

ATLANTA SCHOOL CHEATING SCANDAL PRESENTS VALUABLE ETHICAL LESSONS (Opinion, *The Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, August 14, 2011, A10.)

I was inspired to write this article after the insightful and thought-provoking discussion that took place in my Ethics class one Thursday evening. Here, I played the CBS Evening News Clip on the Atlanta Public Schools cheating scandal, which highlighted how principals and teachers held cheating parties on weekends, how students' answers were changed from incorrect to correct on standardized tests, and how Georgia's Governor Nathan Deal planned to execute punishments for teachers and administrators. From there, I asked my students to share their thoughts, reflections, and concerns about this report and how it affected and will affect the role that education plays in our lives.

It is safe to say that, based on our class dialogue, there are several ethical lessons we can learn and consider as we examine this particular scandal. The first ethical lesson is that we need to reexamine our value system concerning education as a nation. It is true that a day never goes by without me hearing about the numerous cuts schools experience in state and federal budgets, especially here in South Carolina. For example, our governor has said back in June that any surplus funds from state tax collections (totaling approximately \$56 million) should not go towards education, but for other items, one of them being tax cuts for businesses for purposes of job creation. This way, these jobs would be there for our future school graduates. However, I disagree with Gov. Haley's idea because, in the economic times in which we live, jobs are here today and gone tomorrow. Hence, we cannot promise jobs, but we can surely promise equipping and empowering our children for a lifetime with the best education possible. I heard a familiar proverb that said "give a man (woman) a fish and you feed him (her) for a day. Teach a man (woman) to fish and you feed him (her) for a lifetime". In other words, let us consider the following question: how could Gov. Haley propose such a budget idea while many teachers have lost or on their way of losing their jobs?

Another important ethical lesson on which we can reflect is to ensure that education provides us with a balance by ensuring the security of funding to provide the best resources for our schools, along with guaranteeing that the rights of our children will not be violated as they pursue education with integrity and honesty. As I read the Atlanta Journal-Constitution's article entitled "Atlanta School Kids Angry over Cheating Scandal", it was interesting to have read the reactions of a few students who have felt cheated and robbed of pursuing a quality education. Overall, the students shared that the teachers that changed their standardized test answers did not give them an honest opportunity to show their academic progress. Several students said the following: "They're (APS) selling us short. I think they're really taking education away from us. It was all about greed—to make sure the money is there". In other words, I would apply the Egoism Principle here to say that Atlanta Public Schools were only looking out for themselves to ensure their funding and status as a successful school district instead of building

their success upon bright, well-rounded, and aspirant students, especially as they matriculate in order to become active public servants for our world.

The last ethical lesson we can gain is for our communities and our parents to be held accountable and responsible for the priorities of educating our children. I do not blame solely on the Atlanta Public School District for their role in the cheating, for I believe that “it takes two to tango”, which is where our households come into play. I am from the household that education begins at home. Our schools and churches should not substitute that role from the household. Unfortunately, those institutions have shepherded that role because the virtues of building ideal character traits such as honesty, integrity, and the passion to learn, are not being incorporated. Therefore, because our communities and homes have failed to teach, so have our schools, and our world.

My overall aim in writing here is for us to put the priority of high quality education back on the radar along with making ethically sound decisions. This way, our actions and our budgets become compatible.