



# VALUES AND ETHICS IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

FEBRUARY 2021

VOLUME 15 NUMBER 3

## School Lunch as Curriculum: Neglected Encounters for Values and Leadership\*

Susan Laird

*Center for Leadership Ethics and Change  
University of Oklahoma*

### Abstract

Recent studies of school gardens (Simon et al, 2015; Williams and Brown, 2012) and of the National School Lunch Program (Pringle, 2013; Levine, 2008; Ralston et al, 2008) have posed value questions for school leadership and policy, about production and distribution of school food. This review of the new educational studies scholarship on school lunch (Weaver-Hightower, 2011; Rice et al, 2013) deploys Jane Roland Martin's theory of education as "encounter" (2011) to challenge that daily ritual's educational devaluation as mere food service and to argue that, since foodways are learned (Laird, 2008), school lunch is an unacknowledged normative curriculum of ethical consequence for children's learning to live, an educational aim devalued by the current policy environment's narrowly academic conception of curriculum. This study concludes by proposing Alice Waters' Edible Schoolyard in Berkeley as a kind of laboratory school in School Lunch Ethics, worthy of new research in values and leadership.

### Introduction

"Education only occurs," philosopher Jane Roland Martin (2011) theorized four years ago in her capstone volume *Education Reconfigured*, "if there is an encounter between an individual and a culture in which one or more of the individual's capacities and one or more items of a culture's stock become yoked together, or if they do not in fact become yoked together, it is intended that they do" (p. 17). Her theory of education as encounter aims to correct flaws that she has found in what she has named "the deep structure of educational thought" (Martin, 2011, pp. 26-45). Time is insufficient now for us to walk through her entire subtle analysis of that critical concept, but one of that deep structure's major consequences has been to narrow our thinking about education's range through a system of dualisms that draw sharp distinctions — for example, between culture and nature, humans and animals, men and women, public institution and private home, school and world, mind and body, reason and emotion (Martin, 2011; see also Martin 1985; Martin, 1994) — and assign privileged value to the first side of each binary while diminishing

## VALUES AND ETHICS IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

### Editor:

**William C. Frick**

*University of Oklahoma, USA*

### Editorial Assistant:

**Sara C. Doolittle**

*University of Oklahoma, USA*

### Editorial Board:

**Charles Burford**

*Australian Catholic University, Australia*

**Margaret Grogan**

*Claremont Graduate School, USA*

**Catherine Hands**

*Brock University, Canada*

**Marla Susman Israel**

*Adlai E. Stevenson High School, USA*

**Olof Johansson**

*Umea University, Sweden*

**Pauline Leonard**

*Louisiana Tech, USA*

**Katarina Norberg**

*Umea University, Sweden*

**Anthony Normore**

*California State University Dominguez Hills, USA*

**Elan Paulson**

*Western University, Canada*

**James Ryan**

*OISE/UT, Canada*

**Allan Walker**

*The Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK), China*

**Lindy Zaretsky**

*Reaching Education Resolutions, Inc., Canada*

the second side's value. Her theory requires us to broaden our current policy environment's concept of curriculum and think about education as a "maker" of both individuals and cultures (Martin, 2011).

Whether inside schools or outside them, learning to live (see Martin, 1992)—not just learning to read, write, calculate, and succeed on computer-generated tests—becomes worthy of educational studies. Events like climate crisis, perpetual war, and plutocratic power plays may give rise to unplanned encounters with hunger, thirst, poverty, compassion, and cruelty through which knowledge and beliefs about our changed environment, and about new patterns of behavior that it demands, may become yoked to our individual capacities: both cultures and individuals may change as a consequence of such learning even if no explicit teaching has taken place. Moreover, such learning may occur for better or for worse: it may be educative or miseducative. In purposefully educative response to encounters that may turn either way, Martin (2011) counsels what she calls "middle-way strategies" (pp. 128-131) between censorship and *laissez-faire*.

Her theory of education as encounter has given me a new lens through which to acknowledge the significance of encounters for which I had no educational language when I was an English teacher many years ago, when our nation was at risk rather than racing to the top, and I was assigned to daily lunchtime cafeteria duty with one other teacher, one bouncer-style aide, and a vice principal. Anyone who has taught in a large regional public high school like mine knows that this routine *in loco parentis* duty may present challenges such as unhappy students who are rude to cafeteria servers and don't bus their trays; who make unhealthy food choices (despite whatever nutritional instruction health classes might offer) or, worse, have no healthy food choices available at all; who start food fights or waste or play with their food; who become racist, snobbish, heterosexist, prankish, mean, belligerent, violent, or sick, or even have epileptic seizures; who come up to you and want to share a triumph or trouble, vent a grievance, tattle, joke, chat, or get advice. My school colleagues found such pacing-back-and-forth duty generally dull and irksome and, like most analytic philosophers who taught us all how to think about education back then, did not regard it as "real" teaching. Forbidden to sit at table with students, I found this cafeteria duty often irksome too, but mainly because I did regard such *in loco parentis* duties, required from all teachers, at least potentially, as real teaching. Therefore I silently resented institutional demands that my colleagues took for granted, for policing children's behavior rather than for teaching them to live well—an important conceptual and practical distinction. Knowing nothing about the deep structure of educational thought, I discerned school lunch's educational possibilities for the latter purpose were being squandered foolishly because of our professional leadership's critical neglect of myriad

encounters—as we may now call them. Encounters that make school lunch an unacknowledged normative curriculum, through which young people may learn to live poorly or well. My purpose today is simply to invite you into an emerging educational studies scholarship on school lunch that values those encounters (see Laird, 1988; Laird, 2013).

### Learning Foodways

In 2007 I began to imagine the generative possibilities of taking such a turn when I pointed out to my colleagues in the Philosophy of Education Society that although our basic needs for food and water are biologically instinctual, common to all animal life (human and nonhuman), our desires to eat and drink, or not, and our tastes and other values and habits as eaters and drinkers may be *learned*. Contemporary food scholars have termed such cultural food practices "foodways." This term signifies a broad range of encounters whose curricular content may include what, how, with whom, when, where, how much, by what sorts of labors and whose labors, from what markets and ecosystems, and even why and with what attitudes and consequences people eat and drink—or do not eat and drink. McDonald's recognition that foodways are learned is evident in its own Hamburger University, but other fast-food corporations also market to children, employ and train adolescents, and exploit financially strained educational institutions to ensure that young people learn fast-foodways. From narratives of earlier learning encounters with slow-foodways in genuine kindergartens, Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute, John Dewey's Laboratory School, and home economics, we might infer significant conceptual and normative relationships between foodways and schooling. John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Friedrich Froebel, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Michel Foucault represent an educational thought tradition on foodways, indebted to ancient Stoic and Epicurean dietetics. Meanwhile education concerning foodways has contributed to gender's social construction across diverse North American cultures whose members imported their own holy feasts and fasts, distinctive foods, tastes, taboos, and manners; sought relief from famines and hungers; or were enslaved to produce, prepare, and serve food (Laird, 2008).<sup>i</sup>

Yet in 2011, just as Martin was publishing *Education Reconfigured*, sociologist of education and gender Marcus B. Weaver-Hightower (2011) observed in *Educational Researcher* that, "Although food is ever present, its role in the life of schools has been little studied by education scholars" (p. 15).<sup>ii</sup> In "Why Education Researchers Should Take School Food Seriously," Weaver-Hightower (2011) reviewed scarce research then available about school food and proposed that our profession should "view food as an integral component of the ecology of education—the broader interconnections of actors, relationships, conditions, and processes of which education is composed" (p. 16). Not yet theorizing lunchtime

encounters with foodways as curriculum, he cited school food's "impact" on health and academics and on teaching and administration. However, he did note also the roles schools have played and could play in teaching children about food and its implications for the environment and other species, and observed that school food is big business, affects social justice, and offers windows into identity and culture as well as educational politics and policy (Weaver-Hightower, 2011). Developing all those same themes with much more practical specificity in CSLEE's *Journal of Authentic Leadership in Education*, Patricia Simon, J. Taylor Tribble, and William Frick (2015) have theorized school gardening's "generative possibilities" for cultivating "sustainability as a cultural meta-value for informing the ethics of school leadership" (p. 2). Acknowledging that school gardening has deep historical roots in the U.S., now generally neglected, Simon, Tribble, and Frick (2015) credit school gardens' recent resurgence to Alice Waters' creative initiative at Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School in Berkeley, the Edible Schoolyard Project. That trio imparted practical wisdom to their theorizing by grounding it in a pilot study of Global Gardens, which provides garden-based education programs for schools in the Tulsa metropolitan area. The precarity in this present historical moment, wrought by climate crisis, perpetual war, and plutocratic greed, begs for new ethical leadership such as they have theorized, attentive to ecological, cultural, and social values that initiate and shape in-school encounters for learning sustainable foodways.

### School Lunch, Not for Learning

Despite school gardens' present innovative promise (see Williams & Brown, 2012), school lunch remains one taken-for-granted daily ritual that transmits national foodways from generation to generation everywhere. The ontological significance of school lunch in this context of precarity is undeniable in public educators' common habit of describing their schools in terms of the percentage of their student populations on free and reduced lunch. Founded by the National School Lunch Act in 1946, but variably administered from district to district, the National School Lunch Program has spawned a vast industrial school food service network which today engages almost all schools as the second largest food and nutrition assistance program in the U.S., albeit one that has explicitly intended to increase demand for agricultural commodities. In 2013 *A Place at the Table* documented in film (Participant Media, 2012) and print (Pringle, 2013) NSLP's vital role as an inadequate but necessary remedy for widespread hunger among U.S. children, one in four going hungry everyday. Meanwhile, NSLP raises many value-laden concerns for school leaders about nutritional quality of foods served and about program costs and revenues. Those value-laden concerns pose extremely difficult administrative challenges such as access and integrity tradeoffs, as well as recently intensified ethical questioning about NSLP's consequences for culturally

diverse children's health, especially for children living in poverty (Ralston, Newman, Clauson, Guthrie, & Buzby, 2008). This policy context's ideological and economic complexities make value questions concerning school lunch highly controversial, rendered all the more difficult by federal education policy's 1979 divorce from federal health and welfare policy. Meanwhile, public debates that surround school lunch concern primarily leadership values that are *non-educational*.

Susan Levine's (2008) history of NSLP in *School Lunch Politics* explains one possible reason educators take this category mistake for granted: "While the American social welfare community and school officials believed school lunches should, by right, be *educational* [emphasis added] in nature, the political clout necessary to gain congressional support for a national program resided solidly in the Department of Agriculture" (Kindle loc. 1674).<sup>iii</sup> School lunch became a vehicle for surplus food commodity distribution—for economic, not educational value. Levine (2008) records that, by the 1990s, school lunches had become "a significant measure by which the federal government judged the resources and needs of American communities" (Kindle loc. 1674), as well as a measure of schools' racial composition.<sup>iv</sup> Recent privatization of school lunch service has targeted poor children for unhealthy industrial fast foods, prompting subsequent serious attempts to reform NSLP. Even while engaging debates over food values and economic values at every turn, recent NSLP reformers have addressed school lunch as *only* food service—as food marketing and food censorship. Taking that conceptual reduction for granted, most leaders neglect school lunch's value as a ritual site of everyday *learning* worthy of educators' critical and curricular attention. Students learn foodways at school lunch, but thanks to the deep structure of educational thought's compatibility with industrial agriculture's economic interests, NSLP is no moral learning matter.

### School Lunch Encounters

Responding to this problematic practical situation in 2012, philosopher of education Suzanne Rice took the lead to form an interdisciplinary study group on "moral dimensions of school lunch" (see Dobrin, 2013; Krings, 2013). Specifically for study group members active in the Philosophy of Education Society, she defined a new field, which she has named "School Lunch Ethics," around the following three value-laden themes:

1. Students' access to food.
2. The growth and production of food for school lunch and its ethical significance in terms of human, non-human animal, and environmental welfare.
3. School lunch as an ethically consequential daily ritual that educates and miseducates students about food and various foodways (Rice, 2014).



Her initial school lunch study group included three other philosophers of education besides herself and me, Matthew T. Lewis, Bradley Rowe, and A.G. Rud; one philosophically engaged historian of education, Kipton D. Smilie; and one team of sociologists of education, Jennifer Ng, Holly Morsbach Sweeney, and Melinda Mitchiner. Rice (2013a) published this study group's work in a special issue of the *Journal of Thought*, and has begun collaborating with Rud to expand the group, now to include also several curriculum theorists, including Weaver-Hightower, for future production of an edited anthology on school lunch ethics.

From multiple perspectives, the initial group's work identified and analyzed ethically miseducative school lunch encounters with (1) the architectonics of "governmentality," the disciplining power exerted by the spatial design and "spectacular foodscape" of the commonplace school cafeteria itself, which features foods as commodities and renders consumers passive before the "monopoly of appearances" (Lewis, 2013); (2) tightly controlled and ever-decreasing time for lunch and force-feeding of instruction during lunch for health's sake, both of which do violence to the possibility of leisure in school, whose etymological root (in Greek *skole* and Latin *scola*) means "leisure" that may consist of time free for contemplation and conversation vital to the very possibility of what our educational administration students call "accountable" learning tasks (Smilie, 2013); (3) cultural and age-defined exclusivity in students' voluntary social interactions with one another in the school cafeteria, causing prejudices, divisiveness, and hurt (Ng, Sweeney, & Mitchiner, 2013); (4) home-schoolers' experiences of eating as an interruption of "brain learning"; (5) the privatized and highly various commercial "open campus" options that privilege students who can afford lunch out on the town while in school, enhancing local business interests more than learning; (6) the school cafeteria that teaches nothing intentionally with the composition of the lunch ritual itself (Rud, 2013); and (7) the taken-for-granted, socially accepted consumption of animals, ethically inconsistent with social justice concerns about a fast-food vendor like Chik-Fil-A, whether from simple ignorance, willful ignorance, or vegetarian incontinence (Rice, 2013b; Rowe, 2013).<sup>v</sup> These initial cultural studies in school lunch ethics have begun to construct an inventory of encounters that constitute school lunch's possible hidden curriculum.

The study group's inquiries have also suggested middle-way strategies, which include initiation of other school lunch encounters that may introduce new educative possibilities for students' moral growth; for example, (1) curricular enhancements "for inquiry into health, the body, and aspects of the good life that are not afforded through other kinds of classroom discussion" (Rud, 2013, p. 85); (2) a new dietetic focused on "alimentary freedom" and pleasure (Lewis, 2013); (3) a "Mix It Up at Lunch" program promoted by Teaching Tolerance to foster

stereotype-busting, age-diverse, and intercultural interactions among students who might otherwise doubt they have much in common (Ng *et al.*, 2013); (4) a leisurely lunchtime that includes conversation for its own sake, which may liberally "pierce the dome of everyday life" and feed students' appetites for learning without controlled discussion or accountable instruction (Smilie, 2013, p. 62); (5) a "gastro-aesthetic pedagogy" focusing students' attentions on their foods' tastes so that they may learn distaste for slaughtered animals as their food (Rowe, 2013); (6) opportunities to "develop eating habits of vegetarianism and veganism" (Rice, 2013b, p. 119); and (7) the Edible Schoolyard Project, which includes not only (a) a schoolyard remade into an organic learning garden, but also (b) a chicken coop where students raise chickens to produce eggs, not meat, (c) a kitchen where students prepare tasty simple food from their own harvests as well as nearby farms and sit down around beautifully set tables with one another to eat and talk, (d) collaboration with academic teachers to make food a school subject, and (e) local, national, and global outreach (Laird, 2013). Like Simon, Tribble, and Frick (2015), then, scholars in this School Lunch Ethics group signified the Edible Schoolyard as a possible strategy for educative response to miseducative encounters they had theorized (Author, 2013; see also Lewis, 2013; Rice, 2013b; Rud, 2013).

My own contribution to this study group examined the Edible Schoolyard Project's conceptual foundations in Alice Waters' study of Maria Montessori's *casa dei bambini*, whose explicit educational ethic of nourishment resembles existentialist Simone Weil's theory of food for both body and soul as a human need that entails ethical obligations. I concluded my study as I conclude now: By inviting (your!) pragmatist critique through which the ESY might become a kind of laboratory school in School Lunch Ethics for our time, deliberately archiving and variously examining qualitative evidence of myriad encounters, educative and miseducative, that ESY has made possible for students' learning to live and for their culturally diverse community's learning too (Laird, 2013).

### Notes

\* An address given at the annual Values and Leadership Conference of the CSLEE.

<sup>i</sup> Thanks to Suzanne Rice and Bradley Rowe for generously engaging and smartly and substantially amending my research program in philosophy of education, gender, and food, begun in 2007, especially to her for inviting my contributions to her exhilarating study groups on school lunch ethics in 2012-2016 and on human-animal education in 2013-2015, and also to A.G. Rud for his editorial collaboration with her to publish our groups' scholarship. Special thanks to William Frick for engaging and encouraging my scholarship on learning to live and for inviting my involvement in UCEA-CSLEE, including its 20<sup>th</sup> Values and Leadership conference. I have learned much from all four colleagues and not least also from my incomparable mentor of three decades, Jane Roland Martin, although I accept full responsibility for any flaws in my too-brief rendering here

of their brilliantly generative value-theorizing and intellectual leadership.

<sup>ii</sup> I am indebted to Suzanne Rice for introducing me to this article.

<sup>iii</sup> I am indebted to Suzanne Rice for introducing me to this book.

<sup>iv</sup> This fact may explain a thought-provoking phrase so new you will not even find it on Google, which I heard two weeks ago at a conference of the Society of Philosophy and History of Education: “the school lunch to prison pipeline,” suggested by the fact that NSLP food and prison food are basically the same food in this “New Jim Crow” era—about which see Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010, 2012).

<sup>v</sup> This provocative portion of the school lunch ethics project sparked a vibrant second study group on human-animal education, whose work has been collected for publication in Suzanne Rice and A.G. Rud, eds., *The Educational Significance of Human and Non-Human Animal Interactions: Blurring the Species Line* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

### References

- A place at the table* [Motion picture]. (2012). Participant Media.
- Dobrin, A. (2013, April 21). Morality begins with the stomach. *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/am-i-right/201304/morality-begins-the-stomach>
- Krings, M. (2013, April 18). Researcher looks at morality issues related to school lunches. Retrieved from <https://news.ku.edu/2013/04/18/researcher-looks-morality-issues-related-school-lunches>
- Laird, S. (1988). *Maternal teaching and maternal teachings: Philosophic and literary case studies of educating*. [Doctoral dissertation, Cornell University].
- Laird, S. (2008). Food for coeducational thought. Presidential essay. In B. Stengel (Ed.), *Philosophy of Education 2007* (pp. 1-13). Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society.
- Laird, S. (2013). Bringing educational thought to public school lunch: Alice Waters and the Edible Schoolyard. *Journal of Thought* 48(2), 12-25.
- Levine, S. (2008). *School lunch politics: The surprising history of America's favorite welfare program*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Lewis, M. T. (2013). Postmodern dietetic: Reclaiming the body through alimentary freedom. *Journal of Thought*, 48(2), 3.
- Martin, J. R. (1985). *Reclaiming a conversation: The ideal of the educated woman*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Martin, J. R. (1992). *The schoolhome: Rethinking schools for changing families*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Martin, J. R. (1994). *Changing the educational landscape: Philosophy, women, and curriculum*. New York: Routledge.
- Martin, J. R. (2011). *Education reconfigured: Culture, encounter, and change*. New York: Routledge.
- Ng, J., Sweeney, H. M., & Mitchiner, M. (2013). Let's sit together: Exploring the potential for human relations education at lunch. *Journal of Thought*, 48(2), 65-77.
- Pringle, P. (2013). *A place at the table: The crisis of 49 million hungry Americans and how to solve it*. New York: PublicAffairs.
- Ralston, K., Newman, C., Clauson, A., Guthrie, J., & Buzby, J. (2008). *The national school lunch program background, trends, and issues*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.
- Rice, S. (2013a). Introduction. *Journal of Thought*, 48(2), 3-11.
- Rice, S. (2013b). Three educational problems: The case of eating animals. *Journal of Thought*, 48(2), 112-127.
- Rice, S. (2014). *School lunch ethics*. Unpublished manuscript, Alternative session, Philosophy of Education Society, Albuquerque.
- Rowe, B. D. (2013). It IS about chicken: Chik-Fil-A, Posthumanist intersectionality, and gastro-aesthetic pedagogy. *Journal of Thought*, 48(2), 89-111.
- Rud, A. G. (2013). Midday eating while learning: The school cafeteria, homeschooling, and the open campus high school. *Journal of Thought*, 48(2), 82-86.
- Simon, P., Tribble, J. T., & Frick, W. (2015). Sustainability as a cultural meta-value for informing the ethics of school leadership: School gardening and its generative possibilities. *Journal of Authentic Leadership in Education*, 4(1), 1-13.
- Smilie, K. D. (2013). Time to eat: School lunch and the loss of leisure in education. *Journal of Thought*, 48(2), 49-64.
- Weaver-Hightower, M. B. (2011). Why education researchers should take school food seriously. *Educational Researcher*, 40(1), 15-21.
- Williams, D. R., & Brown, J. D. (2012). *Learning gardens and sustainability education: Bringing life to schools and schools to life*. New York: Routledge.

**EDITORIAL OBJECTIVES:** *Values and Ethics in Educational Administration* is dedicated to promoting and disseminating a broad range of scholarly inquiry relating to the areas of values and ethics in education, and their relationship to theory and practice in school administration and leadership. The areas of values and ethics represent a promising direction for research into the practice of educational administration, and the editor is prepared to consider a wide range of disciplined empirical and conceptual works of interest to both scholars in the field as well as practitioners in the PK-12 sector.

**SUBMISSION INFORMATION:** All articles will be reviewed by the editor to determine their suitability for this publication. In addition, at least two additional reviewers will conduct blind reviews of the article.

**MANUSCRIPT REQUIREMENTS:** The initial manuscript should be submitted electronically to the editor at the email address shown below. Manuscripts should conform to APA 6th edition formatting requirements and should not identify the author(s) of the work. A separate author page should be included providing the author(s)' details, including contact information (address and e-mail). In addition, an abstract of 100-150 words should be included, as well as up to six keywords identifying the central subjects addressed in the manuscript. Diagrams, tables, and figures should be kept at a minimum, appear in black and white, and follow the manuscript in numbered order corresponding to numbered placeholders in the text. Footnotes and Endnotes should be avoided whenever possible.

References should appear in the following format:

Stanley, R. J. & Hollander, M. P. (1992). Beyond the boundaries: The quest for knowledge. *Administrative Life*, 2(3), 36-49.

References and citations should be in alphabetical order, and chronological within alphabetical order. The editor reserves the right to make changes to the manuscript to ensure that it conforms to the house style. Generally, manuscripts should be between 2, 500 and 5,000 words in length. Prospective author(s) must include a statement which indicates they agree to the submission of the manuscript, and that the manuscript has not been published, and is not under consideration for publication, in part or in substance, elsewhere.

The editor will communicate via the internet with the author(s) of accepted manuscripts to ensure that the final version of the article is not only acceptable with the author(s) but also complies with the journal's established requirements and format.

**PUBLICATION DETAILS:** *Values and Ethics in Educational Administration* is an independently published quarterly by the University Council for Educational Administration's Consortium for the Study of Leadership and Ethics in Education. This journal is published both in traditional hard copy format as well as on-line at <http://www.ucea.org/initiatives/ucaa-centre-study-leadership-ethics/>. On-line access to the journal articles is free and copyright provisions are expected when using any information contained in an article.

**EDITORIAL CONTACT INFORMATION:** Address all papers, editorial correspondence, and subscription information requests to:

William C. Frick  
Rainbolt Family Endowed Presidential Professor  
University of Oklahoma  
Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies  
Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education  
820 Van Vleet Oval  
201 Collings Hall  
Norman, OK 73019-2041  
405-325-2447 (office)  
405-325-2403 (fax)  
<http://www.ou.edu/education/people/william-frick>

