The Origins of Ethical Knowledge in resolving Ethical Dilemmas in Teaching

By

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Abstract

Using a qualitative research methodology, this present study provides a descriptive account of the experiences of three Ontarian teachers in how they use the “ethical knowledge” that they possess in their attempts to resolve ethical dilemmas in their work.

Through one-on-one interviews, this study investigates the nature of ethical knowledge in teaching by exploring three critical research questions: How does a teacher’s professional knowledge inform his/her ethical decision-making? How does a teacher’s personal experience and personal morality inform his/her ethical decision-making? When professional knowledge and personal morality conflict, which one is favoured and why? The findings from this study suggest that professional knowledge in teaching and personal morality are constantly intersecting and colliding and are, thus, inseparable. Seven key themes emerged from this study that illustrate the complex relationship between the professional knowledge and personal morality of the three teachers: ethics vs. morality; dilemmas; understanding and communication; care; collegiality; experience, wisdom, and mentor; and identity, integrity, and image. In making recommendations on how to foster ethical knowledge in teaching, all three teachers called for a space for open discussion about the ethical dimensions of teaching. Such spaces included weekly staff meetings or professional development days.

Keywords: teachers, ethical dilemmas, ethical knowledge, professional ethics, personal morality
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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Research Context

Teaching is undeniably a moral activity (Fenstermacher, 1990; Hansen, 1993; Sockett, 1993). As Young (1995) illustrates, the underlying reason for teaching is that society wants what is good, and teaching, at the most basic level, is the practice of transferring to the ignorant useful knowledge that is needed in order to live a good life (Hansen, 1998). Fenstermacher (1990) argues that it is impossible to separate teaching from its moral underpinnings, as children do not come into the world already as virtuous people but, instead, acquire these virtues through learning from role models. Teachers fulfill this role, as they are expected by the public to shape responsible citizens and to help children develop human virtues (Fenstermacher, 1990); they affect the moral developments of their students (Strike & Soltis, 2009) through explicit moral teaching and by modeling virtuous behaviour (Osguthorpe, 2008). As teaching is an activity that involves working with others, the majority of whom are children and vulnerable, it thus necessitates the practice of moral virtues such as fairness, honesty, and justice. Indeed, “Every response to a question, every assignment handed out, every discussion on issues, every resolution of a dispute, every grade given to a student carries with it the moral character of the teacher” (Fenstermacher, 1990, p. 134). In all dimensions of their work, then, teachers continuously engage in a highly moral activity.

The highly moral nature of their work necessitates that teachers be ethical people (Campbell, 2003). We want ethical teachers not only because we would like them to teach our children virtues such as honesty and fairness but more importantly because we want them to teach virtuously. Teachers who teach virtuously will care for their students, treat them fairly, and respect their different viewpoints and opinions (Osguthorpe, 2008). Teachers, then, must be
ethical teachers in order to be good at their jobs. The idea that teachers need not be caring, respectful, competent, knowledgeable, and trustworthy is a contradiction in terms (Sirotnik, 1990). Indeed, the fact that teachers need to display ethical behaviour in their practice is universally recognized in ethical codes for the teaching profession by ministries of education from all around the world. Some examples of these ethical codes include the *Ethical Standards for Teachers* from the Board of Teacher Registration Queensland, Australia; the United States’ National Education Association (NEA) *Code of Ethics of the Education Profession* (2010); and the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* (2009).

Yet, while ethical codes highlight the same virtues that teachers should exemplify in their work—honesty, trustworthiness, integrity, care, justice, respect, fairness, sensitivity, commitment to students and their learning, and impartiality—they fail to give specific guidelines on how teachers may act with honesty, trustworthiness, integrity, care, justice, respect, fairness, sensitivity, commitment to students and their learning, and impartiality.

Crook and Truscott (2007) states that professional ethics can be descriptive—what members actually do; prescriptive—what members ought to do, or proscriptive—what members should not do. The NEA code is most commandment-like in that it is written in the negative mode and outlines specific acts from which one should abstain (i.e., “The educator shall not…”). It is thus written in the proscriptive mode. On the other hand, the Queensland code is written in the positive, or prescriptive, mode and formulated like the Hippocratic oath, outlining actions that the teacher promises to do. Of the three codes, the OCT ethical code is the shortest and vaguest, as it merely outlines four ethical standards that the teacher should uphold in his or her professional duties: care, trust, respect, and integrity. One of the things that this code purports to do is “to guide ethical decisions and actions in the teaching profession” (Ontario College of
Yet, the vagueness of the code begs the question as to whether it does serve this purpose. Indeed, Campbell (2001) cites the OCT ethical code as an example of a professional ethical code that, due to its openness, raises more questions than it does providing solutions to the dilemmas that teachers face in their everyday work with students, parents, and colleagues. She illustrates the inapplicable nature of the code by first presenting ethical dilemmas that real teachers have faced and then narrating possible thought processes that teachers might have had if they had used the OCT code to try to resolve those dilemmas. A closer look at ethical dilemmas in teaching is thus needed.

1.1 Articulation of the Research Problem

The term “Ethical Dilemma” has been defined in a number of ways by different scholars in the field of educational research. For Freeman (1998), they exist when teachers are required to act in such a way that will benefit one party at an expense or inconvenience to another, and as Young (1995) states, they involve situations where “we must choose between two courses of action, each of which we feel is wrong in some way, bad in motive, or likely to produce bad results” (p. 39). Suppose, for instance, that Bobby raises his hand and asks Ms. Jones why she says, “Boys can marry other boys” when his parents have told him that their religion states otherwise. In this case, Ms. Jones must decide how she can act with integrity and speak honestly about the rights of same-sex couples, standing up for what she herself believes in, while simultaneously respecting Bobby and his family’s religious beliefs. Consider another case where care for a student conflicts with fairness, justice, equality, and honesty. Kathie fails her final exam, but Mr. Smith is inclined to pass her because he knows that her parents’ divorce is having a negative effect on her and her studies. Should he pass her? Would this be fair to her? Would
this be fair to the other students? Or suppose that Mr. Berry witnesses Mrs. Norman stealing money from the fund of a student club. Mr. Berry is inclined to tell the principal about this incident but knows that if he does, he will be breaking the bond of collegial loyalty and will surely be involved in a lengthy battle with Mrs. Norman, the teacher’s union, and perhaps other teachers at the school.

All of these cases highlight the fact that conflicts arise in schools because the interests of multiple people are at odds with one another. The teachers in these cases are the decision makers, having to take into consideration all of the factors that contribute to the ethical dilemma and all of the consequences that may arise from a potential ethical decision. Yet, in trying to resolve the ethical dilemma, what bodies of knowledge do they turn to? Is the OCT code of ethics (2009) actually useful in guiding teachers to make “ethical decisions and actions in the teaching profession” or is it “inapplicable” as Campbell (2001) argues? Do they look solely to the professional policies and the ethical code of the teaching profession or do they look they turn completely inwards to their own moralities and personal bodies of knowledge? Or perhaps, do they look turn to both the professional and personal bodies of knowledge? These are precisely the questions that I will investigate in my study.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide a descriptive account of the experiences of three Ontarian teachers in their attempts to resolve ethical dilemmas that they are confronted with in schools. Specifically, I am interested in the looking at the “ethical knowledge” that these three teachers use to help them resolve those ethical dilemmas. It is important to note that I am not analyzing the nature of ethical dilemmas themselves nor am I attempting to provide a
philosophical study about the origins of ethical dilemmas in the workplace. Instead, I am looking at the intersection and collision of the professional and personal realms in forming the ethical knowledge that teachers use to resolve the ethical dilemmas that they encounter in their work as teachers.

Research about ethical dilemmas in the teaching profession is not as plentiful as the available research done on the general moral dimensions of teaching (Campbell, 2008). Yet, a closer look at ethical dilemmas arising in schools and the ways in which they are resolved can tell us much about the teaching profession as a whole. For example, Campbell (2003) identifies collegial loyalty as a threat to teacher professionalism, as group solidarity and unquestioned loyalty to one’s colleagues is deeply problematic in situations when it is pitted against obligations to one’s own students. Indeed, the issue of collegial loyalty goes against the very essence of teaching. Teachers are supposed to act in loco parentis (Scarfo, 2011), which necessitates that the needs of their students should always be the teacher’s first and foremost priority. Yet, although this is true, is there no place for collegial loyalty within the teaching profession then? Indeed, looking at the sources of knowledge that teachers use to resolve ethical dilemmas will launch us into a deeper discussion about the ethical dimensions of teaching and how best we can support our teachers.

How ethical dilemmas are resolved can also tell us about teachers and their level of awareness of the moral nature of what they do. This awareness is indicative of their ethical knowledge, a knowledge base for professional ethics and teaching (Campbell, 2003). It is important that teachers possess ethical knowledge, as it affects how they teach. As Campbell (2003) argues, ethical knowledge is the foundation of teacher knowledge: “it is not a question of superimposing ethics onto the special [pedagogical] knowledge and skills, but rather of
contextualizing ethical practice as an integral component of the special [pedagogical] knowledge itself” (p. 116). The more self-awareness that teachers have regarding the potential ramifications of their actions and decisions, the more ethical knowledge they will possess and the more ethical they will be as teachers. Teaching is a highly moral activity. It is important that we research about ethical knowledge and the awareness that teachers have about the moral dimensions of their work so that we can understand how best to improve teaching practices. By asking teachers to reflect on ethical dilemmas they have faced and the ethical knowledge they consulted in trying to resolve the dilemmas, teachers are forced to reflect on what they did, how did they did it, and perhaps even what they can do the next time they are confronted with an ethical dilemma.

As a qualitative study, its findings are not meant to be generalizable and representative of the experiences of all teachers in Ontario. Instead, I want to understand the unique experiences of three individuals and their struggles with ethical dilemmas in the hopes that I will be able to suggest some ways in which to enhance professional ethical development. In the teaching profession, it is inevitable that ethical dilemmas will arise because the interests of multiple stakeholders—students, families, colleagues, the larger society—are always intersecting and conflicting with one another (Freeman, 1998). My goal is not to provide solutions to specific ethical dilemmas in teaching nor is it my aim to provide suggestions on how to prevent ethical dilemmas from arising. Rather, in focusing on the experiences of three teachers working in Ontario and the sources of ethical knowledge they consult, I want to suggest how we can better equip and prepare our teachers to resolve ethical dilemmas in their work.
1.3 Research Questions

The present study seeks to understand the nature of ethical knowledge in teaching by investigating three critical research questions. First, *how does a teacher’s professional knowledge inform his or her ethical decision-making?* By “professional knowledge,” I mean knowledge and understanding of *The Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* (Ontario College of Teachers, 2009), *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession* (Ontario College of Teachers, 2009), school board policies, education policies, education acts, and union rules and policies. I wish to understand whether one of the strategies or approaches used by these three teachers was to consult the OCT code of ethics to guide their ethical decisions. If they did use the code to guide their ethical decisions, how did they interpret OCT’s four ethical standards—care, trust, respect, and integrity—and how did their interpretations translate to their ethical decision and action? If they did not use the code as one of their strategies in solving ethical dilemmas, what were the reasons for this? Was it because the code is too vague, and therefore “inapplicable” (Campbell, 2001)? What other types of “professional knowledge” did they use to try to resolve these ethical dilemmas *professionally*? This part of my research will therefore build upon Campbell (2001); yet, where she combines empirical evidence from research studies with fabricated first-person narrative responses, this study will look at the real experiences of three Ontarian teachers and the unique thought processes that each of them had in their attempts to resolve ethical dilemmas.

Second, *how does a teacher’s personal experiences and personal morality inform his or her ethical decision-making?* By “personal morality,” I mean the moral standards to which a person holds himself or herself personally accountable in his or her day-to-day life. Were the teachers more inclined to act according to their own moral principles, which are “implicit,
instinctive, and idiosyncratic” (Freeman, 1998), than they were to act upon their professional knowledge? Or did the teachers draw upon a combination of professional knowledge, personal experience, and personal morality to arrive at a decision?

Finally, when professional knowledge and personal morality conflict, which one is favoured and why? If the teachers chose to act upon professional knowledge, rather than according to their own personal morality, how did this action affect their personal integrity? How did this affect their personal identity? On the other hand, if the teachers chose to act upon personal morality, how did this affect their professional identity and role as teachers?

Again, this is a qualitative study, meaning that my findings are not meant to be generalizable nor representative of the teaching profession as a whole. The purpose of this study is to understand the unique experiences of three Ontarian teachers in their attempts to resolve ethical dilemmas present in schools and to pinpoint some approaches and strategies they employ. I wish to bring their experiences to the forefront and to make their voices heard.

1.4 Background of the Researcher

I have been interested in ethics and morality since my first year of undergraduate studies at McGill University in Montréal, Québec. I began my studies in 2010, wholly intending on majoring in Psychology and minoring in English Literature. During that first semester, I took an introductory course to moral philosophy to fulfill an elective requirement. It was during this time that I was first introduced to the moral teachings of Aristotle, Kant, Hume, Bentham, and Mill. This was the beginning of my philosophical awakening.

Having never before encountered such thought-provoking teachings, I found myself constantly thinking about what it meant to be a “good” person or what the “right” thing to do was in every situation I found myself in. After that first year, I changed my major to Philosophy, and
after only two years, I had already completed the equivalent number of credits to constitute a major in Philosophy. However, as I was nearing the end of my undergraduate degree, I became increasingly dissatisfied with the other branches of Philosophy, and although I was attracted to Moral Philosophy, my interest in it could not sustain me in my completion of my degree. It was during this time that I revisited the idea I had in high school of becoming a teacher, and so three semesters from the end of my degree, I took a leave of absence from McGill and returned home to Toronto to volunteer full-time at an Ontario high school.

During this time, I was able to shadow multiple teachers and act as a teacher’s assistant in the classroom. Although I did not recognize it then, what I was witnessing daily in the school was ethics-in-practice. Sometimes, teachers would mark more leniently with some students because of circumstantial issues (e.g., “The student was usually an ‘A’ student. He was just having a bad day”), and other times, teachers would explicitly teach ethics in the classroom (e.g., “It’s good for us to be honest, and it’s bad for us to steal, so please don’t plagiarize”). I associated these things as being part of the regular teaching routine and made my mind up that I was going to become a teacher. In September 2013, I returned to McGill where I finished my undergraduate degree, graduating with a major in Philosophy and a minor in Psychology. I was then accepted into the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT) where I am now completing a two-year Master of Teaching degree with an English teachable in the Junior and Intermediate divisions.

In my first semester at OISE/UT in September 2014, I took a course called, “Educational Professionalism, Ethics and the Law” with Dr. Elizabeth Campbell. This course opened up my eyes to the moral and ethical dimensions of teaching—a dimension that I had not considered before. When I thought back to my volunteering experiences and to the situations I had been in
where I did not know what to do, I was finally able to classify those conflicts as something: no longer were they just “teaching issues,” they were ethical dilemmas in teaching. In this professional ethics course at OISE/UT, we reviewed multiple case studies of ethical dilemmas and discussed all the things that made those ethical dilemmas complex—the multiple stakeholders involved, the various solutions, and the multitude of possible consequences. In discussing some cases, I was most struck by the different ways in which my colleagues decided to resolve the ethical dilemmas. Indeed, I was very surprised at how often and quickly some of them would suppress their own personal ethics in favour of the professional standards, not because it was the “good” or “right” thing to do but mostly because it was “the easier and less complicated thing to do.”

When I thought about these ethical dilemmas and how I would resolve them, I often found it excruciatingly difficult to come up with a solution. This is not to say that I lack ethical or moral principles; on the contrary, I think that I am a person with very strong ethical and moral convictions. Rather, these ethical dilemmas were hard for me to resolve because I found that I could not align my own personal morality with the normative “ethical” practices in teaching. What should I do if I know that my colleague constantly yells and belittles his students? What should I do if I disagree with my colleague’s way of teaching the curriculum? My own personal morality tells me that I need to do something about both of these cases, but normative practices in teaching favours collegial loyalty and signals to me that I might be ostracized by my peers if I say something.

Every ethical case I looked at, I found it hard to know what to do. This naturally led to my current question: what are some strategies and approaches do teachers use when they are attempting to resolve ethical dilemmas? Do teachers consult their professional knowledge or
personal morality in their decision-making process? There could be instances where teachers are able to consult both their professional knowledge and personal morality, in which case, how are they able to merge the two? What if, in trying to resolve the ethical dilemma, they cannot act according to their own personal moralities? As I can imagine my own perceptions of myself changing for the worse if I routinely did not act according to my own personal morality, how would this change the teachers’ perceptions of themselves?

In conducting this study, then, I am not only attempting to help other teachers better understand ethical dilemmas. I am also helping myself. Both ethics and teaching have been a passion of mine for the past couple of years, and I am happy to bring the two together in this study to better understand the relationship between these two areas.

1.5 Overview

Chapter one introduced the topic and provided background information to the research study. It briefly discussed teaching as a moral activity; introduced three ethical codes used by the teaching profession in the United States, Queensland (Australia), and Ontario (Canada); and explored the phenomena of ethical dilemmas in teaching. Chapter one also identified the purpose and significance of this study, which is to understand what strategies and approaches three teachers in Ontario use in their attempts to resolve ethical dilemmas present in schools. Chapter two will provide a more in-depth background to this study by reviewing the relevant literature to professional ethics and ethical dilemmas. It will also provide a theoretical and conceptual framework through which the findings of this study can be interpreted and discussed. Chapter three will describe the qualitative methodology, specifically the research procedure, instruments
of data collection, participants, data analysis, and review processes. Chapter four will outline the findings, and finally, chapter five will discuss and interpret the findings.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter of the research study is to review the literature relevant to the moral and ethical dimensions of teaching. The intention is to establish a foundation for the study and to provide a framework through which the findings of this study can be interpreted and discussed.

Prior to the 1980s, research in this area primarily discussed the role of the teacher as the moral educator and the role of schools as institutions of moral learning (Campbell, 2008). However, the past few decades have seen a favourable shift in this research area, as notable educational philosophers and researchers have gone beyond the moral purpose of education to investigating the moral dimensions of teaching and ethical professional practice (Fenstermacher, 1990; Hansen, 1993, 1998; Sockett, 1993; Soltis, 1986; Strike & Soltis, 2009).

It is important to note that with the exception of Campbell (1992, 1996, 1997, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006), there has not been much peer-reviewed research done on the ethical dimensions of teaching as a profession in Canada. In its investigation of the ethical knowledge that teachers use in their attempts to resolve ethical dilemmas in their work, this study is framed by ethical theory. Working under the umbrella of ethical theory, this study is framed within a conceptual framework: the intersection and collision of the professional and personal realms.

This literature review is divided into three sections, each serving to provide a crucial background understanding to the study and its conceptual framework. Section one explores professional ethics and ethical knowledge. Section two focuses on ethical dilemmas in teaching, specifically investigating the nature of ethical dilemmas (what kinds of ethical dilemmas occur
and why they occur) and teachers’ experiences with ethical dilemmas. Finally, the last section explores the intersecting and conflicting relationship of role morality and personal identity.

2.1 Professional Ethics and Ethical Knowledge

Professional ethics concerns “those norms, values, and principles that should govern the professional conduct of teachers, administrators, and other educational professionals” (Strike & Ternasky, 1993). Although certainly connected to the moral dimensions of teaching, it differs from it. Professional ethics does not ask what the moral purpose of education is nor does it ask what the role of a teacher is as a moral educator. Rather, it is concerned with the practice of teaching itself; it asks questions about what constitutes fairness in grading, what equitable practices are, and what appropriate action towards one’s clients are (Strike & Ternasky, 1993). In other words, professional ethics asks, “How do I teach ethically?”

Campbell (2008) has identified 1990 as the turning point for research in this field because of the sheer increase of research conducted after this time, beginning with the publication of a prominent book called, *The Moral Dimensions of Teaching* (Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990). A collection of essays written by prominent researchers in the field, this book addresses such issues as teacher professionalism, moral agency, and ethical codes of teacher practice. Two essays in this collection, Strike (1990) and Socket (1990), are particularly relevant to my study and will thus serve as a starting point to discussing professional ethics.

The relationship between the legal and moral responsibilities of teachers is explored by Strike (1990) in his attempt to understand how the former may shape and influence the latter. He argues that society wants teachers of good moral character and that this is reflected in the law: teachers who commit crimes are denied certification and are dismissed from the profession. Yet,
he claims that the law sets forth only minimal standards and, for many reasons, cannot be used as the sole guide for the ethical standards of the teaching profession.

Strike (1990) outlines four important reasons for this. First, the law does not provide standards that pertain to teaching specifically but applies to all other activities as well—that a person should not be a child pornographer or sexual molester pertains to everyone, not just teachers. Thus, the law does not inform specific ethical standards for the teaching profession.

Second, the law does not address issues of grading and evaluation. Teachers are expected to be fair, accurate, intellectually competent, and consistent; this fact is not reflected in the law. Third, the law does not inform teachers on how they should understand the rights of their clients. In situations where the interests of multiple parties—students, parents, colleagues—conflict, what should the teacher do? Finally, the law does not reflect the values internal to each subject matter that teachers should respect. A teacher, for example, should recognize the beauty of poetry, to draw out its close connection to the human condition, and not teach it as though its sole purpose were to help students learn to write jingles and manipulative advertisements.

Strike (1990) argues that there are ethical principles that pertain specifically to teaching that are not included in the law and thus calls for a serious discussion about the ethical principles that must govern the activities of teachers. The law is a poor and inadequate guide, and we will need a “conception of ethics for teachers that takes more seriously the characteristic activities of teaching” (Strike, 1990, p. 219). Professional ethics in teaching, then, must hold teachers accountable for actions that fall outside of the legal realm.

Writing during the “second wave of American educational reform,” a movement towards empowering teachers and giving them more autonomy in school-based management, Socket (1990) argues that a practical model of professional accountability needs to be established, a
model that requires that teachers be accountable to both their students and professional peers. This system of professional accountability must meet four criteria, each with trust incorporated as a significant condition. First, it must have a common moral basis, one with agreed-upon principles but allows for some validly held moral differences. Second, it must allow agents, professional peers, and others to make judgments and deliver an account according to standards regarding assessment of teachers’ teaching skills, student scores, teachers’ veracity and fairness, and so on. Third, it must answer to the rights of students, colleagues, parents, and the larger public and provide opportunities for these parties to make formal complaints without fear of punishment. Finally, this system of professional accountability must be formed in a way that teachers will maintain its integrity and the public trust it develops.

Socket (1990) argues that this system of professional accountability takes the form of a professional code of practice. As professionalism develops, a code of ethics is necessary, not only to assist the professional in his or her conduct, but also to let the public know what they may expect from the professional. A professional code of ethics must contain the cumulative wisdom and virtue of the profession, and although it must be regularly revised as new issues come up and are resolved, it will still always contain fundamental principles of good practice (Socket, 1990).

The importance of an ethical code for the teaching profession is, indeed, argued by many (Campbell, 1996, 2000; Eberlein, 1989; Freeman, 1998; Macmillan, 1993; Strike & Soltis, 2009). Both Macmillan (1993) and Freeman (1998) echo the sentiments of Socket (1990) and argue that it is necessary to encode and enforce professional ethics. Professional ethics differs greatly from personal morality. Teachers must, of course, exhibit those characteristics that are expected by any person—honesty and fairness, for example—but
must also be “bound by a sense of the ethical dimensions of the relations among professionals and clients, the public, the employing institution, and fellow professionals (Macmillan, 1993, p. 189). Where individuals hold different personal moralities—different personal codes by which they live—teachers embrace the same professional ethics (Freeman, 1998). Indeed, a professional ethical code will help teachers reject the idea of moral relativism in teaching (Campbell, 2000)—the idea that the ethical and moral value of actions are non-absolute and relative to individuals and situations (Haynes, 1998).

Although it is useful to know the professional ethical code, for it can provide general guidelines for what one ought to do as a professional teacher (Campbell 1997; Haynes, 1998) the ethical code is an “inadequate resource for preparing and sustaining moral professionals” (Campbell, 2000, p. 204) and knowing the code does not mean that one automatically becomes an ethical professional (Soltis, 1986). Ethical codes do not provide the “philosophical justification of the fundamental ethical principles embedded in the code” (Soltis, 1986, p. 2), which means that in situations where the stated rule under the code does not apply to a given situation, it is hard for teachers to extrapolate the underlying principles behind the rules of the code to make an ethical decision in a given situation. Campbell (2000) states that an ethical code that specifies how one must act in every given circumstance is impossible. Yet, an ideal ethical code “should be specific enough to provide useful and relevant standards for action, yet broad enough to encompass most situations in a generally applicable way” (Campbell, 2000, p. 214).

The problem with ethical codes is that there is a gap between theory and application in context, for although there might be “moral clarity” with the principles of the ethical codes, there still might be “moral ambiguity” regarding the application of those principles to specific situations (Campbell, 2000, 2001). Working within the smaller context of Ontario, Canada,
Campbell (2001) uses the Ontario College of Teacher’s *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* (2009) as an example of a professional ethical code that raises more questions than it does providing solutions to problems. She illustrates the inapplicable nature of the code by presenting ethical dilemmas that real teachers have faced and narrating possible thought processes that teachers might have had if they had used the ethical standards to resolve the dilemmas. Campbell (2001) concludes her paper by suggesting that the ethical code is minimally useful if one attempts to use it as an instructional manual for resolving ethical dilemmas in teaching. Instead, ethical codes and standards in teaching should more generally be viewed as “potential springboards for broader school efforts to define what right is in terms of ethical practice” (p. 407). Rules should not be followed automatically (Haynes, 1998) because “the multifaceted nature of ethical dilemmas requires critical thinking, not blind compliance” (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011); it is the underlying principles of those rules that should guide the teacher’s decisions. When unsure of a rule’s applicability, educators need to discuss with one another so that there is a shared understanding of the principles (Campbell, 2001).

As Campbell (2001) says it, educators “need to reach a point where conceptual understanding and the procedural routines for the implementation of new ethical norms are so internalized and embedded in their interpretation of professionalism that any need to refer to the actual formal codes or standards becomes irrelevant” (p. 409). The ethical code is the starting point to ethical teaching; yet, it is not enough to ensure ethical teaching. Teachers need *ethical knowledge* in order to be ethical teachers (Campbell, 2003). This ethical knowledge is the “heightened awareness that teachers…develop in response to their recognition of their role as moral agents” (Campbell, 2006, p. 33), and it is what Campbell (2003) believes to be the knowledge base for professional ethics and teaching (2003). It is important to note that it is not
the case that a teacher either has ethical knowledge or does not, but rather that there exist
different degrees of ethical knowledge based on the level of awareness one possesses regarding
one’s role as an ethical teacher (Campbell, 2003, 2005). The more self-awareness that one
possesses regarding the potential ramifications of one’s actions as a teacher, the more ethical
knowledge one possesses.

Ethical knowledge “enables teachers to make conceptual and practical links between core
moral and ethical values such as honesty, compassion, fairness, and respect for others and their
own daily choices and actions” (Campbell, 2006, p. 33). Using ethical knowledge, teachers are
able to recognize the moral nuances of their work and to work towards promoting a caring
classroom environment; they not only strive to ensure that such virtues as fairness, honesty,
consistency, respect, and kindness are present in their classrooms but also are present in their
professional practices as teachers. Ethical codes “in and of themselves are by no means an
adequate resource for preparing and sustaining moral professionals” (Campbell, 2000, p. 204).
Teachers must develop ethical knowledge so that they may be able to extract the fundamental
ethical values written in the code and apply them to specific cases.

Ethical knowledge, then, is a kind of Aristotelian practical wisdom (Tirri & Husu, 2002).
According to Aristotle, the prudent person is one who exhibits phronesis (practical wisdom).
Someone who is prudent is “able to deliberate finely about things that are good and beneficial for
himself” and can “calculate well to promote some excellent end in an area where there is no
craft” (Irwin, 1999, p. 89). In other words, being prudent and practically wise means that one is
able to sift through the many existing options and choose the best option to help one achieve
one’s ethical aim. Ricoeur (1999) expands on Aristotle’s “phronesis” by suggesting the term
“critical phronesis.” Critical phronesis goes beyond making decisions for oneself to making decisions for others or decisions that involve others.

Having practical wisdom means that one is aware of universal or general principles and knows how best to apply them to specific cases. For example, in the legal realm, the judge hears both sides of the defence and analyzes the evidence before he or she consults his or her knowledge of the law to generate a sentencing. Yet, we may ask how the judge is able to apply his or her general knowledge of the law to the particular case, for it seems that there is a gap when going from the particulars of the case to the general universal principles stated in the law. After all, the law does not account for every nuance of each case. This is where critical phronesis is needed: it bridges the gap between the particular and the general. Of course, no legal case is exactly the same, so the judge must use his or her critical phronesis to decide correctly which sentence to give. However, cases may be similar, so the judge may use his or her past experiences to guide his or her decision. This is why Aristotle says that experience is useful for practical wisdom (Irwin, 1999) and that we should consult “the wise” in helping us make our difficult decisions because they have more experience. The suggestion that we should consult others in helping us to make difficult decisions is one that is indeed voiced by many scholars researching ethical dilemmas in teaching.

According to Campbell (2005), while ethical knowledge “is something to be shared among professional practitioners in order to enhance the awareness of all teachers, it has not become a collective norm or value within schools” (p. 217). Ethical knowledge can only enter the professional sphere through open forums of discussion (Campbell, 2003, 2005; Hostetler, 1997; and Strike, 1995). Just as teachers meet to discuss curriculum goals and administrative procedures, they can meet to discuss the moral dimensions of their decisions and actions.
(Campbell, 2005). Sichel (1993) calls for an establishment of School Ethics Committee (SEC), a committee with an education, policy, and consultative purpose. Operating like any other ethics committee in medicine, business, and law, the SEC could provide individual teachers with consultation before or after an action is made with regards to ethical dilemmas that teachers face (Sichel, 1993, p. 171). Whichever way it is done, what is clear is that teachers need to enter into dialogue with each other—creating a dialogue of “moral language” (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011)—about the ethical practices of teaching and to explore how ethical knowledge should influence their practices as teachers (Campbell, 2005). Yet, although having ethical knowledge is necessary in order to resolve ethical dilemmas, having ethical knowledge does not mean that one will be free of ethical dilemmas and will never encounter them.

2.2 Ethical Dilemmas in Teaching

The term “ethical dilemma” can be described in many ways. Young (1995) defines an ethical dilemma as a “situation in which we must choose between two courses of action, each of which we feel is wrong in some way, bad in motive, or likely to produce bad results” (p. 39). Nash (1996), on the other hand, describes an ethical dilemma as a situation in which the agent has to choose between two equally defensible courses of action. Ethical dilemmas arise when “teachers have to take action that will benefit one party at some expense or inconvenience to another” (Freeman, 1998, p. 32); when, as Oser (1991) argues, “three moral claims cannot be simultaneously met: the claims of justice, care, and truthfulness” (as cited in Tirri, 1999, p. 33); or when “people have to coordinate their actions with others” (Husu, 2001, p. 76). Whichever way the term “ethical dilemma” is defined, what is clear is that a difficult choice has to be made between two alternatives. Ethical dilemmas are inherent in teaching because of the number of
stakeholders involved; instead of avoiding them, teachers need to find ways of handling these ethical dilemmas (Colnerud, 1997).

Shapira-Lishchinsky (2011) offers five categories of ethical dilemmas, some categories overlapping with those offered by Colnerud (1997). The first category is “caring climate and formal climate.” Ethical dilemmas falling under this category require teachers to choose between attention for individual’s needs and adherence to formalized institutional rules. An ethical dilemma of this sort would require the teacher to decide how best to care for a student or colleague who has acted against the rules. Ethical dilemmas falling under the second category, “distributive justice and school standards,” involve issues of fairness regarding school standards. Teachers experience ethical dilemmas of the third category, “confidentiality and school rules,” when student confidentiality conflicts with their obligation to obey and uphold school rules. Ethical dilemmas of the fourth category, “loyalty to colleagues and school norms,” involve situations in which teachers witness other teachers acting against school norms but find it difficult to confront them because of the notion of collegial loyalty. Finally, ethical dilemmas of the last category, “family agenda versus educational standards,” involve situations where the teacher’s idea of what is best for the student is different from that of the parents.

This study conducted by Shapira-Lishchinsky (2011), which interviewed 50 Israeli teachers from 50 Israeli schools, revealed that the most common ethical dilemmas fell under the category, “caring climate versus formal climate.” Ethical dilemmas of this type focused on the teacher-student relationship where the teacher was required to choose between personal needs and obeying school rules. Each of these cases involved giving students second chances and being more flexible with rules, and in all of them, Shapira-Lishchinsky (2011) found that care for others was an important value that teachers considered, a finding that supports the arguments of
feminist educational scholars who argue that care for students must underlie all ethical decisions (Noddings, 1993). Shapira-Lischinsky (2011) also points to the tensions between “loyalty to colleagues and school norms”; she argues that “collegial relationships may be harmful to the school because teachers do not wish to hurt their colleagues and report their misconduct” (p. 655).

Indeed, collegial loyalty is a problem that is written at length by Campbell, as she identifies it as a threat to professionalism and ethical teaching (1992, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2005). Campbell (2005) states,

Ironically, one of the most entrenched norms and values shared among teachers as colleagues and peers may be exactly the kind of norm that militates against honest and open collaboration, social interaction that promotes an ethic of interpersonal care and trust, and the cultivation of consensual practices that reinforce the teacher’s role as moral agent and exemplar (p. 209).

Collegiality is not wholly in itself a bad thing because there needs to be a “professional community” in teaching—a community of people who trust one another and collaborate with each other (Sockett, 1993). Where collegiality becomes problematic is when it is pitted against obligations to one’s own students and when it becomes transformed into group solidarity and unquestioned loyalty to one’s colleagues.

Campbell’s research highlights how the unspoken normative practice of collegial loyalty prevents productive “ethical talk”—that is, individuals are reluctant to engage in conversations or complaints regarding the practices of other teachers because they are afraid of perceived disloyalty, peer ostracism, and perhaps even retaliatory action from the teachers’ union (Campbell, 1996, 2003). For Campbell (2005), “It is difficult to envision how teachers can create
meaningful collaborative opportunities so integral to a professional community within school cultures where at least one interpretation of collegiality is synonymous with non-interference in the practice and conduct of peers” (p. 215). When collegial loyalty instills feelings of anxiety, intimidation, helplessness, and “moral cowardice,” ethical knowledge begins to fade (Campbell, 2003). When ethical knowledge fades, so too does ethical teaching.

Tirri (1999) identified four main categories of ethical dilemmas: matters related to teachers’ work, the morality of pupils’ behaviour regarding school and work, the rights of minority groups, and common rules in school. Results from the data showed that teachers experienced more ethical dilemmas in matters relating to their work than they did in other domains, and what is more, that they favoured the use of what Oser (1991) had termed, “single-handed decision making” (as cited in Tirri, 1999) in solving these problems. Yet, strategies varied case-by-case within the larger context of matters relating to teachers’ work, as teachers chose an avoiding orientation when dilemmas arose regarding a colleague’s poor work morals (Tirri, 1999). This claim is consistent with the literature regarding collegial fear and collegial loyalty and its harm to the teaching profession (Campbell, 1996, 2005, 2008; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011).

From the literature, it is evident that teachers are confronted by a range of ethical dilemmas. A qualitative study conducted by Joseph and Efron (1993) on teachers’ self-perceptions of their roles as moral agents found that teachers’ personal moralities shaped the choices they made and the conflicts that concerned them. It is clear, then, that the teacher’s individual identity affects his or her role as an ethical teacher.
2.3 Role Morality and Personal Identity

Husu (2001) claims that “according to empirical studies, teachers cannot separate their own moral character from their professional self. The stance of teachers’ moral character…guides their ways of interacting with students, parents, and colleagues” (p. 69). With this in mind, the notion that teachers can separate their personal identities from their roles as teachers is impossible. Indeed, many researchers have reported on the ethical dilemmas that teachers face when their own personal identities and personal moralities conflict with that of the norms and practices of the teaching profession.

Campbell (1992, 1996, 2003) uses the term “suspended morality” to describe a state in which teachers have suspended their own sense of moral responsibility to conform to a collective norm in situations where they believe they should not. Teachers acting out of a state of suspended morality often act and justify their actions through a “false necessity” of doing their job; they believe they have no choice but to follow organizational expectations (Campbell, 1992, p. 439). Although Gibson (2003) does not write specifically in the context of teaching, his notion of “role morality” is important to this discussion. Gibson (2003) puts forth the notion that individuals adopt a different morality depending on the roles they assume. In effect, Gibson argues that each individual wears two “moral hats”: one for his or her everyday life and one for his or her profession. When individuals join a profession, they are thus bound to the professional association—they are no longer “morally independent” individuals.

Ethical dilemmas arising in the professional world require individuals to juggle and accommodate “multi-layered, conflicting and crosscutting demands of differing moralities—the individual’s own values, those imposed by the employer, and the constraints of professional codes” (Gibson, 2013, p. 24). Gibson also argues that issues are further complicated if the
individual has multiple roles, as he or she will have more demands with which to contend. Indeed, teachers experience ethical dilemmas because of the fact that they have multiple roles—as moral educators, as *in loco parentis*, as teachers of the curriculum, as well as a wealth of other roles. Teachers also deal with many people and must make sure to balance the competing interests of students, students’ families, and society.

Role morality “fosters excuses for actions that individuals would not endorse out of a role” (Gibson, 2013, p. 28). This statement supports Campbell’s claim of how teachers justify their actions out of a sense of false necessity of “just doing their jobs.” When teachers experience a conflict between the values that they hold and the values of another, they experience “external value conflict” (Young, 1995); this is the case with teachers who not only hold their own personal values but are also socialized into a collective normative professional value. Teachers who are torn between their own beliefs and the norms and practices of the profession experience internal conflict (Campbell, 2003) and a threat to their own personal integrity (Lyons, 1990).

Three dimensions of integrity are identified in Santoro (2013): personal integrity, professional integrity, and the integrity of teaching. Teachers experience a sense of personal integrity if they feel that a version of themselves is reflected in their roles as teachers. Professional integrity requires that teachers not only answer to their own sense of integrity but also to that of the profession, the subject, and the community they serve. Professional integrity involves “maintaining alignment between what one believes to be the responsibility of the role of teacher and one’s actions in that role” (Santoro, 2013, p. 570). Finally, integrity of teaching demands that one is cognizant of how one is contributing to the teaching profession.

Santoro (2013) indicates that teaching constitutes both a moral identity and a professional identity. When the role of teacher intertwines with one’s own personal moral identity, protecting
the integrity of teaching is also deeply connected to protecting one’s own personal identity; teachers who had to compromise their professional integrity (by teaching in ways they did not believe supported their students) experienced negative impacts to their personal integrity and to the integrity of teaching. Santoro’s research illuminates the reasons as to why some teachers leave the teaching profession: they experience a threat to their personal integrity, their professional integrity, and to the integrity of teaching. As Palmer (1997) claims, good teaching is inextricably linked to the integrity and the identity of the teacher.

According to Hamberger & Moore (1997), “personal identity” is the aspect of oneself that is beyond choosing while “social identity” is the aspect of oneself that is “related to a role that one chooses and for which other members of society have expectations as a result of that choice” (p. 304). According to them, teachers begin to understand the ethical dimensions of teaching when they work through the conflicts that arise between their personal and social identities. Conflicts may arise between their understanding of the ideal social identity of a teacher and the apparent social identities of teachers, between their personal identities and their idealized social identities, and between their personal identities and the behaviours they see in practice. Both Hamberger & Moore (1997) urge for teacher education programs that engage in discussion about values and identities so that teachers may better understand the interplay of their personal and professional identities.

2.4 Conclusion

In an attempt to provide the reader with background knowledge to this present study, this literature review was divided into three sections. The first section discussed professional ethics and ethical knowledge while the second section focused on ethical dilemmas in teaching. The
last section explored the notion of role morality and discussed its conflicting nature with personal identity.

This study seeks to investigate three questions: *How does a teacher’s professional knowledge inform his/her ethical decision-making? How does a teacher’s personal experience and personal morality inform his/her ethical decision-making? When professional knowledge and personal morality conflict, which one is favoured and why?* In the next chapter, the qualitative methodology will be reviewed, specifically the research procedure, instruments of data collection, participants, data analysis, and review processes.
Chapter 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This research study investigates the sources of knowledge that three Ontarian teachers consult in order to resolve ethical dilemmas that they encounter in their work. Chapter one introduced the topic and provided background information to the research study. Chapter two provided a more in-depth background to this study by reviewing the literature relevant to professional ethics and ethical dilemmas. Chapter two also outlined both the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of this study. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the qualitative methodology through which this study was conducted, specifically the research approach and procedures; the instruments of data collection; the participant sampling criteria, recruitment procedures, and participant biographies; the data analysis; the ethical review procedures; and the methodological limitations and strengths.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

A literature review and four semi-structured interviews were conducted using a qualitative research approach. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) describe qualitative research as:

Rich in description of people, places, and conversations, and not easily handled by statistical procedures. Research questions are not framed by operationalizing variables; rather, they are formulated to investigate topics in all their complexity, in context…. They also are concerned with understanding behavior from the subject’s own frame of reference. (p. 2)

Given the purposes of this study—to understand in detail the unique experiences of three teachers in their attempts to resolve ethical dilemmas in their work—it was necessary to adopt a qualitative research approach. The goal of this project is to act as a vehicle for these teachers to
be heard so that we can continue to better understand the implications of ethical dilemmas in schools. Qualitative research facilitates this goal. As Creswell (2013) puts it, “We conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a research and the participant in a study” (p. 48). Listening to the teachers’ stories was extremely important to understanding their experiences with ethical dilemmas in their work.

The qualitative research approach was also chosen as a means of remaining consistent with other educational research that has informed this study (Campbell, 2003; Colnerud, 1997; Hamberger & Moore, 1997; Husu, 2001; Joseph & Efron, 1993; Santoro, 2013; Tirri, 1999). All of these studies employed a qualitative research approach to arrive at descriptive accounts of the experiences of teachers with ethical dilemmas.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three participants. I elected to interview the participants, rather than observe them, because I wanted to hear their stories. What is more, allowing participants to respond to direct questions increases “cognitive effort” (Ballou, 2011). Increasing cognitive effort was important to the goals of my study, as I wanted the three teachers to reflect on their experiences with ethical dilemmas in their work and to reflect on the approaches they took, specifically what bodies of knowledge they consulted, in their attempts to resolve those ethical dilemmas.

The semi-structured approach with open-ended questions was selected over the structured closed-ended questioning approach for many reasons. First, semi-structured interviews are flexible (Miles & Gilbert, 2005). Although guiding questions were created beforehand based on the research questions, the semi-structured approach allowed me the freedom to be flexible in the
way I conducted the interviews. I was neither confined to the wording nor the sequencing in which I asked the questions; the semi-structured interview format also allowed me to skip over questions that were not applicable to a participant. As well, the open-ended questioning format to the semi-structured interview was chosen to allow participants the freedom to answer the question from their own frame of reference rather than choose from a constraining selection of predetermined responses.

One-on-one interviews were conducted with three Ontarian classroom teachers, each interview lasting for a duration of approximately one hour. Guiding questions, used to facilitate the interview, were divided into four sections. Section A collected background information about the participant in his or her role as a teacher and also asked questions about the participant’s personal beliefs, understandings, and practices regarding ethical dimensions of teaching. Section B focused primarily on ethical dilemmas, asking the participants to first, read a case study and then to respond to a series of questions regarding the ethical dilemmas inherent in the case study. Section B also asked the participants to reflect on their own experiences in dealing with ethical dilemmas in their work. In Section C, the focus narrowed to how the teachers attempted to resolve the ethical dilemma and the sources of knowledge they consulted to help them resolve this particular ethical dilemma. In effect, they were asked to discuss the “how and why” of the strategies they used or approaches they took in their attempts to resolve the ethical dilemma. Probing questions were asked to attain a more comprehensive picture of the knowledge, skills, and methods they used during the decision-making process. Finally, Section D focused on changes and next steps. The teachers were asked to reflect on changes that have occurred since they had attempted to resolve their respective ethical dilemma (e.g., changes to rules, changes to how they perceived themselves as people, changes to how they viewed teaching). This final
section also asked teachers to speak about the changes they would like to see and the supports that they would like to be made available to them in their future encounters with ethical dilemmas in schools.

3.3 Participants

In this section, I elaborate on the sampling criteria of this study and justify each criterion. I then discuss the sample/recruitment procedures and finally end this section with participant bios.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

Three participants were selected based on the following criteria:

1. *They are certified by the Ontario College of Teachers and are full-time practising teachers in Ontario.*

Teachers needed to be practising full-time for two specific reasons. First, teachers needed to be full-time teachers (as opposed to Long Term Occasional or Occasional/Substitute teachers) because I believe that the consistency and stability of knowing one’s day-to-day environment (surroundings, colleagues, students) allow for a more comprehensive narrative of their ethical dilemma. Whereas full-time teachers, who have their own classrooms, can comment on ongoing ethical dilemmas they have experienced with colleagues, substitute teachers may not be able to do the same.

Second, teachers needed to be full-time teachers (as opposed to retired teachers) because I believe that the sense of immediacy—of still being in the school environment—affects how teachers reflect upon and discuss the ethical dilemma.
Finally, since this is a qualitative study conducted in Ontario, all participants needed to be public-school teachers certified by the Ontario College of Teachers. This was purposely done to ensure consistency across the board—that all teachers were familiar with and had been working with the same professional standards and ministry policies.

2. They have been confronted with one or more ethical dilemmas in their work as teachers, and they have purposely attempted to solve the ethical dilemma(s).

Because this study looks at the bodies of knowledge that teachers consult in their attempts to resolve ethical dilemmas, it thus necessitates that the teachers chosen for this study must have been confronted with one or more ethical dilemmas in their work as teachers.

Furthermore, these teachers must have taken purposeful action in their attempts to resolve the ethical dilemma(s). In other words, these teachers must have made purposeful choices and decisions and to be able to provide justification for their actions. The purpose for selecting teachers who have taken purposeful action in their attempts to resolve the ethical dilemma(s) they have faced in their work is to avoid replicating the study conducted by Tirri (1999), who employs both qualitative and quantitative data-gathering methods to conclude that teachers use four strategies when they are confronted by ethical dilemmas (avoiding, delegating, single-handed decision, and discourse). It is important to note that the participants in my study are teachers who purposely attempted to resolve the ethical dilemma(s). As a result, none of my participants avoided nor delegated the decision to someone else.
3. They are willing to reflect upon and discuss in detail one or more experiences in which they were confronted with an ethical dilemma.

Due to the nature of this qualitative study, participants were chosen based on their willingness to discuss their experiences with at least one ethical dilemma.

4. They are able to articulate their definition and understanding of the term, “Ethical Dilemma.”

It was important that participants were able to articulate their definition and understanding of the term “Ethical Dilemma” so that when they told their stories, I was able to situate, analyze, and interpret their response within the context of my research.

3.3.2 Recruitment Procedures

Participants were recruited for this study through convenient sampling. Through referrals from colleagues and friends, three Ontarian teachers were selected. Contact was initiated by me, introducing myself; the context in which the referral was made and by whom; and an overview of the research study, which included the study goals, research questions, and research methodology. Individuals who responded to the invitation to participate were asked to answer four preliminary questions to gather some background information and to ensure that they matched the participant sampling criteria. These five questions were:

1) Are you currently a full-time teacher in Ontario?
2) What grade(s) and subject(s) do you currently teach?
3) For how long have you been teaching?
4) For which school board do you currently work?
After the three participants were selected, arrangements were made to meet at a time and location of their choice. Two days before the interview, participants were sent five questions (out of a total of 27 interview questions) to consider in advance. Participants were told that they did not need to answer these questions via e-mail, as they would be asked to answer them during the interview itself. The rationale for sending these five questions in advance was because I believed that these questions required more time than the interview could afford to be reflected upon. This was done to allow me to more accurately represent the participants’ thoughts and opinions. These five questions were:

1) What is your definition of the term, “Ethics”?

2) What is your definition of the term, “Personal Morality”? (Is there a difference between “ethics” and “personal morality”?)

3) What is your understanding of the term, “Ethical Dilemma”?

4) How often do you think about ethical practices in teaching and/or education?

5) In your work as a teacher, have you ever experienced an ethical dilemma that you attempted to resolve? (This section of the interview will ask you to reflect on a particular ethical dilemma that you have faced in your career as a teacher and on your experience with attempting to resolve that ethical dilemma.)

Convenient sampling was favoured over purposive sampling, as it ensured that the participants who were referred to me would be those with whom there is already a sense of trust and professionalism. It also ensured that the participants were those who had some degree of familiarization with the concept of ethics and teaching.
3.3.3 Participant Biographies

Three practising teachers from public boards across the Greater Toronto Area were interviewed for this study. All three matched the sampling criteria for this study and were also held in “Good Standing” by the Ontario College of Teachers. As I wanted my study to bring the experiences of these teachers to the forefront, I recognized that a certain level of trust was needed in order for the participants to want to share their stories with me. Thus, I had a connection to all three participants.

Claire has been a teacher for a total of 26 years, and for all 26 years, she has been at her present school in the Peel District School Board. She teaches Health and Physical Education, grades 9–12, and has also taught mathematics in the past. In addition to teaching, Claire has her certification in life coaching and is currently pursuing her Doctor of Philosophy. She is interested in looking at teaching as centered within the context of relationships.

Greg is a fifth-grade teacher in the Toronto District School Board. He has been a teacher for 10 years with three of those years spent at his present school. He currently teaches all subjects and has taught grades four, five, and six in the past.

Dianne has been teaching for approximately 10 years within the Toronto District School Board. Although Dianne only currently teaches grades nine and 10, in the past, she has taught grades 9–12 English, French, Science, English as a Second Language, Careers, and Civics.

3.4 Data Analysis

The semi-structured interviews were analyzed qualitatively. Three participants who fit the participant criteria and who were also able to fully articulate the ethical challenges and dilemmas they had faced during the careers, which indicated their high level of ethical
knowledge, were selected for interviews. After the interviews were transcribed, data underwent multiple rounds of review. First, I began what Saldana (2009) calls, “The First Cycle” of coding. During this stage, the transcript of each interview was read for repeated ideas, words, or phrases (Creswell, 2013), and important text, keywords, and phrases were underlined and noted in the margin of the transcript.

Using my research questions as a tool to organize the information, I then coded the data according to categorical themes that were consistent or inconsistent with my literature review. Saldana (2009) writes, “The act of coding requires that you wear your researcher’s analytic lens. But how you perceive and interpret what is happening in the data depends on what type of filter covers that lens” (p. 6). Throughout the process of preliminary coding, I approached the data from the lens of a Western philosopher. I have used my own educational background in Western Philosophy to inform my analysis, and therefore, Western Philosophy serves as the theoretical framework to my MTRP. In the “The Second Cycle” (Saldana, 2009) of coding, I consolidated my preliminary codes into a table, making it easier for me to identify categories. Finally, in the last stage, I created an excel spreadsheet where I organized all of my codes into 17 categories. I chose to organize my data into an excel spreadsheet because, as Bazeley (2009) notes, the excel spreadsheet format makes it possible to compare patterns across different sets of data (codes from my other interviews).

Finally, I synthesized all of the information by looking for similar patterns across the data collected from all three participants. Ultimately, some of the categories were combined to create three major categories. This was done not only for reasons of feasibility but, more importantly, was done to identify overarching themes across the interviews and the existing literature. The three major categories are (1) Professional Ethics and Policies, (2) Relationships with Others,
and (3) The Self. Of course, like Saldana (2009) says, the danger of “lumping” is that it may “lead to superficial analysis if the coder does not employ conceptual words and phrases” (p. 16). In lumping similar categories together, I have worked hard to ensure that my analysis is thorough, revealing a nuanced picture of my data through the use of keywords that best illustrate the concepts in relation to my investigation of ethical knowledge.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

This study received approval from the Social Sciences, Humanities, and Education Research Ethics Board at the University of Toronto. Participation in this study was solely voluntary, and at any stage during this study, participants had the right to withdraw their involvement. Consent was requested before the start of the interview. Participants were informed that they could withdraw their participation at any time during the interview and that they had the right to refuse to answer any question.

At the start of the interview, participants were presented with two copies of the letter of consent (see Appendix A), one of which they kept for their own records. The study goals and research questions were reviewed, following which the letter of consent was discussed in detail. They were informed that they would be assigned pseudonyms and that all names of colleagues, schools, students, or other people or institutions mentioned during the interview would also be assigned pseudonyms. They were also informed that any individual-specific information or identifying markers that could potentially compromise their anonymity would be omitted or given an alias.

All data collected from the three teachers were stored electronically in a password-protected file on my laptop, which also required a password to access. Every effort was made to
protect against the loss of data; as a result, a hard copy of all the data was also stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home. Participants were informed that the transcripts of the interviews would be stored up to a maximum of five years, after which, they would be destroyed. There were minimal risks in participating in this study, but given the research topic, there was a chance that the interview questions could have triggered an emotional response from the participants. To minimize this risk and to reduce the element of surprise, I e-mailed the participants a list of interview questions beforehand.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

As Sofaer (1999) says, “qualitative methods help provide rich descriptions of phenomena. They enhance understanding of the context of events as well as the events themselves” (p. 1102). The use of interviews created a space in which the teachers were able to reflect on their own teaching practices and to talk about their own lived experiences—about what they thought was important and about what they wanted to change. The strengths of qualitative research and the justifications for selecting this method of research have already been discussed in earlier sections of this chapter. However, although every effort has been made to create a thorough study, there are nonetheless certain limitations to this study.

First, it is undeniable that with such a small sample size as three participants, findings from this study cannot be generalizable. As this is a qualitative study, the goal is to understand in detail the unique experiences of three teachers in their encounters with ethical dilemmas in their work and their attempts to resolve those ethical dilemmas. Data analysis is interpretative, especially in a qualitative study where data is not quantifiable (Thorne, 2000). I have approached the data from my own unique lens of interpretation, one that is not only informed by my own life
experiences and moral convictions but one that is also strongly informed by my undergraduate background in philosophy (especially ethics and moral philosophy). Another researcher with a background in sociology, for example, may have not only asked different questions but may have also analyzed the data in a different way and thus come up with different findings.

There are also other limitations surrounding the selected techniques of data collection. The interview format, although a straightforward way of acquiring in-depth descriptive accounts and perspectives, also has very many limitations. Every effort was made on my end to establish an environment and relationship of trust so that the three teachers would be comfortable talking about their experiences. However, I still recognize that the formal interview set-up may have affected what they chose to tell me. Other limitations of the interview format include, but are not limited to, the possibility of my own tone and body language having an influence on the responses the teachers gave, the fact that it was difficult to ascertain whether the teachers were giving genuine responses, and the chance that the environment in which the interview was conducted affected the responses given. To reduce some of these limitations, participants were allowed to select where and when they wanted to be interviewed.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I started by describing the research approach and procedures. I discussed the qualitative methodology and the semi-structured approach I adopted for interviewing the participants. Following this, the participant sampling criteria were reviewed and justifications for each criterion were given. Recruitment procedures were detailed as well as participant biographies, methods of data analysis, ethical review procedures, and methodological limitations and strengths.
In the next chapter, research findings will be discussed in detail in relation to the literature review.
Chapter 4: FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to report findings from interviews conducted in this research study. Three semi-structured interviews were conducted with three practising teachers within Ontario to investigate three research questions: How does a teacher’s professional knowledge inform his/her ethical decision-making? How does a teacher’s personal experience and personal morality inform his/her ethical decision-making? When professional knowledge and personal morality conflict, which one is favoured and why?

Data was coded and categorized into three major categories: (1) Professional Ethics and Policies, (2) Relationships with Others, and (3) The Self. Table 1 below shows these categories and their respective themes.

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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Themes</th>
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<td>Professional Ethics and Policies</td>
<td>Ethics vs. Morality</td>
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<td>Dilemmas</td>
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<td>Relationships with Others</td>
<td>Understanding and Communication</td>
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<td>The Self</td>
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Table 1: Categories and Themes
In addition to the introduction and conclusion, this chapter is divided into three sections based on the major categories. Each section is further divided according to the themes related to each category. The professional ethics and policies section focuses on the three teachers’ conceptualizations of professional ethics and policies. It illuminates how these teachers define ethics and how they understand and situate themselves within the framework of professional ethics and their own personal morality. This section also discusses the teachers’ own unique understandings of what constitutes an “ethical dilemma.”

Relationships with others concern how the teachers attempted to resolve ethical dilemmas within the context of their relationships with others (their students, their colleagues, and their administration). The section on the self, on the other hand, explores how teachers’ identities factored into their ethical decision-making process and how these, in turn, affected their image and self-perceptions.

4.1 Professional Ethics and Policies

4.1.1 Ethics vs. Morality

All three teachers defined ethics as a formal code that guided their practice and conduct as teachers. Words and phrases such as “official,” “societal standards,” and “expectations” were used to describe ethics. All three teachers noted that ethics is open-ended and objective whereas morality was defined as more personal and specific to themselves. Claire specifically described morality as aligning “more with my own values and belief system…around who I am personally, who I am as a teacher, and how I relate to my students and my colleagues.” For all of them, morality was closely linked to their personal identities (who they are and what they value).
Looking at the relationship between ethics and morality, all three participants acknowledged that although the two are different, they are closely intertwined with one another, even inseparable.

It is important to note that all three participants often referred to the ethics of the teaching profession as going beyond the *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* (OCT, 2009) to more broadly encompassing other education, school board, and union policies. Greg stated that “the ethical framework of the profession” is a mixture of school board policies, the OCT *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* (OCT, 2009), “union regulations… and all of these things you’ve been trained on with the organizations.” Like Greg, Dianne saw the professional code of ethics in a broad sense—as more of an “ethical body of knowledge” that encompasses all policies and professional codes. When describing a particular dilemma involving assessment and evaluation practices, she referred to a policy regarding assessment and evaluation practices as being a part of the code of ethics. Thus, for the participants, the professional code of ethics goes beyond the four ethical standards (care, trust, respect, integrity) to encompassing *all* professional policies.

Unprompted by me, Dianne continued to reflect on past situations in which she had to resolve ethical dilemmas in her work and the process of using the *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* (OCT, 2009) to guide her decision. As she elaborated:

If I were to talk about professional standards from that little book that we received long ago… that would be related to the softer side of my decision-making and that the thing about caring about students and being a good role model to them. But those standards are so grey! To care for a student… in what way? About their future? About the moment? Academically or emotionally? Just to say that I am following those standards is very fuzzy.
This problem that Dianne cited regarding the “moral ambiguity” in applying the principles from the *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* (OCT, 2009) to specific situations is consistent with the research conducted by Campbell (2000, 2001). According to Campbell (2001), the Ontario College of Teacher’s *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* (2009) is an example of a professional ethical code that raises more questions than it does providing solutions to problems. She illustrates the inapplicable nature of the code by presenting ethical dilemmas that real teachers have faced and narrating possible thought processes that teachers might have had if they had used the ethical standards to resolve the dilemmas. Campbell (2001) concludes her paper by suggesting that the ethical code is minimally useful if one attempts to use it as an instructional manual for resolving ethical dilemmas in teaching. Instead, ethical codes and standards in teaching should more generally be viewed as “potential springboards for broader school efforts to define what right is in terms of ethical practice” (p. 407). Rules should not be followed automatically (Haynes, 1998) because “the multifaceted nature of ethical dilemmas requires critical thinking, not blind compliance” (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011); it is the underlying principles of those rules that should guide the teacher’s decisions. When unsure of a rule’s applicability, educators need to discuss with one another so that there is a shared understanding of the principles (Campbell, 2001).

Indeed, all three teachers stated that professional ethics are *guidelines* that should always be kept in mind. Greg emphasized that “you need to have these ethical guidelines. You have to have these ethical boundaries and framework in your head in order to work effectively.” Campbell (2001) states that teachers “need to reach a point where conceptual understanding and the procedural routines for the implementation of new ethical norms are so internalized and embedded in [teachers’] interpretation of professionalism that any need to refer to the actual
formal codes or standards becomes irrelevant” (p. 409). This sentiment is echoed in Dianne’s own response:

I do think a lot of teachers make decisions according to their gut instinct, but that doesn’t mean that they’re unfounded, random acts. I think that the teachers, over time, and in their schooling, have been acquainted with the professional standards… and with common sense, with what’s logically expected of them and what’s good for their students and themselves. We make decisions on all of that…. It’s not just professional ethics. As I said, I think it’s much broader than that. We are human beings in society. I don’t think that the professional standards—the “ethics”—are the be all and end all.

Dianne also made a statement that aligns with Sackett (1990) regarding the nature of the professional code:

Ethics or any rules or laws are not stagnant and concrete. I think they need to be redefined sometimes. They need to be evolved with different situations and they change with society and the people.

For Claire, being an ethical teacher involved using the professional code in conjunction with her own value system:

I think it’s a combination of both. I have a pretty extensive background in terms of experiences in just dealing with parents, kids, colleagues, and admin. You just learn along the way how to approach things in a professional way. In terms of my own morality, I have very strong values about who I am and what I do and in my classroom…. Values are huge. They really drive the vision I have for myself and for our department.
For all three teachers, ethical teaching meant taking into consideration the professional code of ethics while also consulting their own personal moralities, and for them, it was impossible to separate these two.

### 4.1.2 Dilemmas

All three respondents stated that there was a thin line between ethics and morality: sometimes their own personal morality aligned with the professional ethics of teaching while at other times, the two clashed. For Greg, “I would say that personal morality wouldn’t always line up with ethics. It’s because morality is more often based on your religious views and your background and personal subjectivity.” For Greg, an ethical dilemma arose when there was a disconnect between his own personal morality and professional ethics. Claire, on the other hand, adopted the Freeman (1998) definition of an ethical dilemma, as she said:

> [An ethical dilemma is] some sort of situation within a particular context where there are different ways of resolving an issue where the outcome of one… sort of leaves the other unsatisfied.

All of the respondents recognized that ethical dilemmas are not easily resolved because there are many factors to take into consideration; this finding is consistent with prior research conducted in the field (Colnerud, 1997; Freeman, 1998; Husu, 2001; Nash, 1996; Tirri, 1999; Young, 1995). As Dianne stressed:

> It’s when you don’t really know if the decision that you’re going to make is really the right choice or not… because there are so many variables. For example, in teaching, are you thinking more about the students academic well-being? Their emotional well-being?
Am I think about being fair to the whole class? Am I think about the student’s future? Or the student at the moment? I mean there are so many factors!

For all three teachers, the relationships that they held with others played a key role in the ethical dilemmas they discussed and also in how they ultimately chose to resolve those ethical dilemmas. The following section goes into further detail about this.

4.2 Relationships with Others

4.2.1 Understanding and Communication

All three teachers expressed that trying to understand the perspectives of others and having open communication with them were the first steps to resolving ethical dilemmas in their work. Greg emphasized, “You have to give [the other person] a chance to talk… and then, if not, you’ll have to say something and deal with it.” Claire described teaching as entirely “in the context of relationships,” and as such, communication was very important to her:

If there are issues like this where you know someone does something, or there’s something that’s really bugging you inside… then we need to talk about it. We all make mistakes.... Teachers make mistakes. There’s something to be learned from that for everyone involved. And so, my first instinct is not to attack but to just open the lines of communication and ask, why? Help me understand this. Instead of the reactionary approach—you know, how do we understand this and move forward from it? First, have the conversation.

When prompted with the question as to why communication was important to her in resolving ethical dilemmas in her work, Claire stated, “To really find out the thinking behind the action—to understand the why, the driving force that led [the person] to do that.”
The lack of understanding and communication was cited by the participants as being a major cause of ethical dilemmas arising in their work. Both Claire and Dianne described an ethical dilemma they each faced regarding the timetabling of courses at their respective schools. Yet, their experiences differed, as Claire was in charge of helping to assign courses to teachers while Dianne was a teacher who was trying to advocate for the timetable she wanted. Claire described the ethical dilemma she faced in this particular situation as one where some of her colleagues could not understand or refused to acknowledge other perspectives:

Everybody’s perception is their reality in terms of what they think is true for them…. It’s just not being able to get by themselves to see that this is the best for the program… It’s not necessarily going to be the best for you, especially not in your first few years of teaching.

Claire described her ethical dilemma as trying to balance the needs of her colleagues while also ensuring the best possible program for her students. For her, understanding and communicating with each other is key to resolving ethical dilemmas:

[Teachers] come from such different backgrounds…. I don’t know their frames of reference…. It’s up to me to try to understand it and to make the most of it in terms of having a program that meets the needs of our kids, but when it’s working in situations like that, like the staffing [issue], I think that a lot of the ethical dilemmas become complicated because of the different frames of references sitting around the table…. We look through different lenses…and somehow, we need to value that… and understand it—that all of those perspectives are really understood and received and respected.

Regarding her experience with timetabling, Dianne described her ethical dilemma as an issue of fairness:
It’s a fairness across the years, like who gets what they want… You want to balance out the number of preps for each teacher… the number of subjects that teachers are comfortable with teaching. If you’re given an unreasonable timetable, you’re not going to function very well as a teacher or as a human being, and you can’t serve students as well. This is very unfair, and it’s unfair if some other teachers have very easy timetables. I mean, it’s good for them, and probably good for their students, but it’s just very unfair.

When asked as to how she dealt with this ethical dilemma, she, like Claire, emphasized the importance of communication. For Dianne, this communication came through the form of advocating for herself:

It’s about advocating for myself because otherwise, I would have it pretty bad. So I speak to the head of my department or to the Vice Principal, whoever’s in charge in timetabling. Expressing my concerns, my preferences and what’s happened in the past so it doesn’t repeat itself… so that they are aware of how this affects me and the students in the long run because I can’t plan a bunch of new courses at once with full class sizes in different departments. I try to discuss with my colleagues… and with other teachers in the same boat, depending on if it concerns them or not. We need to compromise together so that we could reach a positive compromise for the two of us.

Like Claire, Dianne saw understanding and open lines of communication as a means to resolving ethical dilemmas because teaching as a profession works within the context of relationships:

Yeah, I think generally, we need to be vocal about our needs, but to be fair about it. Like someone with a more advantageous position might need to listen a little more and to think from another person’s perspective and see how that affects them and how it could
indirectly affect them because at the end of the day, we are working together, and if we wanted to develop a good course and a good program, we need to do it as a team.

For Greg, teachers need to have a formal space for open forums of discussion regarding ethical boundaries and the ethical dilemmas they face. He stated:

I think there is a space, but it’s very informal. People talk about it—and they only talk about it with people they, you know, hang out with. There’s a space, I guess, but it’s not official. I think it would be good to discuss these things…. To have a staff meeting or in union meetings to sort of talk about where people see boundaries and stuff like that.

Greg’s desire for open forums of discussion regarding the ethics of teaching aligns with recommendations made by many scholars in this research field (Campbell, 2003, 2005; Hostetler, 1997; Strike, 1995). Shapira-Lishchinsky (2011) states that a dialogue of “moral language” needs to be created among teachers, and Campbell (2005) argues that just as teachers meet to discuss curriculum goals and administration procedures, they can meet to discuss the moral dimensions of their decisions and actions.

4.2.2. Care

Consistent across the interviews is that care for others was important to these teachers in their attempts to resolve the ethical dilemmas they faced in their work. This finding aligns with the results from the study conducted by Shapira-Lishchinsky (2011) who found that most common ethical dilemmas fell under the category, “caring climate versus formal climate.” Ethical dilemmas of this type focused on the teacher-student relationship where the teacher was required to choose between personal needs and obeying school rules. Each of these cases involved giving students second chances and being more flexible with rules, and in all of them, Shapira-Lishchinsky (2011) found that care for others was an important value for teachers.
During the interview, I presented to the teachers an adapted case study (Appendix B) in which a teacher (Mark) discovered that his colleague (Ryan) had helped one of their students (Emily) cheat on an exam by stealing Mark’s answer sheet and giving it to Emily in advance. This case study was complex, as it required the three teachers to put themselves into Mark’s position and to think about the ethical dilemmas raised in the case, consider the different parties involved, reflect on the ethics of the teaching profession and their own personal moralities, and to make a decision as to how they would resolve the ethical dilemma if they were in Mark’s position.

For Greg, care came through the form of giving the other teacher in the case (Ryan) a chance to confess and take the responsibility to straighten out the situation. He expressed that he would discuss it with the other teacher and give him a chance. Greg described a systematic approach to resolving the ethical dilemma: starting with care and having the initial conversation with the other teacher and then moving through the “system that is laid out…. There are ways that you are supposed to handle it. You know, try to deal with it… and then take it your [union] representative.”

For Claire, resolving this ethical dilemma involved caring for the other teacher in the form of giving him a second chance and helping him to learn from his mistake:

Sit [Ryan] down and have that discussion about you know what? This isn’t right. What’s wrong with this picture? What have you learned from it? And let’s move forward with it…. So that’s the solution: can it be resolved between [us]? Again, back to the point that we make mistakes. It’s hard to know what Ryan was thinking really when he did it unless you really understand him…even as a teacher, as a person.
For Dianne, care played an extremely large role in how she would resolve the ethical dilemma. Dianne felt that although what Ryan did was professionally wrong, she believed that he had good intentions—that he cared for the student and wanted her to succeed—and that he deserved a second chance. She also stated that she would deal with this situation on her own, as “involving other people is going to cause a lot of people lots of trouble.” This “single-handed decision-making strategy” (Oser, 1991) that Dianne chose to adopt is consistent with what most teachers also choose in their attempts to resolve ethical dilemmas in their work (as cited in Tirri, 1999).

In showing that she cared about the other teacher, Dianne stated that she would not want him to lose his job, that she would consider his well-being, and that “it seems like a very severe consequence out of good intentions.” Dianne also identified how the student, in this case, would be affected in terms of her achievement and her future, and not wanting to see the student get in trouble or fail, she stated that “I think if anything, I would just try harder to prepare the student and retest.” Yet, Dianne also cited another reason (besides from care for the parties involved) for choosing to resolve the dilemma discretely: collegiality. This is discussed in the following section.

4.2.3 Collegiality

For Dianne, the ethical dilemma in the case involving Mark, Ryan, and Emily was hard to resolve because it was a conflict between the relationships and the professional standard.

Mark feels indebted to Ryan [because Ryan helped him out at the start of his career] … feels like he owes him. Not only should he do him some favours, but he really shouldn’t be telling on him or doing anything badly towards him. As a fellow colleague, to tattle on your other colleague seems bad… so the dilemma is with the professional rules.
This sense of “collegial loyalty,” of not wanting to “tattle” on one’s colleagues, is a problem that is written at length by Campbell (1992, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2005). Her research highlights how the unspoken normative practices of collegial loyalty prevent productive “ethical talk”—that is, individuals are reluctant to engage in conversations or complaints regarding the practices of other teachers because they are afraid of perceived disloyalty, peer ostracism, and perhaps even retaliatory action from the teachers’ union (Campbell, 1996, 2003).

Yet, collegiality is not wholly in itself a bad thing because there needs to be a “professional community” in teaching—a community that is founded on trust and collaboration (Sockett, 1993). Indeed, this sentiment is echoed in both Greg and Claire’s responses. For Greg, consensus and agreement among colleagues is important. It is important for colleagues to work together and that “everyone is on a similar page.” For Claire, collegiality comes in the form of mentoring other teachers and offering them support, especially those who are new to the teaching profession. She described her experience with a colleague who informally mentored her at the beginning of her career: “She really taught me the two things that I tell my department now. If you’re here, you’ve got to care about kids… and care about what you do for them.” As supported by the literature, collegiality is needed in the profession; however, where collegiality becomes problematic is when it is pitted against obligations to one’s own students and when it becomes transformed into group solidarity and unquestioned loyalty one’s colleagues.

4.2.4 Experience, Wisdom, and Mentor

Claire stressed the importance of having a mentor within the teaching profession to help her with the difficulties she faced as a teacher, particularly with ethical dilemmas she had faced throughout her early years of teaching. For Claire, wisdom came with experience: a mentor
teacher with years of experience could offer advice based on his or her own experience or act as a mediator for problems that arose between colleagues.

Like Claire, Greg also referred to experience and mentorship as playing important roles in helping him to resolve ethical dilemmas in his work: “First follow the professional route… then draw on your own experience… go talk to a staff member you trust or a mentor, someone respected in schools and see how they would handle it.” Indeed, consulting one’s prior experience or seeking help from a mentor is what Aristotle says should be done when one is faced with making a difficult decision (Irwin, 1999).

The Aristotelian notion of “practical wisdom” has been connected to the ethical knowledge that teachers must have in order to resolve ethical dilemmas in their work (Tirri & Husu, 2002). Having practical wisdom means that one is aware of universal or general principles and knows how best to apply them to specific cases. Teachers with practical wisdom and ethical knowledge are therefore able to make “conceptual and practical links between core moral and ethical values such as honesty, compassion, fairness, and respect for others and their own daily choices and actions” (Campbell, 2006, p. 33). All three respondents in this study expressed that the professional standards and the ethical code were not enough to help them resolve the ethical dilemmas they faced in their work. Rather, all three participants stated that they used standards and code as guidelines as to how they should act and that they always went beyond that to consult experience, mentors, or their own value systems. As Dianne said:

[The code of ethics] is fairly broad. I’m pretty sure that a lot of teachers don’t really know what they are exactly, but they know according to their common sense. We all know what’s definitely wrong…. I say, always use your common sense. Do consider the stakeholders, be aware of professional codes. Use your common sense and do think about
your personal relationships. Think about your job and think about your personal, emotional wellbeing.

In her response, Dianne pointed to the fact that teachers need to take themselves into consideration when resolving ethical dilemmas. This preservation of “the Self” in the face of making a difficult ethical decision in teaching is discussed in the next section.

4.3 The Self

4.3.1 Identity, Integrity, and Image

All three teachers made references to preserving their identities, integrities, and/or images when they were attempting to resolve ethical dilemmas in their work. Greg emphasized the need to follow the “ethical framework of the profession,” as he stated:

If you went outside of the ethical setup…you may lose trust from your staff members.
You may lose credibility. You may get blamed because if the person did that and blamed you for doing that, it would be your word against theirs…. Protect yourself.

For him, it was important to protect his image when he was attempting to resolve ethical dilemmas in teaching, and the way for him to protect his image was to follow the professional codes.

For Dianne, on the other hand, protecting her integrity was of utmost importance to her in resolving ethical dilemmas. Dianne described a situation in which she had attempted to motivate one of her students by making a deal with him: she would pass him at the end of the school year if he attended her classes and made an effort to hand things in to her. The student agreed and did as he was asked, so at the end of the school year, Dianne gave him a passing mark. However, an ethical dilemma arose for Dianne when she was asked by her Principal to revise the mark; the
Principal believed that the student was much more well-suited at another school where his needs could be met, but with a passing grade in Dianne’s class, the Principal could not recommend the student to the other school. Dianne described her reaction to the situation:

I was surprised to even be called to the office about this! Because I thought this was a good thing…the student’s achievement! My initial reaction was ‘No I’m keeping the grade because we’ve made this deal’, and I wasn’t going to go back on my word, especially because [the student] did it fairly.

Dianne also described that she thought at length about the students’ well-being—that perhaps he would be better suited at another school and that she should change his grade. However, she ultimately decided that she needed to stay true to her integrity as a teacher and to keep her promise to the student. She explained:

I mean we are role models to our students, and if I say something that I had put thought into and it was something fair and reasonable and he met those requirements, I wanted to stick to my word, to be a good role model.

For Dianne, it was important for her to protect her own integrity, both as a human being (in believing in keeping one’s word) and as a teacher (in being a role model to her students).

For Claire, understanding her own identity and what defined her as a teacher helped her to resolve ethical dilemmas. Claire expressed a need for all teachers to reflect on their own “who and why” of teaching:

We’re never given time to really sit down and reflect on why we even do what we do in the classrooms and are we doing these kids service by what we’re doing?
She also stated that teachers need to sit down together and discuss what was important to them as a group so that there is a mutual understanding across the board. She believed that it is in this way that ethical dilemmas would be more easily resolved, as she stated:

What is it as a group that’s important to us? I think that’s when you can make magic happen. You can solve some of these dilemmas because you do understand what it is that makes you want to do what you do why you think the way you do.

For Claire, reflecting and staying true to “who I am personally, who I am as a teacher, and how I relate to my students and my colleagues” was most important to her in helping her to resolve the ethical dilemmas she encountered in her work.

Indeed, the idea of preserving and staying true to one’s identity, integrity, and image in teaching is one that has been explored by many scholars in this field. Three dimensions of integrity are identified in Santoro (2013): personal integrity, professional integrity, and the integrity of teaching. Teachers experience a sense of personal integrity if they feel that a version of themselves is reflected in their roles as teachers. Professional integrity requires that teachers not only answer to their own sense of integrity but also to that of the profession, the subject, and the community they serve. Professional integrity involves “maintaining alignment between what one believes to be the responsibility of the role of teacher and one’s actions in that role” (Santoro, 2013, p. 570). Finally, integrity of teaching demands that one is cognizant of how one is contributing to the teaching profession. Both Dianne and Claire’s responses are consistent with these findings, and as Palmer (1997) claims, good teaching is inextricably linked to the integrity and the identity of the teacher. Like Claire, both Hamberger & Moore (1997) also urge for teachers to have a space for discussion about values and identities so that they may better understand the interplay of their personal and professional identities.
4.4 Conclusion

The findings from interviews conducted in this study with three practising teachers in Ontario showed the complex nature of resolving ethical dilemmas in teaching. In attempting to resolve ethical dilemmas in teaching, all three respondents explained that although they consulted professional ethics and policies, they also looked inwards towards their own moralities and values to help them make a decision. Indeed, as Husu (2001) claims, “According to empirical studies, teachers cannot separate their own moral character from their professional self. The stance of teachers’ moral character…guides their ways of interacting with students, parents, and colleagues” (p. 69).

All three teachers also emphasized the importance of their relationships with others in their work. Colnerud (1997) states that ethical dilemmas are inherent in teaching because of the number of stakeholders involved and, therefore, instead of avoiding them, teachers need to find ways of handling these ethical dilemmas. Four key themes related to teachers’ relationships with others emerged from this study that are consistent with prior research: understanding and communication; care; collegiality; and experience, wisdom, and mentor. Findings from this study related to the teachers’ identities, integrities, and images also align with research done in the field. However, a finding from this study diverges from the literature.

Campbell (1992, 1996, 2003) uses the term “suspended morality” to describe a state in which teachers have suspended their own sense of moral responsibility to conform to a collective norm in situations where they believe they should not. Teachers acting out of a state of suspended morality often act and justify their actions through a “false necessity” of doing their job; they believe they have no choice but to follow organizational expectations (Campbell, 1992, p. 439). Although Gibson (2003) does not write specifically in the context of teaching, his notion
of “role morality” is important to this discussion. Gibson (2003) puts forth the notion that individuals adopt a different morality depending on the roles they assume. In effect, Gibson argues that each individual wears two “moral hats”: one for his or her everyday life and one for his or her profession. When individuals join a profession, they are thus bound to the professional association—they are no longer “morally independent” individuals.

All three teachers in this study talked only of experiences with ethical dilemmas where their actions aligned with their own personal values and moral systems. None of the teachers indicated that they needed to “suspend” their own personal moralities. According to the findings of this present study, the issue of “role morality” was not a problem for these three teachers. However, it remains unclear as to whether “suspended morality” or “role morality” were not issues at all for these teachers or whether these teachers chose to only discuss experiences where their decisions aligned with their own personal moralities. Further research would have to be done in order to clarify this.

This study sought to investigate three research questions: How does a teacher’s professional knowledge inform his/her ethical decision-making? How does a teacher’s personal experience and personal morality inform his/her ethical decision-making? When professional knowledge and personal morality conflict, which one is favoured and why? The findings from this study clearly show that the professional and the personal cannot be separated in teaching. All three respondents stated that they used their professional knowledge (professional codes and policies) as guidelines to help them make their decisions but also consulted their own personal moralities and value systems. As Dianne noted, “There are always shades of grey” in teaching. It is not a matter of professional knowledge always taking precedence over personal morality or vice versa: when it came to resolving ethical dilemmas, all three teachers believed that they
needed to take into account both the standards and their own value systems and moralities in order to make the most ethical decision.

This chapter discussed the findings from this study in relation to the literature review. In the next chapter, implications from these findings for the educational community will be discussed and recommendations will be made.
Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

5.0 Introduction

This study investigated three research questions: How does a teacher’s professional knowledge inform his/her ethical decision-making? How does a teacher’s personal experience and personal morality inform his/her ethical decision-making? When professional knowledge and personal morality conflict, which one is favoured and why?

Chapter one introduced the topic, research questions, and provided background information to the research study. The second chapter reviewed the literature relevant to the moral and ethical dimensions of teaching, establishing a foundation for the study and providing the theoretical and conceptual framework through which the findings of this study were interpreted and discussed. These frameworks will be revisited in this final chapter. Chapter two was divided into three sections: professional ethics and ethical knowledge, the nature of ethical dilemmas and teachers’ experiences with ethical dilemmas, and the intersecting and conflicting relationship of role morality and personal identity in teaching. Each of these sections in the literature review provided crucial background understanding to the categories and themes later outlined in chapter three.

Chapter three described the qualitative methodology through which this study was conducted, specifically the research approach and procedures; the instruments of data collection; the participant sampling criteria, recruitment procedures, and participant biographies; the data analysis; the ethical review procedures; and the methodological limitations and strengths. Chapter four discussed the findings from interviews conducted with three teacher-participants. Data was coded, and seven themes were identified and subsequently organized under three major categories. These categories and themes will be revisited in this current chapter.
In addition to the introduction and conclusion, this current chapter is divided into three sections. The first section provides an overview of the study by reviewing the research questions, purpose of study, and major findings in conjunction with relevant research in the field. Section two discusses the implications of this study for educators, for the teaching profession as a whole, and for me as a teacher-researcher. In the third and final section, recommendations for future research are made.

**5.1 Overview of Key Findings**

The findings from this study showed the complex nature of resolving ethical dilemmas in teaching. For the three teachers who were interviewed for this study, their professional and their personal selves could not be separated in their work as teachers nor could the two be separated in their attempts to resolve ethical dilemmas arising in their work. Seven major themes emerged from the findings: Ethics versus Morality; Dilemmas; Understanding and Communication; Care; Collegiality; Experience, Wisdom, and Mentor; and Identity, Integrity, and Image. These seven major themes were subsequently grouped into three categories: (1) Professional Ethics and Policies, (2) Relationships with Others, and (3) The Self.

Based on the findings from this present study, I have created a conceptual framework through which we can understand how the professional and the personal realms of these three teachers’ lives intersect and collide to form the ethical knowledge that they used in their attempts to resolve ethical dilemmas in their work.
Each of the components of this conceptual framework has already been discussed in detail in chapter four. The cyclical nature of the conceptual framework illustrates that professional knowledge (ethics and policies) and personal morality are constantly influencing and interacting with each other. Ethical knowledge is formed by these two sources of knowledge coming together. It is impossible to separate these two.

Below, the findings from this study that led to the creation of this conceptual model are divided into subsections and summarized.
5.1.1 Professional Ethics and Policies

Ethics vs. Morality

For all three teachers, ethics was defined as a formal code that guided their practice and conduct as teachers. They noted that ethics was open-ended and objective whereas morality was more personal and specific to themselves. Ethics was also referred to more broadly than the *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* (OCT, 2009) to encompassing other education, school board, and union policies. Indeed, all three teachers emphasized that professional ethics were guidelines that should always be kept in mind but are not necessarily applicable in every situation. This “moral ambiguity” in applying the principles from the *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* (OCT, 2009) to specific situations is consistent with the research conducted by Campbell (2000, 2001). As Greg explained, “the ethical framework of the profession” is a mixture of school board policies, the OCT *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* (OCT, 2009), “union regulations… and all of these things you’ve been trained on with the organizations.”

For the three teachers, the moral ambiguity of professional ethics required that they look towards their own morality and use it in conjunction with the professional ethics to help them resolve ethical dilemmas arising in their work. Dianne said it most clearly in her response:

I do think a lot of teachers make decisions according to their gut instinct, but that doesn’t mean that they’re unfounded random acts. I think that the teachers, over time, and in their schooling, have been acquainted with the professional standards… and with common sense, with what’s logically expected of them and what’s good for their students and themselves. We make decisions on all of that…. It’s not just professional ethics. As I
said, I think it’s much broader than that. We are human beings in society. I don’t think that the professional standards—the “ethics”—are the be all and end all.

Thus, for these three teachers, professional ethics referred broadly to all professional policies while morality was more personal, relating to the individual person.

**Dilemmas**

All three respondents also stated that there was a thin line between ethics and morality: sometimes their own personal morality aligned with the professional ethics of teaching while at other times, the two clashed. They also recognized that ethical dilemmas are not easily resolved because there are many factors take into consideration (such as parties involved, possible consequences of an action, etc.). As Dianne stressed,

> It’s when you don’t really know if the decision that you’re going to make is really the right choice or not… because there are so many variables. For example, in teaching, are you thinking more about the students’ academic well-being? Their emotional well-being? Am I think about being fair to the whole class? Am I think about the student’s future? Or the student at the moment? I mean there are so many factors!

This finding is consistent with prior research conducted in the field (Colnerud, 1997; Freeman, 1998; Husu, 2001; Nash, 1996; Tirri, 1999; Young, 1995).

### 5.1.2 Relationship with Others

*Understanding and Communication*

All three teachers expressed that trying to understand the perspectives of others and having open communication with them were the first steps to resolving ethical dilemmas in their
work. These participants also cited lack of communication as being one of the major causes of ethical dilemmas arising in their work. For them, teaching is done in the context of relationships and so teachers need to have a formal space for open forums of discussion regarding ethical boundaries and the ethical dilemmas they face. The call for open forums of discussion regarding the ethical dimensions of teaching is supported by research done in the field (Campbell, 2003, 2005; Hostetler, 1997; Strike, 1995). Shapira-Lishchinsky (2011) states that a dialogue of “moral language” needs to be created among teachers, and Campbell (2005) argues that just as teachers meet to discuss curriculum goals and administration procedures, they can meet to discuss the moral dimensions of their decisions and actions.

Care

Consistent across the interviews is that care for others was important to these teachers in their attempts to resolve the ethical dilemmas they faced in their work. The three teachers were presented with a case study that I had adapted (Appendix B). In one form or another, each of the three teachers cited “care” (i.e. care for the student and care for the colleague) as an important factor that needed to be taken into consideration in trying to resolve the ethical dilemma they faced. This finding aligns with the results from the study conducted by Shapira-Lishchinsky (2011) who found that most common ethical dilemmas fell under the category, “caring climate versus formal climate.” Ethical dilemmas of this type focused on the teacher-student relationship where the teacher was required to choose between students’ personal needs and obeying school rules. Each of these cases involved giving students second chances and being more flexible with rules, and in all of them, Shapira-Lishchinsky (2011) found that care for others was an important value for teachers.
Collegiality

The concept of collegiality was mentioned in different forms by each of the participants. One participant (Dianne) cited it as a reason for not reporting an unethical action taken by a colleague. This sense of “collegial loyalty,” of not wanting to “tattle” on one’s colleagues, is a problem that is written at length by Campbell (1992, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2005). Her research illuminates how individuals are reluctant to engage in conversations or complaints regarding the practices of other teachers because they are afraid of perceived disloyalty, peer ostracism, and perhaps even retaliatory action from the teachers’ union (Campbell, 1996, 2003).

Yet, collegiality is not wholly in itself a bad thing because there needs to be “professional community” in teaching—a community that is founded on trust and collaboration (Sockett, 1993). This sentiment was echoed in the other two teachers’ responses. Indeed, collegiality is needed in the profession; however, where collegiality becomes problematic is when it is pitted against obligations to one’s own students and when it becomes transformed into group solidarity and unquestioned loyalty to one’s colleagues.

Experience, Wisdom, and Mentor

All three teacher-participants stressed the importance of experience, wisdom, and mentorship in helping them to resolve ethical dilemmas arising in their work. Because of the open-ended nature of the professional codes, the teachers looked towards their own experience to help them. Yet, beyond this, they looked to others who had the experience and who could offer them wisdom and mentorship. Indeed, consulting one’s prior experience or seeking help from a mentor is what Aristotle says should be done when one is faced with making a difficult decision (Irwin, 1999). Teachers with practical wisdom and ethical knowledge are therefore able to make
“conceptual and practical links between core moral and ethical values such as honesty, compassion, fairness, and respect for others and their own daily choices and action” (Campbell, 2006, p. 33). All three respondents in this study expressed that the professional standards and code of ethics were not enough to help them resolve the ethical dilemmas they faced in their work. Rather, all three participants stated that they used standards and codes as guidelines as to how they should act and that they always went beyond these guidelines to consult experience, mentors, or their own value systems.

5.1.3 The Self

Identity, Integrity, and Image

All three teachers made references to preserving their identities, integrities, and/or images when they were attempting to resolve ethical dilemmas in their work. For them, it was important to protect their own images while also maintaining their integrity. For one participant especially (Claire), understanding the “who and why” of teaching and how that affected her own identity was extremely important. The idea of preserving and staying true to one’s identity, integrity, and image in teaching is one that has been explored by many scholars in the field (Hamberger & Moore; Santoro, 2013). As Palmer (1997) claims, good teaching is inextricably linked to the integrity and the identity of the teacher.

5.2 Implications

5.2.1 Implications for the broader educational community

Findings from this study showed that the professional and the personal realms of teachers’ lives can never be separated when they are attempting to resolve ethical dilemmas in
their work. In fact, the professional and the personal are inextricably intertwined, often simultaneously intersecting and colliding with each other. It is no doubt that ethical dilemmas in teaching are complex and nuanced because they involve equally defensible courses of action (Nash, 1996), situations in which moral claims cannot be simultaneously met (Oser, 1991, as cited in Tirri, 1999), and situations in which one must coordinate one’s actions with others (Husu, 2001). Ethical dilemmas are inherent in teaching because of the number of stakeholders involved; instead of avoiding them, teachers need to find ways of handling these ethical dilemmas (Colnerud, 1997).

The implications of these findings show that teachers cannot solely rely on professional standards and ethical codes (such of OCT’s) alone to help them resolve the ethical dilemmas that arise in their work. As Dianne aptly stated,

If I were to talk about professional standards from that little book that we received long ago… that would be related to the softer side of my decision-making and that the thing about caring about students and being a good role model to them. But those standards are so grey! To care for a student… in what way? About their future? About the moment? Academically or emotionally? Just to say that I am following those standards is very fuzzy.

What this means is that teachers are looking inwards to their own personal morality to help them resolve these ethical dilemmas. Of course, with this being true, there is a risk of “moral relativism,” which is the idea that the ethical and moral value of actions are non-absolute and relative to individuals and situations (Haynes, 1998). Campbell (2000) argues moral relativism has no place in teaching. She, like many scholars before her, argue that professional ethics is needed (Eberlein, 1998; Freeman, 1998; Macmillan, 1993; Strike & Soltis, 2009) even though
knowing the code of ethics does not guarantee that one becomes an ethical professional (Soltis, 1986). Ethical codes do not provide the “philosophical justification of the fundamental ethical principles embedded in the code” (Soltis, 1986, p. 2), which means that in situations where the stated rule in the code does not apply to a given situation, it is hard for teachers to extrapolate the underlying principles behind the rules of the code to make an ethical decision in a given situation.

Beyond issues of moral relativism, issues of collegial loyalty and suspended morality also threaten ethical practices in teaching. These two important issues arise not only from vague professional standards and a vague ethical code, but also arise because the teaching profession has not yet created an environment that is conducive for facilitating “ethical talk.” Indeed, the environment is one in which the politics of teaching is greater than the actual teaching itself—teachers are unsure of where ethical boundaries lie, and this problem is compounded by the fact that they feel that there is no space to discuss these issues when they do actually arise.

Teaching is an extremely complex profession, for not only are we teachers expected to teach our students the curriculum, we are also expected to shape responsible citizens and to help children develop human virtues (Fenstermacher, 1990). Teachers affect the moral developments of their students (Strike & Soltis, 2009) through explicit moral teaching and by modeling virtuous behaviour (Osguthorpe, 2008). As teaching is an activity that involves working with other, the majority of whom are children and vulnerable, it thus necessitates the practice of moral virtues such as fairness, honesty, and justice.

Due to the highly moral nature of their work, teachers must be ethical people (Campbell, 2003). We want ethical teachers not only because we want them to teach our children virtues such as honesty and fairness but also because we want them to teach virtuously. Teachers who
teach virtuously care for their students, treat them fairly, and respect their different viewpoints and opinions (Osguthorpe, 2008). The idea that teachers need not be caring, respectful, competent, knowledgeable, and trustworthy is a contradiction in terms (Sirotnik, 1990). Indeed, the fact that teachers need to display ethical behaviour in their practice is universally recognized by all professional regulatory bodies of teaching and their respective ethical codes. Yet, with the problematic nature of the ethical code for use in helping teachers to resolve ethical dilemmas arising in their work, as shown in this study and in the literature, the implications for the teaching profession are numerous. On the one hand, teachers resort to their own personal moralities, creating a slippery slope to moral relativism for the teaching profession. On the other hand, teachers feel as though they cannot talk to each other. They are unsure of boundaries, and when ethical dilemmas do arise, they do not have the space to discuss these dilemmas openly. What the teaching profession and the broader educational community must understand is that ethical dilemmas are inevitable in teaching. That is not the problem here. The problem is that not enough discussion is being had about ethical dilemmas in teaching, and not enough support is in place to help educators resolve ethical dilemmas. Section 5.3 of this chapter will discuss recommendations based on these implications.

5.2.2 Implications for me as a teacher and as a researcher

As a teacher, the implications of these findings for me are several. It is clear that ethical dilemmas are inevitable in teaching, and it is clear that they are difficult to resolve. The best that I can do as a teacher is to speak to other teachers so as to not only try to avoid as many ethical dilemmas in the first place but to also understand some of the ways in which to address ethical dilemmas as they arise. Knowing that collegiality can be a major problem and a barrier to ethical
teaching, I strive to be more critical of collegial norms and to go beyond the ones that are unethical, to uphold my integrity as a teacher, and practice ethical teaching.

Listening to the three teachers speak about their experiences with ethical dilemmas also helped me to understand how complicated and multidimensional teaching really is. More than anything, I learned that teaching is undeniably a moral activity, for as Fenstermacher (1990) so aptly put it, “Every response to a question, every assignment handed out, every discussion on issues, every resolution of a dispute, every grade given to a student carries with it the moral character of the teacher” (p. 134). My participants also raised many important points that made me think critically about the process of resolving ethical dilemmas in teaching—how important it is to care about others but also how equally important it is to uphold one’s own integrity when faced with an ethical dilemma.

Through interviewing my participants, the topic of “the self” and identity came up numerous times. In conducting this study, my hope was to come up with a definitive answer as to the origins of the knowledge that teachers use to help them resolve ethical dilemmas in teaching: their professional knowledge and professional lives or their personal morality and personal selves? What resulted from this study was that teaching is truly a profession of relationships—relationship with others and relationship with the self. These two are intertwined; the professional and the personal are inseparable. What this means to me is that I should embrace these two “realms” of my life so that I can strive to make the most ethical decisions possible in the face of an ethical dilemma in my work. Understanding and communicating, caring for others, seeking wisdom and mentorship from others, and maintaining my own sense of integrity are all important things that I will need to do in my attempts to resolve ethical dilemmas in teaching. Most important of all, knowing from the literature and from the results of this study that
discussions about ethical dilemmas are lacking, I will strive towards opening lines of communication in my work as a teacher.

5.3 Recommendations

The findings from this study and past literature show that having ethical knowledge is essential to resolving ethical dilemmas in teaching. As Campbell states, “ethical knowledge enables teachers to make conceptual and practical links between core moral and ethical values such as honesty, compassion, fairness, and respect for others and their own daily choices and actions” (Campbell, 2006, p. 33). Using ethical knowledge, teachers are able to recognize the moral nuances of their work and, thus, are able to work towards promoting a caring classroom environment; they not only strive to ensure that such virtues as fairness, honesty, consistency, respect, and kindness are present in their classrooms but also are present in their professional practices as teachers. Ethical codes “in and of themselves are by no means an adequate resource for preparing and sustaining moral professionals” (Campbell, 2000, p. 204). Teachers must develop ethical knowledge so that they may be able to extract the fundamental ethical values written in the code and apply them to specific cases.

In order for ethical knowledge to be cultivated and fostered, there first needs to be open forums of discussion where teachers can meet to speak openly about ethical dilemmas arising in their work. Just as teachers meet to discuss curriculum goals and administrative procedures, they can meet to discuss the moral dimensions of their decisions and actions (Campbell, 2005). Sichel (1993) takes this even a step further and calls for an establishment of School Ethics Committee (SEC), a committee with an education, policy, and consultative purpose. Operating like any other ethics committee in medicine, business, and law, the SEC could provide individual teachers with consultation before or after an action is made with regards to ethical dilemmas that teachers face.
in their work (Sichel, 1993). Whichever way it is done, what is clear is that teachers need to enter into dialogue with each other—creating a dialogue of moral language (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011)—about the ethical practices of teaching and to explore how ethical knowledge should influence their practices as teachers (Campbell, 2005). Ethical knowledge is fostered and enhanced through discussion with one’s colleagues. As ethical dilemmas in teaching are unavoidable, and as “the professional” and “the personal” are always intertwined, teachers must work together to ensure ethical practices.

A dialogue of moral language in teaching can be created through many different avenues. Individual schools (or even departments within the schools) can host meetings weekly or bi-weekly to speak about ethical dilemmas arising in their work. Schools can decide how they want to hold these meetings and in which ways work best for them. Beyond this, school boards can create a policy in which team meetings regarding ethical dilemmas need to take place. The findings from this study suggest that professional development workshops regarding ethical dilemmas in teaching could be beneficial for teachers. At this level, the Ontario College of Teachers would be consulted in the discussion of ethical dilemmas and ethical guidelines in teaching. The Ontario College of Teachers does run workshops on ethical challenges on teaching and how teachers can navigate this rough terrain. They provide case studies, booklets, and other resources that are accessible at their workshops. However, their workshops are not given as part of the regular program of professional development days for teachers. This is problematic. Just as teachers attend workshops on reading and writing on their professional development days, they, too, should attend workshops on ethical practices in teaching. The Ontario College of Teachers has many resources, but without regular workshops on school days designated to professional development, these resources are not used to their fullest potential.
Problems related to collegial loyalty and suspended morality can also be minimized through fostering ethical knowledge, but ethical knowledge can only be fostered through discussion. We need to move away from what Campbell (2000) calls “moral ambiguity” towards moral clarity in teaching practice. The onus is on the school boards and the Ontario College of Teachers to create these spaces for discussion. Teachers need to be encouraged to talk to each other about these difficult topics, for if they do not, the profession will suffer and so will our students.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

Prior to the 1980s, research in this area primarily discussed the role of the teacher as the moral educator and the role of schools as institutions of moral learning (Campbell, 2008). However, the past few decades have seen a favourable shift in this research area; yet, with the exception of Campbell (1992, 1996, 1997, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006), there has not been much peer-reviewed research done on the ethical dimensions of teaching as a profession in Canada. Much more research must be done in various areas relating to ethical knowledge and ethical dilemmas in the teaching profession. One area that needs to be studied is how one’s identity is affected when one is confronted with ethical dilemmas in teaching. For example, if an ethical dilemma is not resolved according to one’s own personal morality, how does this affect how one thinks of oneself as a human being and as a teacher? Another area of potential research is on the nature of ethical dilemmas—in which situations do they occur most, who they often involve, and why they arise. Finally, it would be very interesting to conduct a study in which participants are required to attend workshops led by the Ontario College of Teachers regarding the ethical dimensions of teaching and to see whether the participants benefited from these
workshops in any way. It is important to continue to do more research on ethical dilemmas that arise in teaching so that we can continually work towards the highest standard of ethical teaching.

As this study was a qualitative study, the results were thus restricted to the responses of three participants. Thus, the findings are not meant to be generalizable. Further research should include more participants so that they can be more representative of the whole teaching profession. Yet, by the same token, individual teacher’s experiences with ethical dilemmas are unique, and all of their individual stories shine a light on what needs to be improved regarding ethical dilemmas in teaching. If future studies are conducted quantitatively, they should be careful not to neglect the unique voices of individual teachers.

5.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand in detail the unique experiences of three teachers in their attempts to resolve ethical dilemmas in their work. The goal of this project was to act as a vehicle for these teachers to be heard so that we could continue to better understand the implications of ethical dilemmas in schools. The findings from this study show that “the professional” and “the personal” cannot be separated in teaching. All three teachers stated that they used their professional knowledge (professional codes and policies) as guidelines to help them make their decision but also consulted their own personal moralities and value systems. For all three teachers, the relationships they held with others were very important to them in their work. Four key themes related to teachers’ relationships with others emerged from this study that are consistent with prior research: understanding and communication; care; collegiality; and experience, wisdom, and mentor. Findings from this study relating to the teachers’ identities,
integrities, and images also align with research done in the field. A conceptual framework was created based on the findings of this study to illustrate the complex relationship between “the professional” and “the personal” in coming together to form the ethical knowledge of these three teachers.

The implications of this research are many, as the findings show that teachers will inevitably encounter ethical dilemmas in their work. Although many small ethical dilemmas can be avoided through open lines of communication, the point is not to avoid ethical dilemmas altogether. The point is to create a dialogue of moral language and to create a space in which teachers can talk about ethical boundaries and ethical dilemmas that they encounter in their work. The findings from this study suggest that schools, school boards, and the Ontario College of Teachers all make changes to encourage and foster ethical dialogue. One simple and easy way to do this is to incorporate these workshops into the program of professional development days that teachers have a few times during the year. Just as teachers have departmental meetings to discuss the curriculum, they can also meet weekly or biweekly to discuss ethical dilemmas that arise in their work (Campbell, 2005).

One finding from this study diverges from the literature. All three teachers in this study talked only of experiences with ethical dilemmas where the actions they took to resolve those ethical dilemmas aligned with their own personal values and moral systems. None of the teachers indicated that they needed to “suspend” their own personal moralities. According to the findings of this present study, the issue of “role morality” was not a problem for these three teachers. However, it remains unclear as to whether “suspended morality” or “role morality” were not issues at all for these teachers or whether these teachers chose to only discuss experiences where their decisions aligned with their own personal moralities. Further research would have to be
done in order to clarify this. Further research should also explore the nature of ethical dilemmas—in which situations do they occur most, who they often involve, and why they arise. It would also be interesting to investigate in which ways teachers benefit from the workshops on the ethical dimensions of teaching.

This study sought to investigate three research questions: How does a teacher’s professional knowledge inform his/her ethical decision-making? How does a teacher’s personal experience and personal morality inform his/her ethical decision-making? When professional knowledge and personal morality conflict, which one is favoured and why? The findings from this study clearly show that the professional and the personal cannot be separated in teaching. All three respondents stated that they used their professional knowledge (professional codes and policies) as guidelines to help them make their decisions but also consulted their own personal moralities and value systems. When it comes to ethical dilemmas in teaching, it is never as clear as Black and White, for there are always shades of grey. For these three teachers, it was not a matter of professional knowledge always taking precedence over personal morality or vice versa. When it came to resolving ethical dilemmas, the teachers believed that they needed to take into account both the standards and their own value systems and moralities in order to make the most ethical decision. In other words, ethical knowledge, for them, was a combination of both their professional knowledge and their personal moralities. The two are inseparable—always intersecting, always colliding, and always coming together to form their ethical knowledge.
References


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Appendix A: Consent Letter

Date: September 1st, 2015

Dear ____________________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. For the purposes of investigating an educational topic as a major assignment for our program, I am exploring how “the professional” and “the personal” realms of a teacher life intersect and collide to form the ethical knowledge that is needed for resolving ethical dilemmas in teaching.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the process this year is Dr. Peter Yee Han Joong. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a one-on-one interview in October. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you. I can conduct the interview at your office or workplace, in a public place, or anywhere else that you might prefer.

The information gathered from the interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you (including names of institutions, colleagues, students, and other people) in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific question(s) in the interview. I will destroy the tape recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are minimal risks to you for assisting in this project, but given the research topic, there is a chance that the interview questions may trigger an emotional response. To minimize this risk and to reduce the element of surprise, I will e-mail you with a few interview questions prior to our meeting.

Please sign the attached form if you agree to participate in the interview and to be audio-recorded. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher name: Tina Ta

Phone number, email: 637-993-7114 // tina.ta@mail.utoronto.ca
Instructor’s Name: Dr. Peter Yee Han Joong
Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Tina Ta and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: ________________________________

Name (printed): __________________________

Date: _____________________
Appendix B: Interview Questions

Section A: Background

Personal Information
1. For how many years have you worked as a teacher?
2. For how many years have you been teaching at your present school?
3. What grade(s) and subject(s) do you currently teach?
4. What grades have you taught in the past?
5. For what school board do you currently work?

Personal Beliefs, Understandings, and Practices
6. What is your definition of the term, “Ethics”?
7. What is your definition of the term, “Personal Morality”?
   a. Is there a difference between “Ethics” and “Personal Morality”?
8. What is your understanding of the term, “Ethical Dilemma”?
9. How often do you think about ethical practices in teaching?
   a. In which ways?
   b. In what context?
   c. Can you elaborate?
10. Do you consciously try to implement ethical practices in your work as a teacher?
    a. How often do you try to implement these ethical practices in your work?

Section B: Ethical Dilemmas (What?)
Case Study
Ask the participant to first read the following case study and then to answer the questions below.

Mark Summers is a tenth-grade English teacher at Reading Public School and has almost completed his first year of teaching. Things are going well for Mark; after some time, he has finally settled into a routine. The students like and respect him, and he enjoys his job immensely. What’s more, he feels a strong sense of community among the staff at the school, especially among his colleagues in the English department. Yet, it wasn’t always like this. Mark remembers when he first started teaching at Reading Public School. Not only was it Mark’s first day at the school, it was also Mark’s first day as an official teacher, and he was nervous. He felt extremely overwhelmed and confused and didn’t know where to start. Luckily for him, though, there was Ryan.

Ryan Hickory was the other tenth-grade English teacher at Reading Public School. He had already taught for three years before Mark arrived and so knew the ins and outs of the school routine. Ryan often offered to help Mark plan his lessons and even shared his own resources with Mark. On some days, the two of them would go out for drinks after school, and Ryan would share with Mark some of the helpful things that he has learned over the years as a teacher. Not only this, Ryan was also very well liked by the other staff at the school and made a point of
introducing Mark to all the other teachers, ensuring that he feel comfortable within the school. Indeed, Mark felt indebted to Ryan for making his first year of teaching easier for him.

It was approaching the end of the school year now, and Mark had just spent his lunch break marking final examinations alone in the English department. Emily was a student in his class who had struggled to keep up during the year, but to his surprise, she had done extremely well! Mark was ecstatic about Emily’s results and couldn’t wait to tell Ryan, whom he knew was Emily’s favourite teacher at the school. After inputting her final grade into the system, Ryan walked into the office, and Mark told him about how well Emily had done on her final exam. Ryan looked unsurprised and was quiet. Then he admitted that he had stolen Mark’s exam and had given it to Emily in advance. He said that Emily had come crying to him three weeks earlier about Mark’s upcoming final exam and because she was his favourite student in his ninth-grade English class last year, he couldn’t bear to see her fail.

Mark is now incredibly upset and doesn’t know what to do. Should he report Ryan to the Principal? To the union? Clearly what Ryan had done was against the rules and even against Mark’s own personal ethical standards, but Mark considered Ryan not only as a colleague but also his close friend. Ryan had helped him out so much this year, could he really report Ryan? And what about Emily? He had passed Emily on the basis of this exam, and she clearly didn’t deserve it. Should he go back into the system to revise her mark? What if the Principal asks why?

11. What is your first reaction?
   a. How do you instinctively resolve this dilemma?

12. Identify the stakeholders.
   a. Who cares what happens?

13. Identify the issues.
   a. What is at stake here?

14. What are some possible solutions to this problem?

15. Apply your code of ethics.
   a. How would you ultimately resolve this dilemma?
   b. Why do you choose to resolve in this way?

Personal Experience

16. In your work as a teacher, have you ever experienced an ethical dilemma that you attempted to resolve (situations that have made you feel ethically uncomfortable)?
   a. How often would you say that you encounter ethical dilemmas in your work as a teacher?
   b. What do these ethical dilemmas typically involve?
   c. Who is typically involved in these ethical dilemmas?
      i. In which ways?
      ii. In what context?
      iii. Can you elaborate?

17. Reflect on your experiences as a teacher, and recall one particular situation in which you were confronted with an ethical dilemma where you were genuinely unsure of what to do but still attempted to resolve the dilemma.
   a. Without identifying anyone by name, what was the dilemma?
      i. What happened?
      ii. Who did it involve?
iii. What was the issue?
b. What about it made it specifically an “ethical dilemma” for you?
i. In other words, why was it an ethical dilemma for you?

Section C: The Solution (How? Why?)

18. How did you attempt to resolve this ethical dilemma?
   a. Why did you choose to resolve it in this way?
   b. What would you say was the biggest barrier or roadblock to solving this ethical dilemma?
19. Were there any professional supports available to help you resolve this ethical dilemma?
   a. If so, did you use them?
20. What (other) resources did you consult in your attempt to resolve this ethical dilemma?
   • Professional codes?
   • School board policies?
   • Union policies?
   • People – colleagues? Family members? Friends?
   • Personal convictions or personal morality?
   • The law?
21. In your attempt to resolve the ethical dilemma, would you say that you relied more on professional knowledge or on your own personal morality (personal sense of right/wrong and good/bad)?
   a. Please elaborate on your answer (why?)
22. What was the outcome of your attempt to resolve the ethical dilemma?

Section D: Changes & Next Steps

23. If you were faced with the same ethical dilemma again, what would you do? Why?
24. Has the ethical dilemma (and the outcome of your attempt) changed your perceptions and ideas about anything?
   • The way you perceive yourself?
   • The way you perceive your role as a teacher?
   • The way you perceive teaching as a profession?
25. Having had this particular experience with an ethical dilemma in your work, are there any changes that you hope to see (e.g., regarding the school system, policies/regulations, workplace atmosphere, etc.)?
26. Do you have any advice for people new to the teaching profession regarding how to handle ethical dilemmas in teaching?
27. Do you have anything to add before we conclude this interview?

Ask the participant if he or she has any questions. Thank the participant and bring the interview to a close.
### Appendix C: Tables and Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Ethics and Policies</td>
<td>Ethics vs. Morality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dilemmas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with Others</td>
<td>Understanding and Communication</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Care</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Collegiality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experience, Wisdom, and Mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Self</td>
<td>Identity, Integrity, and Image</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1: Categories and Themes**
ORIGINS OF ETHICAL KNOWLEDGE IN TEACHING

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework