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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Ethical dilemmas: A model to understand teacher practice

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Abstract

Over recent decades, the field of ethics has been the focus of increasing attention in teaching. This is not surprising given that teaching is a moral activity that is heavily values-laden. Because of this, teachers face ethical dilemmas in the course of their daily work. This paper presents an ethical decision-making model that helps to explain the decision-making processes that individuals or groups are likely to experience when confronted by an ethical dilemma. In order to make sense of the model, we put forward three short ethical dilemma scenarios facing teachers and apply the model to interpret them. Here we identify the critical incident, the forces at play that help to illuminate the incident, the choices confronting the individual and the implications of these choices for the individual, organization and community. Based on our analysis and the wider literature we identify several strategies that may help to minimize the impact of ethical dilemmas. These include the importance of sharing dilemmas with trusted others; having institutional structures in schools that lessen the emergence of harmful actions occurring; the necessity for individual teachers to articulate their own personal and professional ethics; acknowledging that dilemmas have multiple forces at play; the need to educate colleagues about specific issues; and the necessity of appropriate preparation and support for teachers. Of these strategies, providing support for teachers via professional development is explored more fully.

Ethical dilemmas: A model to understand teacher practice

Introduction

Some thousands of years ago, Plato was known to say that ethics is what we ought to do. But what ought we to do in perplexing situations when the options are equally unfavourable or equally favourable? Is there a model or framework that can help us understand the nature of ethical decision-making and the various forces at play when we are faced with an ethical dilemma? These questions lie at the heart of this paper. Our focus is the work of teachers which we argue is heavily value-laden and, for this reason, susceptible to ethical dilemmas. To help us understand the nature of ethical dilemmas faced by teachers we discuss a model of ethical decision-making. We developed this model from our earlier research with public sector managers, school leaders and teachers in Australia. This model has been applied to public sector leaders' dilemmas (Ehrich, Cranston, & Kimber, 2004), principals' dilemmas (Cranston, Ehrich, & Kimber, 2006); university educators' dilemmas (Ehrich, Cranston, & Kimber, 2005); and pre-service teachers' dilemmas (Millwater, Ehrich, & Cranston, 2004). Its usefulness lies in its ability to uncover the complexity and multi-layered variables that constitute dilemmas. In this paper, we propose a number of scenarios developed from real life problems faced by teachers in Queensland (Australian) schools and we use the model to help us understand the dilemmas and the forces surrounding them. We begin by reviewing some of the writing in the field of ethics and ethical dilemmas, and then move to consider the model and three scenarios.

Ethics

The field of ethics has been the focus of increasing attention in education over recent decades (Campbell, 1997). This attention is because education is a moral and ethical activity that is heavily value-laden (Hodgkinson, 1991). Yet what is ethics? Often ethics is defined in terms

of what it is not. For example, misconduct, corruption, fraud, illegal behaviour, abuse of power, and deception are considered unethical behaviour (Ehrich et al., 2004). By contrast, honesty, integrity, and professionalism are deemed characteristics of ethical behaviour (Kuther, 2003). Peter Singer (1993; 1994) has claimed that ethics is about our relationships with others. Ethics can be viewed as a 'philosophy of morality' as it deals with ought and ought not (P. Mahony, 2009, p. 983). It can be seen as prescriptive rather than descriptive since ethics is concerned with 'what we ought to do'.

However, the question of what we ought to do and what might be the best course of action to take is a vexed one. A number of thinkers have put forward ethical principles as a way of providing guidance on how to live. For instance, in the middle ages, Thomas Aquinas, who expanded on the work of Plato, identified seven virtues of an ethical life. These include faith, hope, charity (or love), prudence, temperance, courage, and justice (in Christenbury, 2008, p. 38). Such ideals remain relevant today. Related to these virtues is a set of principles developed by Francis (as cited in Francis & Armstrong, 2003) for organisations as a means to minimise risks of litigation. These principles include dignity, equitability, prudence, honesty, openness, goodwill, and avoidance of suffering.

Principles such as these have been codified and used by professional bodies such as those representing lawyers, medical practitioners, accountants, and teachers to provide guidance on acceptable practice for members of their respective professions. As an example, the National Association for the Education of Young Children in the United States has developed a professional code of conduct for teachers to help them make decisions in the best interests of children. Similarly, in Australia, employing bodies of teachers as well as professional associations stipulate codes of conduct regarding expected behaviour and

performance (e.g., Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts, 2006). One Australian registration body for teachers (Queensland College of Teachers, 2006), has outlined a formal framework of ideals to guide and encourage all teachers to achieve high standards of behaviour and professionalism. Integrity, dignity, responsibility, respect, justice, and care are the generalised values associated with teaching and learning used to underpin the code of ethics of this professional framework. Oser (1991) maintains that three critical issues are central to teachers' professional decision-making and these are justice, truthfulness and care.

The last of these — care — has been seen by many to dominate the teaching context where interactions with students define the activity of its professionals (Clark, 1995; Noddings, 1992; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 1999; Tirri & Husu, 2002). Clark (1995 as cited in Tirri, 1999) highlighted the perspective of the child or student in the moral dimension of education and focused on how teachers intervening in relationships between students often made or broke the spirit of these students. Thus teachers' relationships with students, whether they are in regard to punishment or the grading of work, should be handled with the value of an ethic of 'care' (Clark, 1995 in Tirri, 1999), first and foremost. Other writers (Kohlberg, 1976; Noddings, 1992) have upheld the notion of care as a definitive notion within useful models of moral judgment that have been allied with teachers and their work. For example, Noddings' work has underscored the centrality of care in teaching-student relations. She has been highly critical of codes of conduct or other such guides that promote rationality over care for others. But how can these notions be made more transparent in guiding the actions of teachers?

While codes of conduct are important documents, codes are limited (Noddings, 1992; Sumsion, 2000) and tend 'not to acknowledge the constraints and competing priorities that impede the achievement of these ideas' (Sumsion, 2000, p. 173). Thus a code of conduct as a set of principles will provide some broad guidelines but is unlikely to provide answers to a complex multi-layered situation where there are competing responsibilities at hand. It is not as simple as choosing the 'right' option as opposed to the 'wrong' one (Kidder, 1995). As Kakabadse, Korac-Kakabadse, and Kouzmin (2003, p. 478) state, there is not always a clear cut answer and what constitutes ethical behaviour is likely to lie in a 'grey zone'. It is in the grey zone that teachers' morality is tested in their everyday work.

In the early 1990s, educational writers such as Goodlad, Soder and Sirotnik (1990), Lyons (1990) and Sockett (1993) acknowledged how making moral decisions was a daily activity for teachers, and that teaching was a moral exercise as it was essentially linked to being in a relationship with others. Thus, as a moral endeavour, teaching is grounded in values that lie at the heart of teachers' professional practice. Teaching is a 'social good' (De Ruyter & Kole, 2010, p. 207) and teachers are expected to instruct students to think and act in ways that their societies believe are worthwhile and responsible. As a profession, teachers are expected to uphold a duty of care, acting in the best interests of their students (P. Mahony, 2009). As Fenstermacher (1990 in Christenbury, 2008, p. 32) states, 'the teacher's conduct at all times and in all ways is a moral matter. For that reason alone, teaching is a profoundly moral activity'.

If the view has been consolidated that teachers are moral agents who operate in relationships with others (such as students, parents, other teachers), it is inevitable that they will face tensions in their work. The current climate in which teachers now work provides a

fertile field for a variety of tensions to emerge (Dempster & Berry, 2003; Shapiro & Gross, 2008). Dempster and Berry (2003) refer to recent complex changes to society that are creating pressures on school leaders and teachers, and in many cases leading to ethical tensions. These tensions include increasing litigation in schools, use and misuse of ICTs in schools, and child abuse (Dempster & Berry, 2003). These tensions open up 'grey zones' (Kakabadse, et al., 2003, p. 478) in which ethical dilemmas can and do arise for teachers.

Ethical dilemmas

A number of writers and researchers have provided illustrations of the types of ethical dilemmas that teachers confront in their daily work (see Campbell, 1997; Helton & Ray, 2005; Johns, McGrath, & Mathur, 2008). Campbell (1997) provides a series of examples of where teachers have felt that administrators required them to undertake actions that breached their professional ethics. This feeling contributed to ethical dilemmas for them as their professional ethics were in conflict with the expectation that they follow the orders of their supervisors. Millwater et al. (2004) refer to dilemmas faced by pre-service teachers during their practicum. Here, pre-service teachers raised issues such as the rights of the group versus the rights of individuals, and the child's right to confidentiality versus the system's requirement to report information. Johns et al. (2008) give examples of complex dilemmas that emerged from special education contexts in which competing interests and limited resourcing made it difficult to resolve decisions. Noteworthy is Lyons' (1990) point that 'many of the dilemmas of teaching are not solvable and must simply be managed rather than resolved' (p. 168). Lyons came to this conclusion based on her research with teachers, which demonstrated that dilemmas were either ongoing or likely to recur.

From Helton and Ray's (2005) research, ethical dilemmas experienced by teachers in schools and universities arise from:

- Law and policies — the need to go beyond the law such as protecting a student from abuse in the home;
- Administrative decisions conflicting with personal or professional ethics;
- Student actions — ethic of care, behavioural issues, plagiarism;
- Colleagues' actions such as discriminatory behaviour in relation to students and to staff; and
- Tensions within professional ethics.

In a study by Tirri (1999), who interviewed 33 secondary teachers in Finland, there were four main categories of moral dilemmas that emerged for teachers. These related to (1) teachers' work such as how to deal with students, issues of confidentiality, and situations in which colleagues were found to be unprofessional; (2) student behaviour regarding school and work such as conflicts between home and school, and cheating; (3) the rights of minority groups where religion was a key aspect of the dilemma; and (4) common rules at school where teachers were inconsistent in enforcing rules. In a related study, Tirri and Husu (2002) interviewed 26 early childhood teachers in Finland regarding their ethical dilemmas. A key finding of the study was that 'ethical dilemmas in early childhood education are very relational and deal with competing interpretations of "the best interest of the child"' (Tirri & Husu, 2002, p. 65). The teachers in the sample identified major challenges as protecting children from both physical and psychological harm.

More recent research has pointed to ethical dilemmas emerging for teachers surrounding student assessment (e.g., Pope, Green, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2009; Richardson & Wheelless, 2009). The attention to this ethical issue is not surprising, given the current climate characterised by increasing accountability, high stakes testing, and pressure to improve student learning scores. In a study involving 103 educators in the United States who were asked to describe a difficult ethical situation relating to assessment of students, Pope et al. (2009) found that 62% of the coded responses related to ethical dilemmas about ‘pollution’ of grades. Pollution of grades refers to ‘misrepresenting the students’ mastery of the assessed material’ (Pope et al., p. 779). Such pollution can occur where teachers modify grades due to student effort or teachers assist students before or during an assessment by providing them with answers and practice opportunities. Pope et al. (2009) found almost all of the conflicts for teachers involved institutional requirements and these were seen to be at odds with teachers’ own views about considerations needed for assessments.

As illustrated by the preceding discussion, teachers face ethical dilemmas in the course of their daily work. An approach that has been identified as helping professionals to reach more informed and careful decisions is the use of ethical decision-making models. The next part of the discussion reviews some of these models and then puts forward the model we have developed. This model is then used to explore three scenarios.

Ethical decision-making models

It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide an extensive discussion of the range and type of ethical decision-making models to emerge in the literature over the last three decades. For this reason, we will explore only a selection of these and point to those that were influential in the development of our model. It is important to note that many of these models have

come out of the business and management literature, and thus might not seem directly relevant to teaching. These models do, however, highlight significant factors and processes involved in the identification and resolution of an ethical dilemma.

Many of the early models of ethical decision making included components such as the forces affecting individuals who are required to make an ethical decision (e.g., Bommer, Gratto, Gravander, & Tuttle, 1987; Ferrell & Gresham, 1985; Hunt & Vitell, 1986). As an example, in a model proposed by Bommer et al. (1987) six categories were seen to influence a manager's decision. These categories included the (1) work environment; (2) the legal and governmental environment; (3) the social environment; (4) the professional environment; (5) the family and peer group; (6) individual attributes.

Based on an early model by Ferrell and Gresham (1985), Fritzsche (1991) designed an interactionist model that illustrated several interrelated components of ethical decision making. In the model, the individual appears as the first part and brings to the situation his or her own values. These values are mediated by other forces inside the organisation such as organisational goals and the organisation's culture. These forces then impact on the problem that has the effect of motivating the decision maker to search for possible solutions. These solutions are evaluated against a set of decision-making dimensions (including economic, political, technological, social and ethical issues). The model indicates that selection of the decision will have an internal and external impact on the organisation. Thus the consequences of any decision could impact on the culture of the organisation or on future options (Fritzsche, 1991, p. 850).

An important contribution to ethical decision making models has been the work of Preston and Samford (2002), who developed their model for the public sector. Central to their model is the notion that public sector values (i.e., those values that support a public interest or the common good) are those that should guide decision makers caught in ethical dilemmas. Preston and Samford's (2002, p. 93) model consists of a series of steps. These include:

- (1) assessing the situation (which requires drawing upon one's values); assessing the specific agency requirements (which includes referring to the agency's code of conduct and or policy and procedures;
- (2) considering dispositional factors (including questions such as 'how does the issue relate to the kind of official I want to be?');
- (3) making a comprehensive assessment of the alternatives (i.e., weighing up gains with losses; ensuring the decision is not breaking the law);
- (4) making a judgement; and
- (5) documenting the decision and being able to justify it. This final step is seen as critical because it reinforces the point that decision makers are publicly accountable for their choices (Preston & Samford, 2002, p. 92).

In keeping with the focus of the other models discussed earlier, Preston and Samford (2002) identifies a number of key elements in their model. These include: the key role of values held by the individual; the influence of the organisation and organisational climate; a set of alternatives; and the need for a judgement to be made. In the next part of the discussion we detail how we developed our model and then consider its component parts.

A model of Ethical Decision Making

Insert Figure 1 here

Our model, see Figure 1, was developed from two main sources. The first source was the existing literature on ethics and ethical decision-making models referred to in the previous section. All of the aforementioned models were influential in our thinking. The models proposed by Bommer et al. (1987), Ferrell and Gresham (1985), and Fritzsche (1991) that identified the role of an individual's values and dispositions and how these values are mediated by the organisation, significant others, and other key forces (i.e., legal force, political force, social force), contributed to our thinking during the design phase. The model by Preston and Samford (2002) was useful not only for its series of steps but also because it was designed for the public sector and thus foregrounded the public interest unlike the other models we reviewed.

The second source was an iterative approach where we drew on and made sense of ethical dilemmas identified by six senior public servants who participated in a pilot study with us (see Cranston, et al., 2002). We considered their dilemmas in the light of an emerging model and based on their responses we adapted and refined our model. Complementing this approach was a series of discussions with educators and managers who provided critical comment on it.

Figure 1 represents diagrammatically the context, forces and decision-making process that individuals or groups facing ethical dilemmas are likely to experience. It also attempts to identify the relationships among individuals, institutions and the community that are likely to be evident when an ethical dilemma arises. Through this model we acknowledge that decisions can have implications for, and effects on, the individual, the organisation, and the

community either directly or indirectly. While describing the various components of the model separately, the model draws attention to the interdependence of the factors and elements in identifying and resolving an ethical dilemma.

As can be seen in Figure 1, there are five main parts to the model. The first part is the critical incident. This incident triggers the ethical dilemma. The second part is a set of competing forces, each of which illuminates the critical incident from its own particular bias. These forces are: professional ethics; legal issues or policies; organisational culture; the institutional context; the public interest; society and community; the global context; the political framework; economic and financial contexts; and ?. The ?, known as the untitled force, signifies that an important but as yet unidentified force could emerge in the future.

The third part of the model is the individual who brings his or her own values, beliefs, and ethical orientations to the dilemma. It is likely that a person's values have been shaped over time by a variety of sources such as religion, socialisation and conscience (Edwards, 2001). Following this is the fourth part of the model — the choice — that the individual makes among the competing alternatives. It is through deliberating the alternatives that the ethical dilemma emerges. The decision the individual takes might lead the person to either ignoring the dilemma or acting in one or more ways. These actions can be formal or informal or external or internal. Finally, the action or non-action, can create particular types of implications not only for the individual but also for the employing organisation and the community. As indicated in the model, new incidents or dilemmas can arise from the action or inaction. In the next part of this paper we put forward three ethical dilemmas faced by teachers and use the model to interpret them.

Scenarios

Scenario 1

A number of English teachers at an urban high school are unhappy with elements of the new syllabus because they do not accord with their understandings of literacy education. It has come to the Head of Department's attention (Penny), that one teacher has shared his dissatisfaction with his senior class. A number of these students have told their parents who have been contacting the school. A debate has now erupted within the staffroom over the syllabus and over the teacher's actions. While Penny has some sympathies with the teacher's position, she also realises that she needs to exercise leadership to ensure that other teachers fully implement the syllabus. That one teacher has informed students and they now have informed their parents is problematic. What should Penny do?

Scenario 2

A student receives a 'C' grade for an assignment in history. The student's parents have criticised the classroom teacher, an experienced and well-regarded teacher, believing that, because their child had a tutor who had assisted him with the assignment and they themselves were retired teachers, the assignment was worth more. The dispute has escalated to Joshua, the Head of the Department. If the matter is not resolved in the student's favour, the parents are threatening action against the teacher and the school. What should Joshua do?

Scenario 3

Kathleen, a teacher at a large primary school, walks past the classroom of a new teacher, who is employed on contract. Kathleen observes that the class is out of control; there is much swearing, and the teacher is unable to quieten the students down. Some weeks ago, Kathleen observed the same scenario in this teacher's class and she offered to help her. The teacher,

however, refused her help and told her that she would handle her own class in her own way. Kathleen is unsure what she should do. If she refers the matter to someone in the administration team, there might be ramifications for the teacher's ongoing employment. On the other hand, if Kathleen does not act, it is possible that these children may continue to be disruptive and learn very little. What should Kathleen do?

Analysis of scenarios in terms of the model

In the three scenarios identified here, a critical incident occurs. In the first scenario, the incident that triggers the dilemma for Penny is a staff member expressing his dissatisfaction with the new syllabus to senior students and this matter escalating so that parents have become involved. In the second scenario, a student's parents have threatened to take action against a teacher and the school due to their child receiving a 'C' grade for their essay. In the third scenario, the critical incident occurs when Kathleen observes a new teacher having difficulties with behaviour management and is unsure what to do because this teacher has refused her help in the past.

Turning to the forces at play in these dilemmas, in all three scenarios, the person who experiences the dilemma has a concern for their colleagues as well as for the students in the school. The forces at play within each of these dilemmas have at their roots and parameters of action, a code of conduct. Professional ethics refer to the point that educators are expected to operate according to certain established codes of conduct within particular ethical frameworks. *Professional ethics* must prevail and become apparent in any decision making by Penny, Joshua, and Kathleen. For all parties, the issue of professionalism is one that is of key concern. Central to the dilemma for Joshua, Penny, and Kathleen, is the professionalism

of another teacher and also their own sense of the need to act professionally but also to meet the ethic of care in regard to students or operate in their 'best interests' (Tirri & Husu, 2002).

In the first scenario, Penny would be aware of the legislation covering the school regarding the syllabus that teachers are required to teach. Teachers are contractually accountable officers who are required to implement policies handed down from the employing body (Ehrich, 2000). While Penny has some doubts about the syllabus, she is also concerned that parents and students have become involved in this matter through the teacher's unprofessional action. In the second scenario, Joshua may need to consider the possible repercussions escalating to a law suit if a resolution is not possible. Legal issues are likely to be uppermost in his mind. In the third scenario, if Kathleen reports the matter to the principal rather than intervening herself, the teacher in question may lose her job. An important force bearing on each of these scenarios is the culture of the organisation and the institutional context. Here, whether or not there are clear procedures, either formal or informal, for dealing with such issues (Preston & Samford, 2002), will be important. How power is distributed in the school, particularly whether leadership and decision-making are concentrated in the hands of the principal or whether they are shared more widely, will be critical for the actions that each person takes.

The dilemma in the first scenario speaks to the broader public interest that exists in countries such as Australia around the teaching of literacy. The dilemma in the second scenario highlights a public interest in the fact that teachers are accountable for how children are taught and assessed. The third scenario speaks to a public interest in discipline in schools and managing under-performing staff.

The school community is a significant factor in these scenarios. In the first scenario, all stakeholders have an interest in the resolution of the problem. Students and parents are now concerned about the syllabus, while the teachers are themselves divided over its value. It would be in the best interest of all members of the school community if the Head of Department could resolve the situation in an even-handed manner. In the second scenario, the school community can be seen primarily in the actions of the parents against the teacher and the school. While society and community might not be obvious in the third scenario, the students are the likely losers if the teacher is not teaching adequately. Thus, the community expects teachers to teach in a capable and competent manner.

The political framework also impacts on the situation facing the teachers forced with resolving the dilemmas presented in the scenarios. In Australia, for instance, schools have traditionally been the responsibility of state governments. Federal governments, however, have legislated to fund schools in particular ways thus imposing accountability. Both governments have accountability requirements. Such issues are particularly relevant in the context of the implementation of syllabi and other curriculum requirements, as in scenario 1. The global context has a bearing on how the teachers in the three scenarios may resolve their dilemmas. It is likely that these issues would emerge for teachers in many countries, not only Australia.

Finally, the ? factor in the model could be understood as bestowing an ethic of care. In the first scenario, Penny has to reconcile the opposing views of the new syllabus and deal with teacher, student and parental concerns. In the second scenario, the Head of Department is likely to have his duty of care to his colleague at the forefront of his mind. He is aware also of the need to understand and address the concerns of parents about their child's work

and/or the possible legal action that might develop. In the third scenario, Kathleen is concerned not only for the well-being and learning of students but also for the professional development of her colleague and the possible career ramifications if the teacher loses her job.

In all of these scenarios, the individual experiencing the dilemma is visible. In the first two scenarios that individual is the Head of Department, while in the third scenario it is a teacher. Each of these individuals will bring their own personal ethics—whether that be an emphasis on consequences, reference to rules, or a focus on relationships and character—to identifying and resolving the dilemma at hand. These individuals might discuss their dilemma with a significant person in their lives such as a colleague, a partner, or a friend.

Decision

The interactions among the various factors mentioned above and the individual person's personal ethics will determine the action or non-action that they will take. For instance, Penny might do nothing or she might decide to provide a professional development session about the new syllabus for her colleagues, and offer a session to parents. She may choose to speak to her colleague who raised doubts in the minds of students (and then to their parents) about his action and also syllabus. The Head in scenario two might leave it to the teacher or principal to resolve the issue or he might seek to mediate between the parents and the teacher. Kathleen too could either pretend she did not witness the teacher's poor behaviour management skills, she could immediately intervene or she could approach a member of the administrative team to seek their counsel.

Implications

Whatever decisions each of the key players makes, those decisions are likely to create repercussions for them personally, for their colleagues, for the students and parents, and for the school more broadly. For instance, if Kathleen ignores what she saw in the teacher's class, the implications are most serious for students who will continue not to learn anything but how to disrupt a classroom environment. If Penny were to facilitate a professional development session about the new syllabus for her colleagues, she may resolve some of the tensions that have arisen among staff but this action might not quell general disquiet about the syllabus. Joshua might convene a meeting between the parents, the teacher and himself. This action might resolve the matter or it might lead to the school's legal team becoming involved. Analysis of the three scenarios presented here indicates that particular types of school structures and power arrangements facilitate or inhibit teachers' ability to make decisions. This issue is not surprising as research studies have shown that ethical dilemmas for teachers often emerge when there is conflict between institutional requirements and their personal/professional values (see Campbell, 1997; Helton & Ray, 2005; Pope et al., 2009; Tirri, 1999). We contend that teachers need to be able to make prudential decisions, and it is the intersection between their personal ethics and their professional experiences that may assist them to do this fairly.

Discussion and conclusion

There are no easy steps to remedy ethical dilemmas. However, some useful strategies that can be inferred from the literature and our analysis include the importance of:

- Sharing dilemmas with others such as seeking the advice of trusted senior or experienced members of staff;

- Having institutional structures that put into place systems that prevent actions taking place that would be harmful to students or to staff;
- Articulating one's own personal and professional ethics and modelling one's behaviour so that other staff are encouraged to act ethically;
- Recognising an ethical dilemma and the multiple forces at play in it;
- Educating colleagues about specific issues (for example, the school code of conduct, conflict management); and
- Developing appropriate preparation and support for teachers via professional development programs.

All of these strategies can play a role in heightening awareness about ethics and may assist in providing teachers with the skills required to discharge their duties. The final strategy, the need to develop appropriate preparation and support for teachers, is now discussed as it has implications for teacher preparation institutions. It is a strategy that has been promoted widely by writers in the field (see Johns et al., 2008; D. Mahoney, 2008; P. Mahony, 2009; Shapiro & Gross, 2008), ourselves included (see Cranston, et al., 2006), as a means of helping educators understand the field of ethics and ethical decision making. Developing sound professional development programs would help teachers understand more fully 'some rather silly current orthodoxies concerning moral relativism' (P. Mahony, 2009, p. 984). Moral relativism refers to the belief 'that no universal standard exists by which to assess the truth of an ethical proposition' (P. Mahony, 2009, p. 984). An understanding of moral relativism and other ethical positions would eliminate confusion about the area and underscore the centrality of ethics and morals to education. These programs would do well to use problem-based learning processes (Bridges & Hallinger, 1991; Vernon & Blake, 1993) whereby a set of ethical dilemma scenarios would be devised with structured guided

questions for teachers to answer and share with others. These scenarios could be developed by teachers themselves or the teachers of these programs. Rogers and Sizer (2010) support this notion when they say that teaching ethical reasoning to teachers is best achieved by using authentic case studies emerging from the teachers' own experiences.

Moreover, we believe that the model discussed in the paper could be used to help teacher participants to articulate the dimensions of ethical dilemmas and the processes involved. By way of example, we have included ethics as a topic within both our under-graduate and post-graduate programs at our respective universities and have used the model in the way proposed earlier. Furthermore, over some years' now, we have provided workshops to and short professional development activities for teachers and school leaders where we have explored ethical dilemmas through a discussion of scenarios and tested these against the model. Our experience suggests to us that there continues to be a great interest in and need for any type of professional development that encourages educators to reflect on their values and to engage in discussions with others about central issues relating to their professional practice. We concur with D. Mahoney (2008) that providing teachers with opportunities to reflect on difficult situations from a variety of perspectives can heighten and enhance ethical decision making.

Finally, we would argue that it is critical for teachers to have a good understanding of the interconnecting factors that result in an ethical decision being considered in order that they can make professionally defensible decisions when faced with difficult problems that emerge out of every day practice. Our sentiments are in alignment with Rockler's (2004), who says this issue is urgent given the complex times in which educational professionals now live and work. This paper has not only raised awareness about the prevalence and nature of ethical

dilemmas in teachers' practice but also put forward a model that makes explicit the forces at play and dimensions involved in the ethical decision-making process for teachers.

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