabling or pushing her). One way to empower a student is to *not* do for her what she can learn to do for herself (Hintze, et al., 2011). This is exactly the point Løgstrup makes in *The Ethical Demand* (1956), when he explains that, when meeting the Other, we have an obligation to care, but that our care can never consist of taking over the other’s responsibility. An empowered student is a student capable of acting (learning) autonomously.

But the goal of autonomy is actually larger and more comprehensive in Process Education where the mission of higher education is recognized to be dual: to produce the highest level of student learning possible and to “promote lifelong growth in cognitive, social, and affective skills” (Myrvaagnes, 2007). Individuals who perform at the highest level of learning are *Master Learners*. Individuals who internalize the process of ongoing growth of learning skills are *Self-Growers* (Leise, 2007b). The self-grower is able to shepherd his or her own continued self-development (Pacific Crest, 2007), potentially achieving a far more comprehensive kind of autonomy than is usually sought and achieved in educational contexts.

Conclusion

While the authors intuited a certain amount of agreement between proximity ethics and Process Education, we were surprised by the extent to which proximity ethics is not only amenable to the principles and practices of Process Education, but serves to place various principles and practices into a context of (educational) caring. Further, we feel that the field of proximity ethics can serve to legitimize certain principles of Process Education, especially those most at odds with traditional educational practices. These are the practices that seem most difficult for educators to accept, even those who embrace principles/practices such as active and collaborative learning. Two principles that seem to be particularly difficult are that educators should be emotionally invested in their students and that educators must accept responsibility for facilitating the success of their students.

It is our hope that this paper shows that these practices have philosophical basis in scholarship that lies outside of Process Education. That there would be such high correlation and that so many of the core principles of proximity ethics and Process Education would be held in common strikes us as a wonderful confirmation of the principles, practices, and goals of Process Education.

Table 6 Process Education Response to the Principles of Proximity Ethics

Principle of Proximity Ethics	Process Education Says
1. When interacting with another, we have an ethical obligation to help the Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators must fully accept responsibility for facilitating student success • An educator is a mentor who follows a servant leadership model
2. What constitutes “helping” can be defined through discourse but must always respect the Other’s self-determination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimal learning requires negotiating shared commitment • Student-centered learning is preferred and respects learner differences • An educator should be a facilitator of learning • Learners define their own learning objectives, performance expectations, and action plans
3. To interact authentically with the Other is to risk ourselves and give up some of our control over where the dialogue between us takes us	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning should be student-centered • Course/curricula design should be responsive to student needs • Active learning is optimal with the educator as facilitator/guide • Collaborative and cooperative learning is preferred and requires sharing control with students • Educators who assess give students more ownership
4. Do what works in the particular situation, taking from any other ethical field (especially discourse ethics, but also virtue, utility, or duty ethics) but always respecting the Other as the primary virtue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student-centered education ensures respect of the student • Instructional design should be flexible to best meet student needs • Facilitation means planning but making continual changes and improvements, using tools and strategies that work • Constructive interventions are made using many potential tools and strategies
5. In bringing preconceptions and prejudgments to our interaction with the Other, we dismiss his needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A quality learning environment requires trust between educator and student • Educators who prejudge a student violate his or her trust • Pre-assessment is a way for an educator to gather the information he or she needs to best meet student needs and must never be used to judge or prejudge a student • Educators should be emotionally invested in their students and project positive feelings toward all students • Educators should believe in the potential of their students
6. When in a position of power over another, we are obliged to act in his best interest, not our own	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In a student-centered classroom, it is the student’s best interest that guides what happens • Servant leadership (a style of leadership in which the needs of the student come first) is a core characteristic of the environment Process Education strives to create
7. A relationship of caring has as its goal that of helping the Other to gain his autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although everyone requires help with learning at times, the goal is to help students become capable, self-sufficient, lifelong learners • Educators should work to help students become self-growers

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