

Examining Ethical Tensions and the Pursuit of Care Through an Invitational Lens

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Ethics are aspirational goals representing the maximum or ideal standards set by the profession, practiced through one's professional behavior and interactions (Remley & Herlihy, 2016). This study explored teachers' meaning making of ethical practice by delineating how participants deliberated and came to make sense of what, why, and how, they made educational decisions. Findings revealed a complex interplay characterized by 1) personal morality clashing with professional norms; 2) conflicts between individualized student benefits versus the larger community's needs; and 3) students' short-term versus long-term development. Conclusions affirm the influence of intentional care and suggest meaning making may begin in an internalized space framed by the participant's personal sense of morality but then be mitigated by external organizational and societal pressures that both inform and challenge ethical choices and professional practices.

Keywords: Ethical decision-making; Ethical dilemmas; Invitational Education; Teacher Preparation; Teachers' Ethical knowledge; Teaching

Introduction

Although values and ethics are frequently used interchangeably, the two terms are not identical. Values pertain to beliefs and attitudes that provide direction to everyday living, whereas ethics pertain to the beliefs we hold about what constitutes right conduct. Ethics are moral principles adopted by an individual or group to provide rules for right conduct. As noted by Remley and Herlihy (2016), ethics are aspirational goals representing the maximum or ideal standards set by the profession, practiced through your professional behavior and interactions.

By contrast, laws represent the body of rules governing the affairs of people within a community, state, or country. Laws define the minimum standards society will tolerate, which are enforced by the government. For example, we can agree that a minimum standard is the legal obligation required of educators or mental health professionals to report suspected child abuse. Yet, the law can further encourage working toward changing societal attitudes to prevent child abuse rather than only reporting it.

Although professional actions are related to ethical behavior, it is possible to act unprofessionally and still not act unethically. Community standards often establish the ultimate legal criteria by determining or defining what is considered reasonable behavior. Reasonableness can be defined as the care that is ordinarily exercised by others practicing within the same specialty within the professional community.

Perhaps understanding the potential divide between community ethics compared professional ethics requires conceptualizing professional ethics by contrasting mandatory ethics with aspirational ethics. We should agree that mandatory ethics describe a level of ethical functioning based on one's compliance with minimal standards and acknowledgement of the basic tenets clarifying what we must do compared to must never do. The focus of mandatory ethics is on behavioral rules. By contrast, aspirational ethics describe the highest standards of thinking and conduct, requiring one to do more than simply meet the letter of the ethics code. Aspirational ethics

entail embracing the spirit behind the code and the principles upon which the code of conduct and behavior ethical rests.

While it is essential to place principles before personalities, the ethical professional should seek to integrate virtue ethics and principled ethics to reach better ethical decisions and policies. Let's take this moment to differentiate between principled ethics and virtue ethics. We should agree that principled ethics are a set of obligations and a method that focuses on moral issues with the goals of solving a particular dilemma or set of dilemmas and establishing a framework to guide future ethical thinking and behavior (Meara, Schmidt, & Day, 1996).

By contrast, virtue ethics focus upon the professional's character traits and nonobligatory ideals to which she or he aspires rather than on solving specific ethical dilemmas. While reflection upon principled ethics begs the question, 'Is this unethical?' Reflection from the pursuit of virtue ethics would question whether one is doing what is best for his or her followers, client, or student. Crucially, virtue ethics requires the professional to be conscious of ethical behavior. Therefore, the virtuous professional would deem it unethical to use approaches or techniques that might not result in the greatest benefit to her or his followers, client, or student or to use any techniques to which he or she has not been thoroughly trained, although their use might not be prohibited in practice.

Therefore, virtue ethics focus upon ideals rather than obligations and on the character of the professional rather than on the action itself. Thus, principles before personalities. Five characteristics of virtuous professionals were described by Meara et al (1996). These were:

- Virtuous agents are motivated to do what is right because they judge it to be right, not just because they feel obligated or fear the consequences.
- Virtuous agents rely on vision and discernment, which involve sensitivity, judgment, and understanding that lead to decisive action.
- Virtuous agents have compassion and are sensitive to the suffering of others. They are able to take actions to reduce their clients' pain.
- Virtuous agents are self-aware. They know how their assumptions, convictions, and biases are likely to affect their interactions with others.
- Virtuous agents relate to and understand the mores of their community and the importance of community in moral decision making, policy setting, and character development. They understand the ideals and expectations of their community.

Educators benefit in a number of ways from working together to identify a clear, shared vision, developing a collaborative culture focusing on learning, engaging in collective inquiry, remaining action oriented, committing to continuous improvement, and being results oriented (Dufour et al., 2008). Greater student success is possible when educators utilize an intentionally caring, optimistic, respectful, and trusting (ICORT) mindset. Through intentional invitations for vibrant discussions and active interactions an ICORT-driven educator systemically addresses institutional needs through an inventory of the people, places, policies, programs, and processes (5-Ps) that influence the potential for success. This intentional desire promotes collaboration, exhibits critical, higher order thinking skills (HOTS), and analyzes accessible, reliable data (Anderson, 2019). In this regard, the practitioner of Invitational Education acts as a virtuous agent.

Effective accountability requirements hastened the emergence of professional learning communities (PLC). Marzano and Waters (2009) believe, a PLC “suggests a group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning oriented, growth-promoting way, operating as a collective enterprise” (p. 56). To be successful, the PLC requires “reculturing the traditional culture of schools and districts” (Dufour et al., 2008, p. 6). This shift needs to be systemic and not merely structural, embedding sustained improvements in “the assumptions, beliefs, values, expectations, and habits that constitute the norm for that organization” (p. 90).

The improvement to the collaborative learning culture begins with recognizing promotion of student learning in schools that are loosely coupled by design must be tightly coupled in relation to non-negotiable goals (NNGs). Beginning with district leadership, a culture based on “defined autonomy” (Marzano & Waters, 2010, p. 8) communicates NNGs to both the internal and external stakeholders. Establishment of non-negotiable goals (NNGs) are a product of earlier collaboration. Intentional invitations promote staff empowerment (Purkey & Novak, 2016). Determination to collaborate, time to meet, willingness to ask earnest questions, creation of an action plan, and always meeting with an agenda, promotes collaborative communication aligned to the established NNGs. Otherwise, change can be either slow, inconsistent, or nonexistent.

There is little doubt that teachers face decisions that can significantly affect students’ confidence, motivation, and learning but as Barrett, Casey, Visser, and Headley (2012) posited, the teaching profession has lacked a set of guidelines to provide teachers with clarity around decisions with ethical implications. They argued that professional ethics serve three essential purposes: to ensure high professional standards, to protect students, and to guide teachers in their decision-making (Barrett et al., 2012).

Many agree that teaching is demanding work (Loewenberg Ball & Forzani, 2009; Santoro, 2011), in part because it draws upon human dispositions and includes a moral set of responsibilities including caring for students (Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik; 1990). Teachers have a responsibility to make moral and ethical decisions all the time. They must consider the needs of students from diverse backgrounds, be fair, consistent, and use their professional authority while seeing past teachers’ own self-interests. “There is more than one available course of action, and the individual teacher makes a choice of what she considers the right course of action in the circumstances” (Heilbronn, 2010, p. 95).

Given the nature of these demands, ethics and teaching are naturally enmeshed (Campbell, 2008a; Cummings, Harlow, and Maddux, 2007). The expectations associated with being an ethical teacher often seem simple at first, however many novice teachers quickly identify a host of situations in which right and wrong, good, and evil, ought and ought not to, are far more complicated than initially perceived and tend to reside in the gray areas (Hutchings, 2016; Mahony, 2009). The ethical decisions that teachers must make on a daily or even hourly basis are often far from clear-cut. Teachers often experience circumstances that evoke mixed feelings and dilemmas regarding ethical decisions, and their reasoning for the choices they make regarding these dilemmas are often unclear (Mezirow, 2000; Jersild, 1965). When parents or other teachers question teachers’ decisions, or when these choices go against their own personal moral compass of what they consider the right course of action based on the circumstances it can be complicated and demoralizing (Heilbronn, 2008). This study sought to uncover the ways in which teachers make meaning of the tangled incidents they describe, in which they identified ethical issues at play, and, how they chose to navigate these decisions and situations. The research question asked: In what ways do teachers make meaning of and describe enacting professional ethics?

Theoretical background

There are key ethical paradigms and their contributors including alternatives to principle-based ethics and care-based ethics that are germane to this study. First, the differences between personal morality versus professional ethics, laws, policies and the ethical theories of justice, care, cultural care, and phrenetic aspects of teachers' professional ethics must be taken into consideration.

Morality versus Ethics

Often *ethics* and *morals* are used synonymously. According to Hazard (1985) morals refer to “the notions of right and wrong that guide us individually and subjectively in our daily existence” (p. 451). By contrast, ethics are norms shared by a group “on the basis of mutual and usually reciprocal recognition” (Hazard, 1985, p. 453). For the purposes of this study, the distinction between morality and ethics is a critical one, given they are serious, theorized concepts.

Morality refers to how people choose to live their life, what principles to abide by for actions that stem from a set of beliefs from a certain culture, specific religion, or philosophical orientation, whereby personal interpretations of what is right and wrong are strongly influenced by the factors mentioned herein. Values about honor and morality can vary between individuals. Personal morality, referring to personal principles, values, and beliefs derived from one's life experiences that are subjective, can be cultural or religious and may or may not align with community mores (e.g., Campbell, 1993; Jackson, Boostrom, & Hansen, 1993; Oser, 1989).

By contrast, ethics tend to be agreed-upon statements regarding behavior and activity used to determine what is right and wrong within a more specific professional realm and to guide behavior (i.e., formal ethics within law, counseling, clergy, medicine, and education). Philosophers have positioned ethics as the study and development of theories that encompass the general nature of moral principles (e.g., Socrates, Aristotle, Kant, Newton). This can include aspects of universal notions of fairness, a sense of right and wrong, or what ought to be done in any given situation. Lowenstein (2008) defined ethics as “the attempt to think critically about what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad, in human conduct” or simply stated how people should conduct themselves (p. 43).

With regard specifically to education, Husu (2001) defined ethics as the “norms, values, and principles that should govern the conduct of educational professionals” (p. 68). Professional ethics signify the professional ethical standards that assist practitioners within situational and systemic contexts that acknowledge dilemmas in choosing the best course of action (Berlak & Berlak, 1981; Fenstermacher, 1990; Jackson et al., 1993; Hutchings, 2016; Strike, 1990).

Laws, Regulations and Policies

Laws and regulations, or policies, for the purposes of this study, refer to the specific articulated rules, policies, statutes, and judicial guidelines that teachers are required to follow. As opposed to moral issues that focus on how people live their lives, the regulatory position takes a rules-based approach to right and wrong, determined by others as opposed to the individual. Hazard (1985) characterized laws as “the norms that ordinarily are written and expressed as generalizations” (p. 448). Teachers are beholden to laws, regulations, and policies that originate from their core professional responsibilities, including promoting and protecting students' safety, fostering growth and development, and facilitating students' learning. As Darling-Hammond

(1985) wrote, “It is unethical for a teacher to conform to prescribed practices that are harmful to children. Yet that is what teachers are required to do by policies that are pedagogically inappropriate for some or all of their pupils” (p. 213). Therein lies the essence of the ethical struggle teachers often encounter.

Moral Development and the Justice Perspective

Relevant to this study is the work that key researchers (e.g., Hoffman, 1982; Kohlberg, 1981, 1984; Rest, 1983) have done in investigating moral development, or the changes in understandings of morality over a life span. Historically, cognitive-based perspectives have dominated the fields of psychology and were cooped to explain teachers perceived moral responsibilities and decisions. For example, Kohlberg (1981, 1984) claimed that moral development progressed through six stages and three levels (e.g., two stages per level). Kohlberg’s theory of development in the most evolved level proposed that people can follow self-chosen ethical standards of behavior, engaging in questioning rules that violate some people’s rights, and considering the needs of all members of a community. Kohlberg considered this phase the time when people have (a) the capacity to consider laws of a society, (b) can consider if and how to uphold or violate principles of justice, and (c) makes decisions about morality that are based on principles that appeal to a value of the common good rather than simply self-benefit. In this stage, a distinction is made between being legally right and morally right. Further, based on Kohlberg’s work, Rest (1975) developed the Defining Issues Test (DIT) and applied it specifically to teachers with the aim of determining their individual moral reasoning levels. Only later did care based perspectives take root espousing the idea that as human’s our decisions are guided primarily by the knowledge of each other through relationships. This care-based approach to ethical practice contrasted Kohlberg’s (1981) focuses on ethics as a matter of justice and fairness in which the assumption is made that people follow universal rules.

The Ethics of Care

Gilligan’s (1982) theory claimed that women tend to emphasize compassion, caring, empathy, and relationships over more abstract concepts such as justice in relation to moral understandings. Gilligan’s research rejected Kohlberg’s (1981, 1984) work established a set of universal ethical principles. Her work (1982) focused on the ways in which being responsive to others’ needs often emerges as more important than the concepts of *justice* and *fairness*. Gilligan uncovered incidents in which people described prioritizing care for others over any sense of universal rules about what is right and wrong ethical practice. Gilligan’s contributions to psychology and the field’s understandings of ethics weighed heavily in this study; her approach and line of thinking resonated as a way to start to understand teachers’ ethical choices and decisions.

In addition, Noddings’ influential “ethics of care” (1984, 2012) suggested that all ethical action centers on interpersonal relationships helped examine the situated contexts of schools and classrooms, where relationships between teachers and student are often at the center of the learning experience. For Noddings, teaching is relational work, something that is inherent in the professional role, a part of all key aspects of instructions such as planning curriculum, implementing lessons, or assessing student work. Nodding’s and Gilligan’s framing of ethics is germane to this examination of how teachers’ make meaning of professional practice in education. Nodding’s suggestion that all ethical action centers on interpersonal relationships helped examine

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Cultural Care

Cultural care is a theory of practice. It is defined as verbal or nonverbal gestures that display a person’s genuine interest in another person’s social, emotional, mental, and physical well-being, while simultaneously recognizing and acknowledging race and culture as a significant part of a person’s identity. As noted in the graphic below, cultural care includes respecting, valuing, and embracing culture from a value- and strengths-based perspective (Allen & FitzGerald, 2017, p 8).

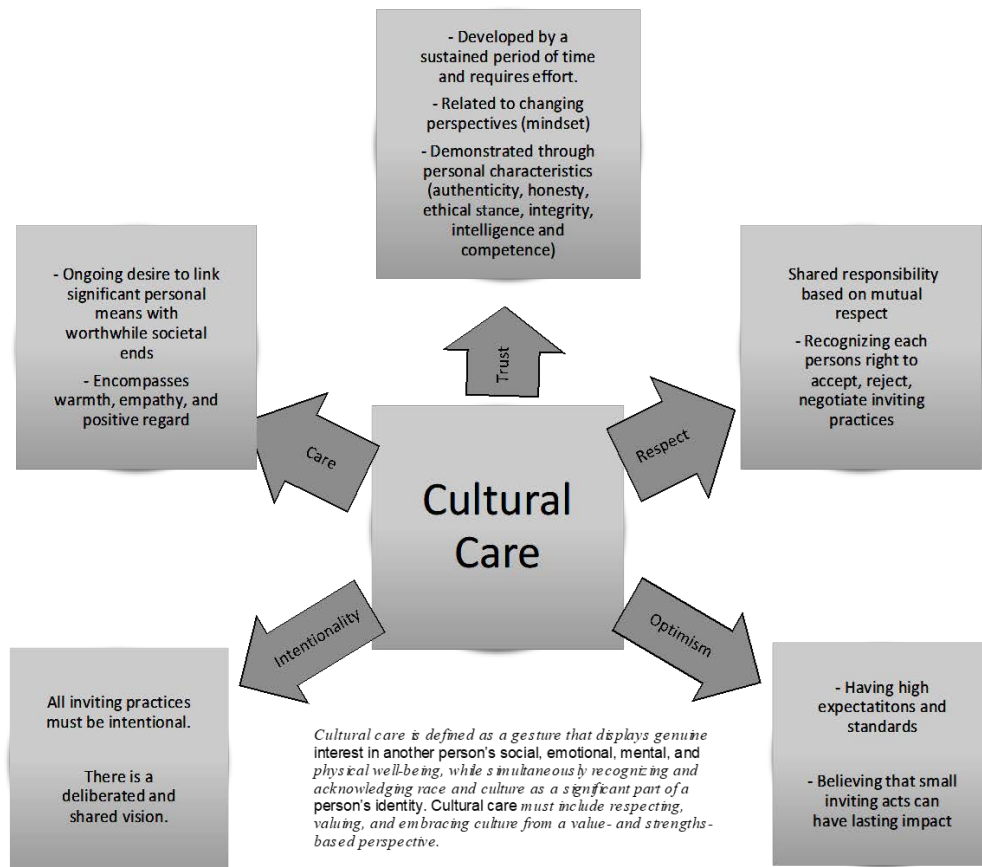


Figure 1. Elements of invitational education (I-CORT) with cultural care as a driver. Adapted from *Fundamentals of Invitational Education (2nd ed.)*, by W.W. Purkey & J.M. Novak, 2016, Greensboro, NC: International Alliance for Invitational Education.

Intentionality care, optimism, respect, and trust (ICORT) are assumptions of Invitational Education theory and practice (Purkey & Novak, 2016; Anderson, 2019)

Moral Dimensions of Teaching

There are also an abundance of literature exploring the moral dimensions or teaching. Campbell’s (2008b) work has provided one of the most compelling literature reviews available to scholars interested in the moral dimensions of teaching. She claimed that besides John Dewey (1903) and a few other scholars, many teacher researchers failed on two fronts: (a) to address the moral aspects of teaching, and (b) to provide any nuanced examination of the ethical nature of

teacher professionalism (2008a). Instead, most scholars focused on accountability, assessment, and measurement of character-building curricular initiatives designed to address character education. In more recent years, Campbell showed that many in the field of education focused solely on the enactment of moral *virtues* in teaching (e.g., Bergem, 1993; Clark, 1990; Tom, 1980).

In historical terms, Campbell (2008a) assessed the landscape of teachers and chronicled the development of how authority, power, and morality began to make its way into the discourse. She claimed that “the field of professional ethics in teaching is situated within a wider concern for the moral dimensions of teaching and schooling” (Campbell, 2008a, p. 358). The literature suggests that professional ethics are more than a list of behaviors teachers should avoid, and yet they are often articulated in codes of conduct by district leaders or principles espoused by teachers’ unions (Campbell, 2000). It would be beneficial to expand upon the few existing codes of professional ethics to include a set of decision rules for teachers to determine the best course of action when one or more underlying principles are in conflict.

Ethical Codes

Many professions such as law, medicine, nursing, dentistry, accounting, and counseling have established codes of ethics to articulate the responsibilities of the profession and have formed review boards that monitor and enforce codes of professional ethics (Webb, 2007). In teaching, while there has been some progress in developing codes of ethics, one could argue that there is still a vast lack of shared ethical understandings. When asked on an impromptu basis, often pre-service teachers describe ethical responsibilities along the lines of vague notions of “what we should do” ensuring or fighting for their students’ learning needs, instilling democratic practice in class, and being fair with students during their day-to-day professional challenges. Such descriptions are consistent with the National Education Association (NEA) Preamble and Principle I *Commitment to the Student* (1975). In 1975, the Representative Assembly of the NEA adopted a Code of Ethics of the Education Profession. Similarly, in 1994 the advisory board for the Association of American Educators (AAE) developed a code of ethics for educators that was built to uphold the highest ethical standards to protect the rights of both students and teachers. While the intention was not to replace the NEA code of ethics, the AAE expanded upon the commitments to the students and the profession. This was a clear attempt to determine the rules of engagement for teachers, clarifying the behaviors and the practices that the teaching profession can, and should, impose on itself.

Over the last 40 years since these initial ethical codes were developed, however, the world has increased in complexity and policy changes prompted the need for more specific guidelines. For example, the inclusion of uniquely abled learners into mainstream classrooms coincided with the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) developing a specific code of ethics for special educators. The CEC code stated, “Special education professionals are committed to developing the highest education and quality of life potential of individuals with exceptionalities” (2003, p. 1). Two years later, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) produced a Code of ethical conduct and statement of commitment specific to professions working with early childhood students (2005). The AAE expanded upon areas already covered in greater detail in the original NEA code of ethics and provided additional guidance to concerns about the added complexity of teaching in the digital age (e.g., how to navigate digital interaction with students, families, and colleagues on social media).

Phronetic Perspective

More recently, scholars such as Levinson and Fay (2016) have proposed a *phronetic* approach to practical ethics, an Aristotelian concept meaning “practical wisdom,” that rejects universal principles and “requires a marriage of theory and practice” (Levinson and Fay, 2016, p. 4). They posited that “Teachers have an almost infinite number of possibilities to select from at a given moment, and that is what makes teaching so complicated” (Levinson & Fay, 2016; p. 55). Phronesis, the authors argue, can help provide insight into how teachers’ competing intentions and conflicting pressures can factor into teachers’ ethical dilemmas and their decision-making processes. Santoro (2018), who also applied this approach, focused on demoralization, a type of dilemma in which teachers ultimately leave the profession as almost “conscientious objectors” because “they have ethical concerns about the work they are doing” (p. xi). Santoro is resolute in her assertion that teachers are living in difficult times. She made the case that value conflicts often arise for teachers surrounding issues of policies, mandates and school practices that undermine the wellbeing of students.

Methods

Participants

The sample for this qualitative study was comprised of twelve public school teachers, who varied in terms of demographic backgrounds, range in years of experience, content areas taught, K-12 grade level experience, and ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Six of the participants were beginning teachers with 2–3 years of experience; three were mid-career teachers with 4–6 years of experience; and three were experienced teachers with between 12–30 years of experience. Seven participants taught in urban school settings, while five teachers worked in suburban school settings. The 12 teacher participants teach in a mix of grade levels: seven taught in elementary schools (K–3), four of whom were special education teachers with Teacher of Student with Disabilities (TSD) certification. Four taught high school science and one taught middle school math. Ten were female and two were male. All 12 participating teachers are from a variety of racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data sources included two semi-structured 60–90-minute interviews with participating teachers’ reflections on critical incidents from their practice. The first semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews were conducted with the 12 participants between September and November. The first interview focused on what methodologists like Patton (2002) describe as “experience questions” to provide space for participants to expand upon the context, their thinking about events and interactions in rich detail (see appendix for interview questions). The goal of the critical incidents (Tripp, 2012) was to provide further information supplied directly from events that occurred in the participating teachers’ practice during the day about how they made meaning of their daily decisions and the ethical implications that participants may have identified, noticed, and reflected upon. Recording what they perceived to be critical incidents provided the chance for participants to reflect upon very mundane daily events that occur routinely, prompting essential understandings about the meaning of what is likely happening below the surface of events themselves. The teachers recorded these daily moments that lingered in their minds beginning in October and continued throughout the spring using notes, journal reflections, text messages, voice recordings and email messages, all of which were coded in NVIVO using open coding.

Gilligan’s (1982) Listening Guide method was utilized given it was designed to attend to voice, in this case the voice of teachers. Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, and Bertsch (2003) presented

this method of analysis that focuses on voice and relationship through multiple listenings to the information presented by participants. The Listening Guide method requires listening for three distinct types of information. First, the researcher listens for plot, referring to participants’ stories and events as they describe them taking place in vivid detail. Second, first-person voice refers to how participants speak about themselves. The second listening is referred to as the Listening for “I” and first-person voice, and at this stage, an I poem is created by separating out each I phrase in order of appearance. Third, contrapuntal voice is a musical term, and attends to the gaps or missing information, conflicting understandings, or responses. Between January and March, participants were provided with their I poems and a second round of interviews took place. The third listening is known as the Listening for contrapuntal voices, which “attends to the participants voice not for its content or themes but for its quality or musicality. This means listening for different voices and their interplay, or harmonies or dissonances within the psyche, tensions with parts of itself” (Gilligan & Eddy, 2017, p. 79). This final stage attends to gaps or missing information and any conflicting understandings or responses.

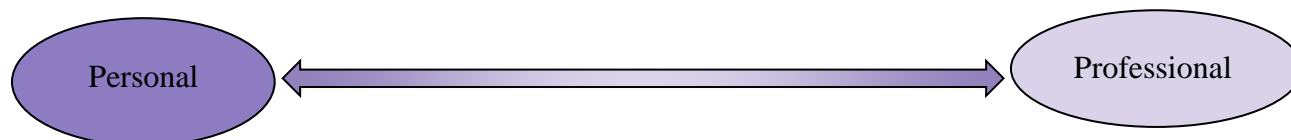
Findings

Qualitative analysis revealed that teacher participants made ethical meaning depending on scenarios and the complicated contexts in which they were situated. The participating teachers in this study overall employed a balanced approach to mediating the tensions they encountered in their educational practice. These participating teachers tried to make decisions that prioritized what is best for students, despite multiple tensions to prioritize other pressures. Each of the twelve teachers articulated their commitment to enact decisions that honor what is best for the student and directly referenced a central grounding in their professional desire and motivation to help students. These participants articulated this as their fundamental responsibility of teaching, and yet they most often felt pressures to conform to other demands stemming from parents and administrators. There were times in which the moral, ethical, or professional responsibilities that teachers described collided, and there were major points of entanglement between participants’ conceptions of these and which should prevail in specific scenarios. I argue that these entanglements can be conceptualized as four intersecting continua that help represent the ways participating teachers made meaning of ethical practice (see Figure 1). The first continuum that represents at one end, professional identity goals, and at the other end, personal identity, and concerns. Second, there is also a continuum that signifies how teachers can feel conflicted between short-term outcomes on one end regarding students’ academic learning, emotional, interpersonal, and developmental needs versus students’ longer-term development and growth in these same domains. Third, there is a range across a continuum that spans a concern for communal versus the individual needs regarding how they made meaning of ethical practice. Each of these three continua reflect the complexity and the multifaceted nature of the teachers’ sense of self.

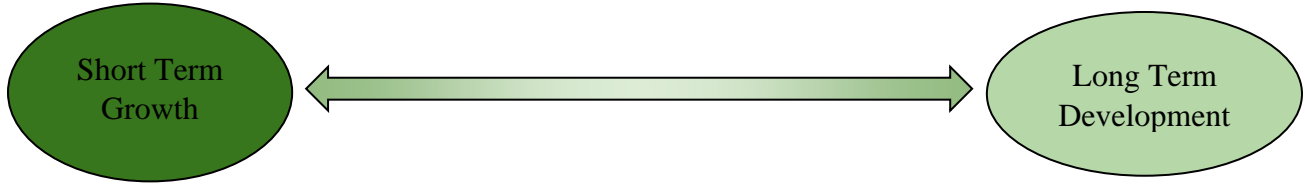
Charting these teacher participants’ considerations along the continua (see Figure 1) illustrated how these tensions come together in certain contexts and intersected with one another.

Continua

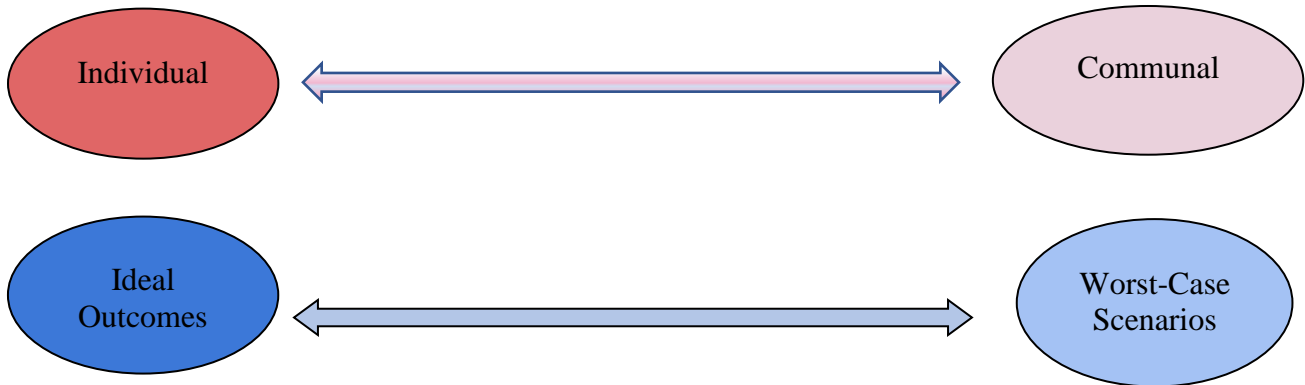
Personal versus Professional Responsibility



Short Term Growth to Long Term Development



Individual versus Communal Needs



Ideal Outcomes and Worst-Case Scenarios

Figure 1: Four Continua of competing tensions

Continuum 1: Personal as Opposed to Professional Responsibility

The first continuum represents the tensions and the negotiations between the professional and, at the other end, a more personal moral orientations that both inform ethical practice.

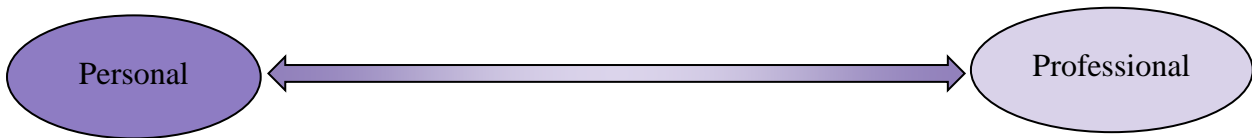


Figure 2: Continuum of Personal versus Professional Responsibility

To demonstrate the study findings, an example for each continuum generated in this study is presented below. The first was illustrated by the case of Charlotte, who repeatedly described tensions between the personal and professional lines that must be drawn in terms of adhering to relational boundaries. As a second-grade inclusion teacher, Charlotte had been teaching for 12 years, many of which were in a co-teaching setting. Her initial desire was to be a school psychologist, but when Charlotte decided to become a classroom teacher, she enrolled and completed a traditional teacher preparation program. She spent her career in the same district but moved between two urban schools in which most of the students were Hispanic and English Language Learners (ELLs).

Professional ethics are about doing the right things the right way, not just when somebody is looking, not just because you are getting paid, but about doing what's right, doing what's expected, and superseding those expectations. For teaching this is first and foremost making sure students are happy, healthy, and learning. This includes reflecting on practice and being honest with oneself and doing what is best for all the people involved, including family, friends, and/or the classroom of students, something that can be simple and complicated at the same time. There is also an aspect of staying centered, cutting out the noise and the negativity and staying positive, just doing one's job and just being a good person when no one is looking. (Charlotte, Interview 1, 9-16-17)

Charlotte expressed how she cares about her students, but she also recognizes that this creates tension when she is also the disciplinarian and instructional leader. In second grade, “they are so little, and I am not, I guess, I’m not trying to be their friend. I’m trying to be a teacher figure, you know, I’m trying to just be the adult in the room ... my job is to keep [them] safe at all times” (Charlotte, Interview 2, 1-18-18).

Charlotte explained that while she does not have children of her own, her students often referred to her as “mom” accidentally when they raised their hand to ask for guidance. She takes this as a positive mistake that tends to happen with students so young when they feel safe and comfortable in the classroom learning environment. Yet, Charlotte also tries to distance herself and have students show respect for the professional role of teaching. Her situation exemplifies the shared tensions experienced by many of the participating teachers as incidents from their practice prompted reflection about ethical concerns, in particular grey areas that emerged with respect to professional boundaries and the building of positive support relationships with students.

In two of her critical incident descriptions, Charlotte addressed these challenges in greater depth, revealing her emotional involvement and investment in student relationships and the tensions these create with adhering to policies. In the first incident, Charlotte described a particular student relationship: The student was really struggling in class and seemed to be neglected at home. Charlotte’s desire to care for the student was evident. Charlotte and her colleague helped this student in ways that exceeded her regular teaching responsibilities on a regular basis, for example, taking the student to get his hair cut right across the street from the school. In the following excerpt, she shared:

I mean the boundaries were super blurred there. I was nervous about blurring the boundaries because I could get in trouble like, you know, I, this is crossing the line even though we had [his mom's] permission, he was still a student. If I walked him to the barbershop a block away, I was responsible for him. And I am putting myself in a position that if something were to happen to him, you know, the mom could always renege and say no, she had no permission. You know, she could have always claimed that I did something, or my aide did something that we did not do, or we did not say. There is a policy that says unless you have this form of documentation, you are not supposed to have this kind of contact. There is a handbook that is, you know, so vague and at some point, you just do not read it although you should, especially in situations like this, you want to see or like what we are doing. In what I told my aide at the time I was like look; I cannot take him to the barbershop. (Charlotte, Interview 2, 1-18-18)

This tension can be identified by examining the I poem representing Charlotte’s reflection about her choice whether to take him:

I mean
I was nervous
I could get in trouble
I am crossing the line
I walked him
I was responsible
I am putting myself in a position
I do not want this

Charlotte's care for her students also creates tensions at home and in her personal identity. Caring is a state of being that she cannot just turn off at the end of the day. However, over her 12 years teaching Charlotte recognized that she has found more balance, and she has established boundaries for the sake of her own happiness. In this regard she shares:

Emotionally, I think that I have learned that at the end of the day, they are not mine, I did not give birth to them. They are not my children that I take home. So, I think, although it is difficult, the weight of the emotion is difficult not to turn off when I get home. But I do, in my mind, I say okay, I am not her mom, I am not his mom, I do what I can at school, and I hope for the best when he goes home.
(Charlotte, Interview 2, 1-18-18)

Charlotte’s account of meaning making of her ethical practice appears to involve a recognition that she has evolved from a very personal sense of caring and responsibility to a more professional understanding of her role as a caregiver, one that includes more clearly drawn boundaries that were hard won based on experiences with her students.

Proof of understanding of the recognizable limits to Charlotte’s professional role is evidenced in her statement: “*I am not his mom.*” Earlier in her career, this was not as distinct for Charlotte. She desired to impact her students’ experiences outside of school, at home, and positively influence their long-term growth directly and immediately. One of Charlotte’s ethical grey areas that she learned to navigate includes how she learned to draw the line between teaching responsibilities and not taking emotional baggage home with her.

Continuum 2: Short-term Growth Versus Long-term Development

The second continuum signifies how teachers can focus on short-term results on one end about students’ academic learning, emotional, interpersonal, and developmental needs versus students’ long-term development and growth in these same domains.

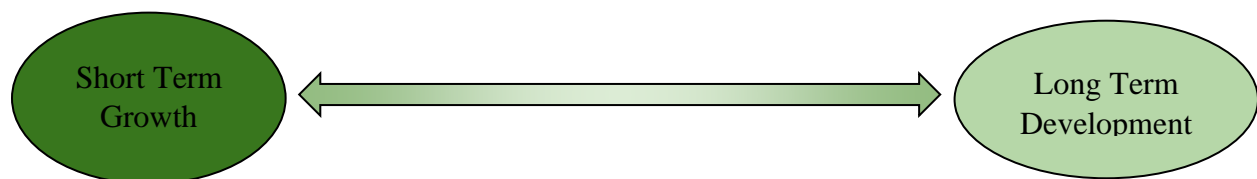


Figure 3: Short-term versus Long-term Development

Many of the participants described stressful experiences with parent-driven student grade disputes, pressures to provide make-up work after deadlines had passed, and a great deal of time spent trying to decipher policies and the best ways of managing these situations from a variety of perspectives (i.e., administrators, families, and students). These teachers articulated feeling conflicted about how to best grade student work equitably, and about providing students with fair and varied assessment of their learning. Underlying these assessment and grading issues was an ethical concern about the importance of the message about whether, in what ways, and to what extent to hold students accountable for their educational performance.

In these instances, most participating teachers articulated a belief that holding students accountable was important to the students' long-term growth, despite the selfish temptation to avoid short-term stresses and headaches with students, families, and administrators. Five of the teachers articulated a sense of understanding that what might not feel good for students in the moment (e.g., having to repeat or rework assignments, or repeat a course due to insufficient work or a failing grade) is beneficial for students' long-term learning and development. Laura explained in her first interview her ethical dilemma around the difference between her own approach to assessment practices and the approach of her colleagues:

You have a schedule, and you must follow that schedule since now they are sophomores, juniors, and seniors in high school. And now we say, "well they're old enough now and they should be able to do it on their own." But no one ever taught them and so how can we just say they should know how to do it? And so, I think a lot of the decisions that I make are based on a thoughtful analysis of the things that have gone on in these kids' lives up into this point. And I said at the beginning, one of the things I want to do is hold them to their accountability. But I think accountability means a lot of different things to a lot of different people. And for me, it means that yeah, maybe the work is not going to be done on time. But it is going to be done, and it is going to be done to their ability. I think my professional ethics are based on that. (Laura, Interview 1, 10-28-17)

These examples regarding assessment practices revealed participating teachers' prioritization of students' long-term development over short-term growth, one of their most challenging endeavors. In terms of a rationale for her stance on this issue, Laura explained to her students that, "in life, they are going to have deadlines, and if they do not reach those deadlines, they are going to lose their job. And in college, their professors are going to tell them, *"Too bad."* So, they need to be responsible for their grades. (Laura, Interview 2, 1-27-18) Laura described an uphill battle trying to get students to understand the connection to life outside the system of their high school. *"The kids do not believe us when we tell them, 'When you go to college, it is not going to be like this,' and they act like we don't know what we're talking about."* When Laura reviewed her I poem on the subject after her first interview, she stated that it really revealed aspects of her practice about which she been thinking in depth.

I teach

I am with them.

I have built really strong bonds.

I always hold all my students accountable

I am quite flexible.

I will decide.

I will take their work.

I think but I always hold them accountable.
I will always stand with them.
I am not well-liked.
It kind of goes against the procedures,
But I do it.
I spend hours every single day
I give up my prep.
I just do not know
I could tell them, 'No'
I am really good at math.
I think they enjoy that
I often need to use the textbook.
I have not done this math since high school.
There is not really any decision to make.
If you ask me, I will stay.

In this exploration of her assessment and grading practices, Laura can get to the heart of some of the conflicting tensions inherent in this complicated set of factors influencing her decisions, as well as the students' decisions. Laura recognizes and calls out the district and its policies, which play a role as well. As described above, aspects of Laura's practice such as respecting, valuing, and embracing culture from a value- and strengths-based perspective reveal her relation to the Allen and FitzGerald (2017) cultural care model.

Continuum 3: Honoring Individual Needs and the Greater Community

A major element in the entangled ethical understandings of practice that were articulated in this study stemmed from the relational aspects of teaching. In this study, the one constant was that teachers tended to honor their relationships. First, they felt most compelled to honor those relationships with their students. Challenges often emerged when this desire to honor their relationships with students was at odds with the relationships or the perspectives of other adults within a school, within the educational community, and within the larger district. This translated into these teachers portraying a sense of being pulled in two different directions. Rebecca in her third year of teaching science in an urban high school, where she is one of three White teachers in the school. Rebecca's students are predominantly from under-represented groups, and she teaches a high percentage of English language learners (ELLs). Rebecca shared that her son and daughter attend private Catholic schools, which often proves to be a challenge with differing holiday schedules than the public school in which she works. In Rebecca's view, one must figure out the culture of the school and how people are interpreting it and then find out the interpretation one can live with. In her case, Rebecca thought that she had improved over the past few years figuring out what administration wants, being at a level she is comfortable with and at a level that students respect as well (i.e., students know what they can and cannot get away with and they are aware of which teachers going to give them hundreds no matter what their effort is) (Rebecca, Interview 1, 10-28-17). Herein exists another continuum, along which participating teachers described attempting to strike a balance between the needs of their students on one end and the obligations engendered by being a member of a greater educational community on the other, as represented in Figure 4.



Figure 4: Individual Needs versus the Greater Community

Rebecca described an awareness that she had improved over the past few years with “*figuring out what administration wants, being at a level that I am comfortable with, and at a level that students respect as well*” (Rebecca, Interview 1, 10-28-17).

There were many incidents in which participating teachers revealed that they find themselves conflicted: precariously perched between their desire to meet the needs of a particular student for whom they are an advocate, and pressures to comply with the directions, advice, or opinions of other members of the professional educational community. These participating teachers reiterated many times that maintaining established relationships with their students is their first priority. At times, teachers experienced moments in which they were pulled between students’ needs and the need to honor the views of other adults in the greater educational community. This was manifested as the views of the administration at a particular school, parents’ views, a school policy, colleagues, or other support professionals. Teachers expressed the difficulties in striking a balance between these sometimes-opposing ends of this continuum, represented by an individual student's needs on one end and the voices from the educational community at large on the opposing end of this spectrum. Participating teachers in this study fell at different points along the continuum, with the majority leaning toward ensuring they meet the individual needs of their students over honoring the various needs or viewpoints of others from the greater educational community. Finding this balance between this tension was one of the ways in which these teachers made sense of their ethical practice.

Prior to becoming a teacher, Olive was an assistant teacher for many years in a preschool program. She has taught kindergarten for four years in a suburban very progressive school. Olive also teaches a night class at the local community college to second language learners. She thinks a great deal about her college students and often imagines what her kindergarteners might need when they become college students. In her view, ethical decisions play out in her classroom when she must choose what is best for her students. For Olive, these external demands come in the form of the curriculum, parental expectations, or needs of the others involved:

That’s my job beyond my job, that’s my true higher calling—if I want to be effective with this child, I have to forget about these things and I have to really focus in on what I think, what I feel, what I see, what I observe, what they’ve shown me that they need it...we all know we can talk about multiple intelligences all day long and different learning approaches and that’s true, but yet we’ve got one curriculum, right. And so sometimes that is difficult for me, but morally I believe that my job is to reach the child and boost the child as much as possible. That’s—the professional ethic that I am behind 100%. Whatever it takes, but sometimes that can be tricky. It could be really tricky (Olive, Interview 1, 9-28-17).

For Olive, there is a “job beyond her job.” She, like other participating teachers, was adamant that most situations in which she tried to advocate for a particular student became complicated quickly and were never as straightforward as she initially anticipated at the outset. In her statement, Olive references the personal and professional continuum: She referenced the reality that it is “difficult for me, but morally I believe that my job is to reach the child.”

Olive’s descriptions of these competing tensions paint a picture of an educator seeking to embody the aspects of what Purkey and Novak (2016) and Anderson (2019) refer to as intentional care, optimism, respect, and trust (ICORT), which are assumptions of Invitational Education theory and practice. Olive described how she often tried to balance the influences in which she felt compelled to choose between what is best for her students and “what the parents want or what the curriculum says.” Olive emphasized that this balancing act “is a little risky” but described this as a process that first starts with her own internal sense making. She described always beginning with an examination of her own feelings, thoughts, and observations and what is best for her student and what she could be proud of in any given situation. Once she is clear on her position, Olive described incorporating other’s feelings and thoughts and her attempt is always to negotiate the external demands into her approach, even if it is sometimes just to acknowledge them.

Continuum 4: Ideal Outcomes as Opposed to Worst Case Scenarios

Teachers in this study tried to achieve the most suitable outcomes for students’ wellbeing, and only once it became clear these ideal results were not feasible in any given situation, they would compromise when circumstances required it. Participating teachers always described the lengths they would go to in avoiding the worst-case scenarios in each context which entailed placing the needs of adults above those of students’ needs.

Participating teachers in this study often revealed conflicts around protecting students’ rights, working towards social justice, and promoting not just tolerance but appreciation of racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, religious, and ability differences amongst students. They often described situations surrounding these issues as those which presented ethical implications. It was while describing such situations that participants engaged in a comparison between what ideally could transpire versus a worst-case scenario in any given situation. Figure 5 illustrates the two ends of the spectrum that participating teachers considered when feeling torn between what they hoped would occur versus what they feared might transpire in the given situations they described.

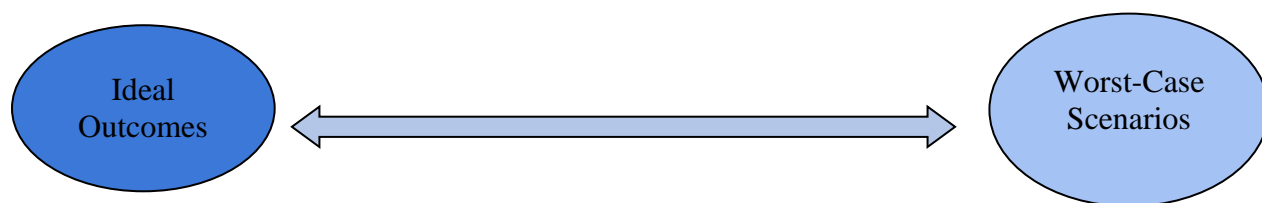


Figure 5: Ideal Outcomes versus Worst Case Scenarios

Originally from Tanzania, Alex speaks both English and Swahili. She had taught for 30 years all within the United States, both at the high school level in chemistry as well as at the elementary level in second grade. Alex very easily conjured many situations that she felt revealed her perspective on ethics.

Well, there were things that I have done which were unethical, but I would do them again. Things like taking food to the kids’ houses for example, the teenager’s house whose mother had just died, and they have no food. And how it

would look for a teacher—a female teacher to go to a boy—two boys living on their own, teenagers ...unethical professionally, but they had no food. I would go to jail for that. You know what I mean. (Alex, Interview 1, 9-29-17)

Alex shared that she has done this repeatedly in different contexts. One of her students had to forfeit a trip to go to Six Flags, and because the entire grade went, Alex had to stay behind with him. So, at lunch, she took him in her car (as nearly all the students normally did) for lunch off the school' grounds. As Alex described:

I did not really think about it at that moment, we just went, got lunch, came back and distributed some of the lunches, and that day—there was a sub-principal, the principal was out, so there was a sub from the main school. And I found out that he went and told the main boss that I have taken a student in my car to get lunch. So, I got called in and I said yes, I did that, and he asked, “did you know that it’s against policy?” and I said yes, I knew that. I mean I did, but I did not think about it when I—so I said yeah, I knew, but this is—can I explain the situation? And he said, I am sorry, but it is not acceptable, you cannot do that. It is a liability issue, and you just can’t do it. (Alex, Interview 1, 9-29-17)

However, what Alex did not realize until a few weeks later was that one of her female co-workers were having sexual relationships with students in the school, a news story that she then realized the principal knew at the time. This left a major impression on Alex:

It was a shock. I never ever imagined a teacher doing something like that. But again, it happens, there are sexual predators, but to me it was just so shocking. But then I thought about what I was doing, and I thought, oh my goodness, somebody could have accused me off the same things and what will be my defense, how could I prove anything otherwise? So that is scary, that is a scary thought. (Alex, Interview 1, 9-29-17)

As part of this meaning-making endeavor, public perception emerged as one of the concepts that weighed heavily on participants as they described contemplating possible worst-case scenarios. This took the form of both actual situations they experienced or witnessed firsthand, through witnessing or hearing accounts of what their colleagues experienced, and through imagined situations that they conjured up themselves.

From a large family of teachers, Edward at first avoided teaching but ultimately succumbed to joining the profession. Edward was in his third-year teaching biology in an urban high school. Edward saw the professional ethics of teaching about “*doing what you are supposed to do when you are supposed to do it, and it’s about how you carry yourself, how you associate with your students, how you associate with other teachers, how you handle conflicts that arise*” (Edward, Interview 1, 10-2-17).

Edward described how he struggled with how to best navigate what he characterized as competing expectations. Edward revealed that he is clearly able to see these issues from multiple perspectives. These perspectives include (a) his students’ perspectives, (b) his own perspective as the teacher, (c) the professional expectation to establish positive teacher and student relationships, and (d) the outsiders’ perspective, who might judge from afar as “the public.” Edward explained his thought processes, which were further illuminated by the contrapuntal tensions of the shift in voice from “I” to “you” to “they.”

Contrapuntal analysis further revealed the tensions apparent in Edward’s explanation of the complexity of the situations that involve interaction with students. He portrayed many of his students as in need of a father figure and that they often seek attention from him as a male teacher. Edward’s perception of a judging public is real in his mind and represents the cases he himself has either witnessed or those which he has heard about firsthand.

Edward provided an account of a student club for which he is the advisor winning a trip to a minor league baseball game. He chose to forgo the trip with students and stated his rationale for this is that he must “*protect his license*” above all else, for his family's sake, For Edward, fear of the worst-case scenario wins over his hopes for the ideal outcome.

Highlighting The First Person

So, it's the other kid who said she doesn't want to go to college because she was told she's undocumented. So, she had given up. So, I'm like, "Why?" So, we worked and she actually ended up getting into X nursing school. We started talking, just, you know these kids most of them don't have a male figure. That's what I realized. But for them I think it's more cultural, so they don't want to expose how much they're earning and everything. But she got the package from X. And so, she was happy, and she came to my room and I was teaching. And again, we talked about the boundaries. We're not supposed to hug. I don't hug my students. We shake hands, high five you know. This kid came into my class, I'm teaching, and she just gave me a hug. And I was like, what just happened?" It's okay. But it's, I have to protect me. This is a girl who really is craving that father figure. And that's what she's seeing in me. So, it's so easy for me to take advantage of her. So, I have to remind myself and be like, "Hey, you're their dad. She really doesn't know." You know she doesn't know where the boundaries are, and you have to remind them. Because they really don't know when to stop. They can fool around with their friends, but I'm not their friend. It makes me feel better about my decision. I did, I made the right decision. And I talk to my wife all the time. I go home and I'm like, "What I'm doing wrong?" and she's like, "Yeah it's not you. It's definitely them. Just give them two days." And then two days later, "Oh Mr. I'm sorry about yesterday. It wasn't just, it wasn't my day."

I poem
*So I'm like Why?"
 That's what I realized
 I think it's more cultural*

*I was teaching
 we talked about the
 boundaries
 I don't hug my students.
 We shake hands, high five
 This kid came into my
 class,
 I'm teaching
 and she just gave me a
 hug.
 And I was like,
 "what just happened?"*

*I have to protect me
 I have to remind myself
 I'm not their friend
 I did
 I made the right decision*

Figure 6: First Person Voice and the I Poem

Edward provided an example in which he revealed the tensions inherent in being a male teacher, trying to build rapport with students and keep them at a distance. His mentor helped him more effectively prevent such situations by setting up some strategically delivered warnings such as:

Just remind them. Remind them that you married, remind that you have kids, and they do that all the time. So, I joke with them "You're going to get me fired" and "I don't want to get fired. Do not walk in here coming and hugging me. People are going to start asking questions." You know when you joke about that more and more, it kind of sticks to them like yeah, "he doesn't like to be hugged."
 (Edward, Interview 1, 10-2-17)

Edward’s process reveals the tensions he experienced building and maintaining positive student relationships, his largest area of ethical conflict in his daily practice.

Discussion

Ethics in any profession are about communally agreed-upon principles of engagement, codes of involvement that guide actions, and set rules of participation that ensure safety and well-being, productivity, positive learning, and development. Lowenstein's (2008) conceptualization of ethics emphasized maximizing good and minimizing harm. She suggested that ethics are an attempt to think critically about human conduct and determining what is right and wrong. Teaching is often characterized as a humanistic profession that requires kindness, care, compassion, empathy, an understanding of others, and an ability to build connections with a variety of people. Teachers in this study reported that their primary responsibilities are grounded in promoting the well-being and learning of their students, thereby embodying the characteristics of virtuous, ICORT-driven educators. Tensions emerged however when these teachers reported trying to simultaneously advocate for their students' wellbeing while also supporting and enacting the mission of their schools, and/or trying to uphold their own sense of professional standards of excellence.

Throughout this study, participating teachers shared perspectives about the challenges they encountered daily when juggling the curricular and academic tasks of teaching with the relational needs of students with whom they forged relationships, as well as the expectations of other adults. These teachers articulated a central focus on building and maintaining caring relationships with students. However, this included substantive ethical conflicts. Care practices went in many directions, emanating from teachers (i.e., sources of care) to students, from teachers to colleagues (i.e., collective care in a school community), from teachers to families, and even as teachers directed care inward to sustain themselves (i.e., self-care). Often these care practices could compete and conflict with one another.

All 12 of the study's participants mentioned a central grounding in their professional desire and motivation to care for and help students, which was not always simple to enact. While care is situated at the center of teachers' professional responsibilities, these teachers described situations that were far from clear cut. Ethicists including Erikson (1963), Kohlberg (1981), and Piaget (1965) published straightforward rules of engagement. By contrast, Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984) established care ethics as an approach that challenged what they perceived as the incompleteness of previous theorists. Rather than emphasizing universal truths such as justice, Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984) not only recognized the primacy of caring, but also the varying degrees of interdependence between individuals in any situation. They advocated for the ethics of care as a promising alternative to the more traditional justice-based approaches.

In an encounter or sequence of encounters that can be appropriately called *caring*, one-party acts as carer and the other as cared-for. Over time in equal relations, the parties regularly exchange positions. Adult caring relations exhibit this mutuality. However, many important relations are, by their nature, not equal relations, and mutuality cannot be expected. For example, the parent-infant relation is not one of equality. The parent can, *must*, do things for the infant that the infant cannot possibly do for the parent. (Noddings, 2012, pp. 771–772)

Noddings advocated for an ethic of care as the foundational concept in relational ethics. Like the plethora of feminists weighing in on this area of thinking, Tronto (2005) added to the literature here regarding how an ethic of care is enacted in practice specifically by identifying four specific elements of care, including attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness.

It goes without mention that there are specific aspects of this line of thinking that have gender implications. First, Tong and Williams (2009) pointed out that care ethicists have more recently tried to separate gender from virtues and values, rather than assigning masculine and feminine perspectives on such topics as morality and moral development. Second, feminists such as Tronto (2012) have argued that gender roles are social and culturally constructed. Since care-based professions are traditionally comprised of women, care can sometimes be assumed to be a feminine characteristic or role.

Aspects of care, or care-based ethics, emerged as a salient focus for this study. Many participants expressed the importance of upholding a positive influence on students and creating and sustaining a responsive connection with other educators and support professionals in the school community as well. Inherent in the descriptions of care practices presented later, there was a distinct importance placed on the context of the situations in which participating teachers' dilemmas emerged. Interdependence between teachers and students within the classroom context was always emphasized, and this extended to other teachers, administrators, and support professionals within the great school and larger district communities; essentially relationships provided both the background, as well as the foreground, to teachers' considerations of ethical practice.

Participants' expressions of care in this study exhibited multiple dimensions, acting as both an undergirding principle and an overarching umbrella of ethical practice. Care practices also unfolded communally. Teachers often described the importance of individual students being a part of the larger inclusive community in which all students' needs are respected and each member of the community must show and be shown empathy and compassion. This was conveyed as a classroom priority in that each teacher seemed to feel beholden—as the articulated in their interviews—to build, maintain, and model effective relationship-building skills with all students and serve as a moral role model for students. Care based ethics were described as the venue whereby teachers could make a positive difference for students, through daily practice. As professionals in a human-focused caring profession, the study's participants reported ways in which showing care for students helped so many aspects of their practice. This ranged increasing students' motivation and commitment, improving students' sense of confidence for a subject, being more willing to try new tasks, and engaging in less appealing aspects of learning. Care was the vehicle for relationship development and formed a context for learning in the classroom community.

Seven participants' statements right at the beginning of their first interviews directly reference the centrality of care in the daily work of teaching, the need to show empathy and compassion to students. By way of illustration, Alana spoke about “how much I care about my students” and how “I try to be someone that cares about them” since “as teachers we are entrusted with their care, and their education” (Interview 1, 9-25-17). Another example of the role that care plays can be seen in Brady's statements that “I am very caring about people” something he communicated included pitfalls because “I care so much, sometimes I think I care about them more than they care about themselves” (Interview 1, 11-4-17).

Professionals undoubtedly have a responsibility to make decisions and enact principles that extend past their personal objections, yet teachers in this study felt conflicted about doing so for several reasons explained herein. As Gilligan and Attanucci (1988) first posited, the justice stance is often pitted against the care approach. In actuality, the findings of this study show that most teachers are making decisions that employ a more integrated approach that incorporates aspects of both care and justice within the various I-position within their minds. These findings support the

assertion that these teachers are virtuous, ICORT-driven educators that often struggled with both internal ethical dilemmas and competing beliefs about what it means to make positive societal contributions as an educator. Perhaps this explanation helps to unpack why Kohlberg's (1981) six stages, while foundational in the field, are insufficient to explain how teachers navigate ethically charged situations of practice. Similarly, it may be unsatisfactory to use a theory of moral development to account for teachers' ethical meaning-making process. After all, as Barrett and colleagues (2012) posited, professional ethics serve multiple purposes: to ensure high professional standards, to protect students, and to guide teachers in their decision-making. While there are differing theories on how to best unpack ethically complex situations, as Aristotle argues in his moral philosophy, "the good and the just are not found solely in abstract principles or rules, but rather are lived and made in the messiness of everyday life" (Levinson and Fay, 2016, p. 48).

Conclusions and Implications

The results of this study suggest that how teachers make meaning of and enact ethical practice depends on how they perceive and respond to multiple sets of competing tensions. These tensions can emerge at various times, and in different ways, depending on the context in which they work. Most recently this became especially clear during the COVID-19 pandemic, when schools and instruction were required to move online. As a result, ethical issues for teachers increased. The four continua developed out of the data collected and analyzed using Gilligan's Listening Guide clearly surfaced as the education community was forced into an unplanned online learning experiment. Thereafter, teachers described their struggles to build and maintain student relationships in virtual and online learning environments. Many teachers articulated the ethical challenges they faced as lines between home and work blurred. A representation of the tensions found on the first continuum: A professional orientation of ethics compared to a more personal moral orientation of ethical practice collided. At first many teachers during COVID-19 planned for a short-term disruption. As online schooling extended, many teachers began to question the ways in which students' *long-term* goals, including emotional, interpersonal, and developmental needs, would be negatively impacted. Similarly, the fourth continuum, which represents how teachers navigated the desire to contribute toward *ideal* outcomes in any given situation versus avoiding the *worst-case* scenarios become evident through teachers' experiences during COVID-19. As school closures increased, concerns of the spread of the pandemic increased the focus upon equity as a marginalizing factor that contributed to educational disadvantages and students' disfranchisement (Sequeira & Dacey, 2020).

To assist prospective teachers in the process of navigating ethical practice, unpacking these continua of tensions would be useful to formally address with pre-service teachers during their teacher preparation programs. Overall, this study contributes to the ongoing base of knowledge regarding how teachers navigate rule-based compared to care-based orientations to address ethical dilemmas and how they can enact ethical practice through an integrated hybrid approach.

This study suggests potential implications and recommendations for pre-service teacher education programs. None of the participating teachers in this study cited memories of addressing ethics in a stand-alone course during their preparation programs. One recommendation is to offer more professional development opportunities that purposefully explore reflective practice while contextualizing and integrating the blend of both personal moral beliefs and professional ethics as they evolve and emerge in daily practice.

Additionally, principal/supervision and leadership programs must dedicate more time to raising awareness, actively modeling, and cultivating intentionally inviting, ethical school cultures that support teachers' ethical reflection. Since the start of the COVID pandemic, teachers' stress levels and rates of burnout have reached all-time highs, resulting in many seriously considering leaving the profession (Zamarro et al, 2021).

There is no clear end to the steep increases in teacher turnover. Teacher shortages are becoming increasingly problematic nationwide. Amidst these challenges, it is imperative that educational stakeholders consider professional development opportunities that can assist teachers to navigate the ethical dilemmas they face daily in the classroom (Sequeira & Dacey, 2020).

There is a gap in the existing teacher education literature related to pre-service and practicing teachers' ethical preparation and the possible impact upon reducing negative incidents of lying, cheating, or abuse in the classroom, the school, and the field of education. Research in this area is clearly necessary. Relatedly, there is an absence of research comparing the effects upon teachers who have had an explicit course in ethics, those who went through teacher preparation programs experiencing an integrated approach to ethical preparation, or those teachers whose program lacked any ethical preparation.

Furthermore, it is troubling that little has been explored internationally to compare ethical decision-making across interdisciplinary professional fields. Overall, this study contributes to the ongoing base of knowledge regarding how teachers make meaning of and enact ethical practice. In addition, this study's design showed that Gilligan's (1982) Listening Guide can effectively be applied to teachers in their professional practice, thereby further generalizing its utility from previous populations, including veterans, nurses, and other professions. Using Gilligan's Listening Guide (1982) during this study revealed that teachers rarely adhere to absolutes. Rather, these participating teachers exhibited that they navigate a complex array of competing and overlapping tensions each day. In real practice, they exhibited due diligence to make meaning of dilemmas and enact ethical practice while navigating an abundance of ethically grey areas.

Advocates for Invitational Education Theory and Practices will always encourage the pursuit of becoming a virtuous, ICORT-driven educator. If a goal without a plan is just a wish; then an ICORT-driven educator believes it is ethically necessary and pedagogically sound to always plan for success by consistently reflecting on one's ethical practice. Therefore, strengthen your pedagogy through the active pursuit of increased awareness, elevated knowledge, and willingness to evaluate ethical dilemmas with care.

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