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Date: April 13, 2023

Opening the Black Box of Teacher Ethical Decision-Making:

Context and Complexity in Educational Justice

A Dissertation

Presented by

Tatiana Geron

to

The Committee on Higher Degrees in Education

in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the subject of

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Cambridge, Massachusetts

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Dissertation Advisor: Meira Levinson Tatiana Geron

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ABSTRACT

Teachers make complex ethical decisions as part of their daily practice. These decisions are shaped by the classrooms and institutional environments in which teachers work, involve their core professional values, and have implications for political theories of justice. However, the nature of this decision-making isn't well understood, and thus rarely discussed in teacher professional learning and policy development. This dissertation opens the black box of teachers' ethical decision-making with three papers that use "empirically-engaged philosophy" to theorize, illustrate, and suggest supports for teachers' ethical decision-making in American K-12 schools.

The first paper analyzes how the spatial and social environment of the classroom shapes teachers' ethical decision-making. I draw from classroom ethnography, philosophy of education, and teacher practice literatures to develop an accessible theory of how the characteristics of the "crowded classroom" create challenges and affordances for teachers' decision-making. In the bounded physical space of the classroom, diverse and developing groups of students interact with their teacher in close proximity under temporal pressures. Teachers must consider their decisions' ethical consequences through time and space, and how to work together with students to resolve ethical challenges.

The second paper is a qualitative study of the ethical reasoning of 149 teachers working in a large city district where mitigating systemic injustices through individual decision-making is

a feature of everyday practice. I analyze how these experienced teachers reason through a "normative case study in educational ethics" (NCS) that presents an ethical dilemma of the tradeoff between systems-level policy implementation and individual student need. My findings provide a rare illustration of phronesis (practical wisdom) and discretion in teacher policy implementation. In contrast to the techno-rational decision-making assumed by the USA K-12 education system, teachers' ethical reasoning in this case was individually-focused, holistic, and flexible.

Given these findings, paper three examines how to support teachers' ethical decision-making through professional development. Data from the same PD experience suggests that when teachers receive the time, space, and scaffolding to consider the values at the core of their practice, they can develop new understandings of how those values connect to larger systems and improve their ability and willingness to articulate and share them with colleagues. Ultimately, values-based PD—specifically NCS PD—may be able to support individual and school-wide ethical decision-making that is responsive to teachers' complex contexts.

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INTRODUCTION: TEACHER DECISION-MAKING AS EDUCATIONAL ETHICS

My formative experiences with educational ethics were as a fifth-grade teacher in Boston Public Schools. In the turn-of-the-century brick building where I taught the humanities side of the curriculum to a curious, multilingual, and chatty collection of ten and eleven- and twelve-year-olds, the ethical dilemmas of educational practice came thick and fast. *How should I arrange my seating chart so that Jesmari can take a mental health break without disrupting whole-class instruction? What's the best way for me to advocate for Alex, a newcomer with no previous schooling in English or his home language? Today in the middle of my lesson my assistant principal accused Edith of stealing her wallet— should I have stopped teaching and questioned her authority? And is there anyone I can talk to about why these questions feel like they weigh on my values, and not just on my technical expertise?*

I was fortunate to be fresh out of a teacher preparation program that created a sense of community and camaraderie around the values that brought us to the profession (Hansen, 1995; Santoro, 2018). But I was entering teaching at the height of the standards and accountability era, when our shared beliefs about teacher autonomy and student responsiveness often felt like no match for the rational and technocratic values of the top-down managerial system in which we worked (Mehta, 2013). On many days, the cognitive dissonance between the teacher I wanted to be and the role I was expected to play made making basic, everyday decisions in my classroom almost too much to bear (Santoro, 2018). Not to mention, I often felt confused by the mismatch between how I conceptualized the values at the core of my practice and the way my colleagues and superiors conceptualized the same values. If we were all saying we worked in BPS because we wanted to work for social justice, why did Ms. P's justice look like getting the 3rd graders to

line up silently in the hall, Ms. F's justice look like the 8th graders learning about Black Lives Matter and Mr. V's justice look like all the English Language Learners getting "proficient" on the MCAS? And even if I defined a coherent conception of educational justice as the aim of my practice, achieving it was another matter—one that required attention to the mundane decisions I made as part of my everyday practice. With little time or space to discuss these questions among colleagues, I kept them to myself, confused about what justice and its corresponding ethical decisions could and should look like in my classroom, whether I agreed with those conceptions, and how they could help me make decisions about Jesmari's seating arrangement, Alex's literacy plan, and Edith's false accusation.

Meira Levinson argues for a theory of educational justice developed "on its own terms from the ground up" (Levinson, 2023). The development of such a theory would be "informed by the kinds of pragmatic perspectives and understandings that arise in practice, not just in theory," (p .123). It would be conceived of "multidimensionally" in order to address how educational justice is dynamic, accommodating instability, change, and human development across and within a lifespan. I believe that if I'd had a ground-up theory of justice in education to guide my practice, I would have been a better teacher. That's not because this theory of justice would have eliminated the hard decisions I had to make in my practice or told me what to do in every situation. As I argue in the three papers of this dissertation, the structure of American K-12 schools and classrooms make such tough decisions part of teachers' professional responsibility, and their answers depend on the particulars of context, environment, and individual students. But because a pragmatic, multidimensional theory of justice could have helped me clarify the values at my "moral center," how they related to my school and district environment, and the relationship between my everyday decisions, the aims of my practice, and the system of

education in which I worked. It could have provided a foundation for decision-making that was both morally attuned and responsive to my context and students, and that could have helped me make better decisions for Jesmari, Alex, Edith, and their classmates.

This kind of "morally pervaded practical wisdom," *phronesis*, is a foundational element of teacher professionalism. It is the virtue of wise practical reasoning, the application of ethical beliefs to the particularities of local circumstances (Eisner, 2002). Because teachers' work is ethical as well as technical, the development of ethical knowledge and the ability to apply ethical knowledge to new circumstances is "a moral imperative of professionalism" (Campbell, 2006).[1] Though I didn't understand it at the time, I now see that to be a "good teacher" and meet the demands of my profession, I needed support in developing *phronesis*. And while phronesis is a professional skill built over time, I believe it can be strengthened by a connection to a strong theory of educational justice built from the ground up.

The three papers that comprise this dissertation aim to provide some theoretical and empirical grounding for such a project. To do so, they take an interdisciplinary approach to ethical inquiry. While questions of justice and ethics have traditionally been the project of political theory and philosophy, I also bring educational history, policy, and psychology, as well as original qualitative research, into my analysis. This approach reflects a contemporary call for new methods of theorizing educational justice that bring the tools of analytical philosophy and political theory to bear on empirics (Ackerly et al., 2021; Zacka et al., 2021; Schouten & Brighouse, 2015; Wilson & Santoro, 2015). These methods aim to create theory that is

[1] While Elizabeth Campbell's definition of ethical knowledge differs from phronesis, here I use the two side-by-side to illustrate the importance of ethical understanding in teacher professionalism. Lacking the space to explore their similarities and differences here, I leave that to another paper!

responsive to and in solidarity with practitioners, and in some cases, to create "theory as liberatory practice" (hooks, 1991).[2]

A central element of my methods is the normative case study in educational ethics (NCS). NCS are tools both for developing action-guiding ethical theory and building the capacities for ethical judgment. As Levinson argues,

> "By modeling problem-driven reasoning, all things considered approaches, a balance between fact-sensitivity and generalization, methods of holding fixed some conditions while prodding at others, reasoning about multiple levels of action, and so forth, action-guiding theory may help agents develop such capacities and habits themselves."

Eisner (2002), in a passage that could be describing the NCS method, argues that this kind of deliberation helps educators develop *phronesis*:

> "If phronesis cannot be taught explicitly, how is it secured? A part of the answer is through deliberation with others. Practical problems are vexing. They traffic in trade-offs. They are riddled with a variety of possible solutions, each of which is likely to create other problems. Deliberation is a way of exploring meta-cognitively those possibilities and their likely consequences. The current interest in teachers deliberating with teachers is an example of a professional practice that can refine phronesis. It can do so by creating a context where multiple interpretations and analyses are likely. Such contexts liberate one from a monocular perspective and a single interpretation. In addition, in the process teachers can strengthen their sense of community by joint deliberation."

Each of my papers uses NCS as a method of uncovering and theorizing ethical decision-making in education.

The first paper, "Ethical Decision-Making in the Crowded Classroom," argues that understanding the classroom environment can help explain why teacher ethical decision-making is so complex and create better theories of teacher ethical decision-making. This paper synthesizes literature from teacher practice and philosophy of education to create an accessible

[2] In "Theory as Liberatory Practice" (1991), bell hooks describes how theory can be liberatory, even healing, when it's developed through "engagement with collective sources," as a social practice, with experience as its basis, committed to changing oppressive power dynamics. There is much more to say about the potential connections between grounded educational theory and hooks' vision; here, I invoke hooks' words as a reminder of the critical power of theory that takes lived experience seriously.

philosophical analysis of teacher ethical decision-making in context. Drawing from Philip Jackson's ethnography *Life in Classrooms* (1968), I identify five features of classroom "crowdedness" that contribute to its ethical complexity: *size, compulsory closeness, diversity, temporal pressures, and group dynamics*. I argue that these characteristics lead to three types of ethical challenges for teachers: linear, second order, and sui generis. *Linear* challenges are ethical difficulties that scale up with classroom size, as some decisions become more complex as they impact the lives of more students. *Second-order* challenges capture those that arise from the unintended future consequences of a teacher's decision. *Sui generis* challenges are those that arise because of the classroom group dynamic and its interplay with the environment. I use a normative case study of classroom practice, *Rocky Choices* (Levinson & Ben-Porath, 2016), to explore and illustrate how these characteristics can draw out the challenges and possibilities for ethical decision-making. Overall, this paper opens the black box of teacher decision-making to show how the teacher's immediate environment shapes their ethical decisions, dilemmas, and resolutions.

The second paper, "Teacher Decision-Making in Conditions of Injustice: Discretion and Phronesis in the 'One Best System'" explores how teachers make these kinds of decisions given injustices in the structural environment in which they work: the factory-model "one best system" of American K-12 education (Tyack, 2001). Using the frameworks of street-level discretion (Lipsky, 2010; Zacka, 2017) and phronesis (Eisner, 2002; Kristjánsson, 2021), and data from a professional development on ethical decision-making with teachers from a large, city district with a history of systemic injustice, I analyze how teachers reason through an NCS that presents an ethical dilemma shaped by school-based and social injustices (Levinson, 2016). This paper opens the black box to find that, for the teachers in this sample, ethical decision-making in the

face of unjust conditions was individually-focused, holistic, and pragmatically flexible. The paper argues that these characteristics are elements of phronesis and discretion that are unduly constrained by the "one best system." It suggests that the system should be redesigned and reformed to account for the realities of teacher ethical decision-making.

Paper three, "Creating Justice in My Practice: Developing Teachers' Values through a Professional Development in Educational Ethics," explores one form this reform could take. This paper argues that educators need the opportunity to talk to one another about the values at the core of their practice. Once given that opportunity, they can develop new, complex understandings about how those values connect to larger systems and structures and can make better decisions as a cohesive school community. In this paper, I analyze data from the same set as in paper two: a professional development experience for 149 educators in a large city district, in which they reasoned through a NCS individually and then in a group discussion. I focus on three emblematic case studies of participating educators that show how the pedagogical use of NCS can help educators articulate, clarify and share the values that guide their professional decision-making. I show that, as educators engaged with the case study individually and then deliberated about it with colleagues, they developed their understanding of values in education as subjective, flexible in response to individual student need, and an important element of whole-school discussion and decision-making. This paper opens the black box of teacher decision-making to show one way that teachers can improve their personal understanding of their own values and their school-level policies to make better ethical decisions on behalf of their students. Taken together with papers 1 & 2, it points to a potential method for alleviating the burden on teachers to make ethical decisions and create justice alone.

The papers in this dissertation, and the works they draw from, are ones I wish I'd had at my fingertips in my Boston classroom. They posit that educational justice occurs in the everyday ethical decision-making of educators, decisions that are shaped by the structure of schooling in the US K-12 system and the professional values of the educator. They try to explain a bit about why that decision-making is so complicated and difficult, especially in large urban districts with scarce resources. They aim to provide some foundation for grounded theories of educational justice. Together, these papers build an understanding that teacher decision-making is ethical, complex and contextual, defying the techno-rational conception of teaching that constrains teachers' work. This dissertation joins the call to professionalize teaching by recognizing and supporting this complexity.

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ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING IN THE CROWDED CLASSROOM

Introduction

K-12 teachers go about their daily work in classrooms where their decision-making must be complex and context-dependent. Though the statistic that teachers make 1500 decisions a day has yet to be verified, the reality that teachers exercise considerable decision-making power in conditions of uncertainty is well-documented (Lampert 1990; McDonald 1992). In the years I taught middle-school English in Boston and New York City, knowledge of this complexity was not only a foregone conclusion, it kept me up at night. My daily decisions—from how to arrange my seating chart to how to support newcomer students—weighed heavily. Because I knew they impacted my students' opportunities to flourish, now and in the future, they seemed to operate on a different dimension than technical practice (Brighouse et al. 2018).

Scholarship in philosophy of education corroborates this lived experience, arguing that the teaching profession is moral and ethical in nature (Campbell 2008; Hansen 1995; Santoro 2018). Teachers have ethical responsibilities towards their students, their profession, and themselves. Their decision-making support students' acquisition of "educational goods," the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions that allow students to lead flourishing lives (Brighouse et al. 2018). As they make these decisions, they must deal with ethical challenges that cause them moral difficulties. These dimensions should be integrated into a larger understanding of teacher professionalization. For this scholarship to be responsive to teacher practice, however, it must account for the environment in which most of teachers' ethical decision-making takes place: the classroom.

In this essay, I argue that the spatial and social environment of the classroom—what I call its "crowdedness," a phrase from education researcher Philip Jackson—shapes teachers' ethical

decision-making and their opportunities for resolving ethical dilemmas in educational practice. First, I draw from philosophy of education to describe the moral difficulties that motivate this work. Then, I bring together classroom ethnography, philosophy, and developmental psychology to describe the ethical complexities of teaching and five characteristics of the "crowded classroom" that shape that ethical complexity. Then, I identify three ways that these categories create challenges and affordances for teachers' ethical decision-making, using a case study in educational ethics to illustrate ways to use this framework to think through dilemmas in real-world practice. Overall, this taxonomy aims to bridge philosophy of education and teacher practice literatures to help the field recognize and investigate teacher practice as complex, situated, and ethical in nature.

Ethical Challenges in Teacher Decision-Making

A teacher's "moral center" – their core values, principles, and knowledge of what it means to be a good teacher— plays a central role in their professional identity. It shapes their decision to enter and their resolve to stay in the profession by furnishing the "moral rewards" of teaching, and provides a north star in their decision-making (Hansen 1995; 2021; Lortie 1967; 2002; Santoro 2018). However, tradeoffs inherent to the work and structure of schooling challenge teachers' moral centers constantly, including tradeoffs between policy implementation and responsiveness to students; tradeoffs between competing aims of education; and pure values conflicts (Brighouse et al. 2018; Colnerud 1997). In many cases, these decisions manifest as *ethical dilemmas*— decisions that have no clear right answer, or that will help some students and harm others no matter the outcome (Ehrich et al. 2011; Levinson and Fay 2016; Shapira-Lishchinsky 2011).

The weight of constant ethical decision-making and dilemma negotiation can lead to extreme difficulties for teachers (Davies and Heyward 2019; Glazer 2022; Santoro and Cain 2018; Tirri 1999). Levinson (2015) argues that teachers experience "moral injury" when they routinely

feel that the decisions they make will cause harm to their students, students they have a responsibility to care for. In some situations, this harm would be avoidable if not for unjust policies and structures that stymie teachers' autonomy; in other situations, teachers will harm some students even as they help others, as part of the demands of their position. Santoro (2018) argues that the constant conflicts between professional demands and a teacher's moral center lead to "demoralization," a state in which teachers feel they are prevented from fulfilling their professional values and vision of good teaching. Demoralization, Santoro finds, often leads teachers to change their practice significantly or quit the profession altogether. These *moral difficulties,* as I'll refer to them throughout the chapter, can cause harm to teachers, school communities, and the students they serve or choose to leave behind.

These ethical dimensions of teaching are crucial to teacher professionalism, yet are rarely discussed in teacher preparation and development (Campbell 2003; Hansen 2021; Levinson and Fay 2016; Orchard, Kelly, and Winstanley 2020). In part, this may be because the teacher practice literature views teaching foremost as a technical profession (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner 2017). But this status quo isn't helped by the fact that work on teachers' ethical decision-making often treats teachers as singular actors making decisions about curriculum, policy, and individual students whose needs must be traded off against each other.[3] It misses teaching's complex, context-dependent component.

Teachers do not make decisions in isolation in the classroom: neither the teachers themselves, the decisions they make, nor the people they are making decisions for exist in isolation from others. Moreover, teachers rarely, if ever, have the time or space to reflect on distributive or

[3] For examples of texts about morality, justice, and ethics in teacher decision-making from philosophy of education and elsewhere that are helpful, but treat teachers as singular classroom actors, see Jencks (1988), as well as Cohen (Cohen 1990), Colnerud (1997), Kelly (1994), and Tirri (1999).

pure values in their day-to-day work, much less weigh them against each other in the moment. Teachers make ethical decisions much as they make technical decisions: spontaneously, in real time, and without full knowledge of their consequences. Much of teacher practice literature accounts for this reality, describing how teachers adapt routine decision-making repertoires to fit the immediate needs of the students in front of them and the realities of their classroom (Bohle Carbonell et al. 2014; Schon 1990). This literature takes the complexity and classroom context of such decisions as its knowledge base (Bransford and National Research Council Committee on Developments in the Science of Learning 2000; Cohen, Raudenbush, and Ball 2003; Darling-Hammond and Sykes 1999; Lampert 2001; Shulman 1986); however, it misses teaching's *ethical* component. Until the understandings from these separate areas of study are brought together, the field will have an incomplete view of the ethical complexity of teacher practice.

Political philosopher Bernardo Zacka connects the ethical decision-making of street-level bureaucrats—government service providers like social workers and public-school teachers— to the details of their environment, arguing that street-level bureaucracy workplaces are "complex moral ecosystems" (Zacka 2017). He urges researchers interested in ethical decision-making to understand "the ways in which the environment informs, sustains, and, at times, erodes, the moral dispositions of individual agents" (pp. 157, 247). In the following sections, I take up Zacka's call to argue that we must consider the environment in which teachers' ethical decision-making takes place if we are to make useful claims about the challenges, affordances, and complexities of that decision-making. For this argument, I focus on the environment in which teachers make their most immediate decisions and spend the most of their time: the classroom. Of course, while the physical space of the classroom is bounded, the social and political space of the classroom is porous—part of a student or teacher's larger ecological system, and impacted by policies and decisions made at

the school, district, state and national levels (Bronfenbrenner 1977; Neal and Neal 2013). In chapter two of this dissertation, I discuss how upper levels of this system shape teachers' ethical decision-making. However, in this chapter, I focus specifically on the level of the classroom as a set of individuals in interaction with one other, with the understanding that these interactions are not isolated from other levels of the ecology of schooling but are worthwhile to study in their own right.

Examining Ethical Decision-Making in the Classroom Environment

In the 1960s, sociologist Philip Jackson set out to better understand classroom complexity. His resulting study, *Life in Classrooms* (1968), surfaces several core understandings that are crucial for understanding the context of teacher decision-making. Jackson's work is as comprehensive as any classroom ethnography despite the years since its publication, and especially helpful in laying the groundwork for this project given its focus on environmental complexity. Jackson suggests that student behavior, development, and individuality interact with the institutional expectations of schooling to create an environment that is highly spontaneous and irrational. Within this uncertain environment, teacher decision-making must be responsive to what Jackson calls the classroom's "crowdedness," or its group nature. At its most basic level, the classroom is a bounded physical space in which a group of diverse individuals must exist and interact for a prolonged period: six to eight hours a day for 180 days of the year. Moreover, the classroom is an "intimate" place, where students interact in an environment of physical closeness to each other and the teacher. Within this group dynamic, the teacher may engage in upwards of 1000 interpersonal exchanges a day; it's possible to imagine that the number of interactions *between* students (depending on the teacher's pedagogy) is an order of magnitude larger (p. 11). Jackson argues that the complexity of teaching is in great part due to classroom crowdedness. Ethical decision-making

is challenging enough when it's rendered individually. What about the crowded classroom may make ethical decision-making especially challenging for teachers?

In the following sections, I build on Jackson to identify five characteristics of the crowded classroom and explore their impacts to create an accessible philosophical analysis of these complexities. Jackson's insights into classroom complexity are scattered throughout *Life in Classrooms*, so I synthesized and categorized his descriptions across the text. I used analytical tools from philosophy to think through the ethical implications for these categories: engaging them in dialogue with insights from philosophy of education and putting them to use in parsing out case studies. Throughout this process, I held up my analysis to the light of my own teaching experience, imagining these characteristics playing out in my classroom and whether they could help me explain familiar decisions. This approach of using philosophical frameworks and tools to analyze empirical research belongs to the methodology of "empirically-based philosophy," philosophical analysis that draws on social science research (Wilson and Santoro 2015). This taxonomy is based on Jackson's work but extends his findings into new theoretical territory.[4]

The resulting taxonomy is not meant to be a comprehensive theory of teachers' ethical decision-making, nor one that defines & describes all the ways ethical decision-making occurs in the classroom. It's meant as a map of the classroom ethical environment that can be used for an initial exploration. Central to my argument is the idea that teachers' decision-making is as messy and busy as the classrooms in which it takes place: to go too far in classifying would likely erase

[4] Jackson's co-authored work *The Moral Life of Schools* (Jackson, Boostrom, and Hansen 1993) also focuses on the school as a moral environment; it's clear that over the course of his career Jackson became interested in the moral dimensions of the classroom. However, *The Moral Life of Schools* does not take up the importance of crowdedness specifically as a factor in teachers' decision-making and focuses on morality in terms of students' moral development rather than teacher decision-making.

the very complexity that this theory is trying to describe. My hope is that this map can serve well enough for an initial approach.

Characteristics of the Crowded Classroom

The basic characteristics of the "crowded classroom" span classroom structures, from elementary classrooms where the teacher and students spend the full day and year together, to middle school classrooms where a cohesive group of students rotates through a handful of subject teachers, to high school block schedule classrooms that meet a couple times a week. In each of these structures, the same group of twenty-odd students spends the day with a handful of subject teachers (with a movement or two in or out as students get pulled for extracurricular activities or learning support or families relocate). These teachers are responsible for anywhere from around eighteen (in a typical elementary structure) to a hundred students (in a typical high school structure) —even as the number of students grows with grade level, teachers are usually able to build meaningful relationships with some and rapport with all. However, it's possible that classroom dynamics and, therefore, the ethical environment vary between grade levels and types of classroom structure. Again, given these potential differences and the possibility of other ethically salient features of classroom complexity not covered by Jackson, this taxonomy can be thought of as a foundation on which to build. This foundation begins with five characteristics: size, compulsory closeness, diversity, temporal pressures, and group dynamics.

Size

The baseline characteristic of the crowded classroom, which shapes all other characteristics, is the number of students it contains. Teachers in Jackson's study describe how the typical public-school classroom of twenty to twenty-five students is a large enough group to "facilitate the intermingling

of personalities" while still small enough for each student to be known individually. This number of students creates "a certain spark;" a smaller group (especially a group with ten or fewer students) "would not offer enough stimulation or 'give and take.'"[5] Jackson further explains that this size creates "a collection of individuals… large enough to keep things moving and small enough to preserve the visibility of individual members" (pp. 142-143). Classroom size, then, shapes how in the classroom students operate simultaneously as *individuals* and *in relation to* one another.

From an individual perspective on size, the ethics of the crowded classroom is about space and resource scarcity. The more individual students in a classroom, the more physically crowded the space may feel. More students can mean more individual needs and a greater strain on resource distribution, from materials (who gets to use the hall pass) to time (how many minutes a whole-class share will take) to teacher energy (how long it takes to grade assignments). It can mean more choices between which students are on the receiving end of a teacher's attention, for how long, and at what level of quality.

From a relational perspective, however, the ethics of the crowded classroom is about interaction. In a twenty-to-twenty-five-person classroom, each student will likely interact with each of their classmates over the course of a given day or week, whether through group work or in the shuffle to the exit at the end of the period. Teacher decision-making can set in motion interactions between students that ensure their acquisition of educational goods such as the capacities for healthy personal relationships and democratic competence (Brighouse et al. 2018). Jacksons' teachers' desire to find a sweet spot of class size illuminates the importance of students' relationships with each other in the crowded classroom.

[5] I'm sure not all teachers would agree with Jackson's interviewees here.

Philosophy of education has traditionally focused on the distribution of teacher time and attention as the most ethically-salient details of classroom decision-making (Colnerud 1997; Jencks 1988). Conceptualizing size as a matter of both individuals and relationships in the crowded classroom suggests that the ethics of the crowded classroom is more than a question of resource scarcity; it may also be a matter of the time and attention students pay to each other.

Compulsory Closeness

Most children and adolescents have no choice whether to attend school and who to attend with; [6] they cannot "quit school" (p. 31). Similarly, teachers have no discretion over who is assigned to their classroom. Yet somehow, the state-mandated, compulsory group must peacefully coexist within a bounded physical space for six to eight hours a day, 180 days a year. The classroom does not have to create bonds of friendship between students or a sense of intrinsic motivation and love of schooling within them (though it sometimes does), but it must create a peaceful, compliant unit out of a group of individuals who cannot leave an intimate space. This "social intimacy" (p.8) sets the classroom apart from almost every other adult space and many spaces where children enter by their or their guardians' choice (such as summer camps, religious programs, or community centers).

Compulsory closeness plays an important role in teacher ethical decision-making because it requires teachers to prioritize choices that a) allow the group to, minimally, peacefully coexist in close quarters over an extended amount of time or, maximally, develop a sense of care towards each other and b) get students to do things they wouldn't freely choose to do (p. 87). Complicating these priorities is what Jackson calls "the illusion of solitude:" the expectation that students work

[6] Though their guardians can exercise choice, often in order to place their children in classrooms with a specific group of students.

independently even as they are physically elbow to elbow with a playground enemy or their best friend. The need for choices that maintain the illusion of solitude and keep close physical relationships peaceful are one reason the classroom is a place of "denied desire" (p. 16).

In this way, as the teacher manages the social dynamic within the physical space of the room, even decisions such as seating charts are imbued with ethical and moral weight.[7] The classroom is inherently a spontaneous environment; the thousands of interpersonal interactions that take place each day make events changeable and potentially explosive (p. 120). Pedagogical practices that develop and sustain routines and norms help students know acceptable parameters of conduct for themselves and the people they are expected to get along with all day, creating a sense of stability and even community within the potential chaos of many children or adolescents interacting constantly (LePage et al. 2005). According to Jackson, the teacher must monitor the events in the classroom and prevent disturbances because "when group control is lost, all is lost" (p. 106). Jackson highlights how teachers focus on controlling who can enter and leave the room, how much noise is tolerable, how to preserve privacy in a crowd, what to do when students finish work early, and the etiquette of how students are to treat each other. However, these decisions may bump up against other aims of schooling, creating dilemmas about student dignity and autonomy and the tradeoff between educational and childhood goods (Brighouse et al. 2018).

However, compulsory closeness also means that students can see and hear the classroom decisions teachers make, even those supposedly made for individual students under the illusion of solitude. This makes all teacher decisions subject to judgement and reaction by the group. This characteristic can create new dimensions for teacher decision-making, particularly tradeoffs

[7] Both the compulsory nature of schooling and the classroom as a bounded physical space are relics of choices made about school organization during the administrative progressive era. It would be interesting to explore whether teachers' ethical decision-making changes in classrooms that are spatially different, such as flipped or open-classroom schools.

between individual student needs. For example, if the teacher tells a student he doesn't need to complete an assignment because he's feeling ill, his tablemate may overhear and fake a stomachache or, even, gossip to the other students that their teacher is unfair or lenient. Because privacy is at a premium in the crowded classroom, teachers must be concerned with fairness, justification, and community, as well as compliance.

Diversity

Classrooms are at least minimally diverse environments.[8] Residential segregation, unequal funding structures, gerrymandered school districting, and the racism and class stereotyping that create and sustain them stymie true racial and economic integration at the public K-12 classroom level. Despite these structural barriers, the classroom still brings together diverse individuals and requires cooperation and interaction across lines of difference. Even racially and economically homogenous schools minimally require that children interact with individuals beyond their immediate family and acquaintances (Laden 2022). Classroom size and compulsory attendance virtually ensure that students will interact with others with diverse gender identities, political beliefs, sexual preferences, ability and disability markers, learning styles and life aspirations, mental and physical health statuses, religious affiliations, and language and immigration statuses, not to mention different experiences of how these identities, and others, intersect (Banks et al. 2005). Specifically, patterns of immigrant relocation, the inclusion mandate of the IDEA, and growing openness to gender and sexuality diversity among younger groups of students, among

[8] In *Life in Classrooms*, Jackson discusses the importance of student "individuality," but does not explicitly discuss diversity. Writing before the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and observing at the University of Chicago Laboratory School, which was less economically and racially diverse in the 1960s than it is today, this aspect of the crowded classroom was not a major part of his analysis.

other policies and phenomena, mean that the average public middle-school classroom will include students with multiple backgrounds, talents, and preferences.[9]

Student diversity uniquely positions the crowded classroom as a place to build the intergroup competence necessary for students to thrive in a pluralistic society (Anderson 2007; Satz 2007). Laden (unpublished MS) discusses how classroom diversity, however minimal, expands students' social networks and, as a result, shapes their "epistemic trust networks" – the sources of knowledge that they trust and rely on for facts and information, as well as who they see as both understandable (rather than inscrutable) and epistemically worthy. This automatically makes the classroom a site for sociopolitical development with strong implications for justice and democracy.

Yet this potential relies on teachers' decision-making. Choice of curricula, pedagogical practices, textbooks, and course materials can facilitate or prevent students from positively interacting across lines of difference, impacting students' moral development and acquisition of educational goods such as the capacity for democratic engagement. Moreover, as Ball argues, teachers' awareness of the social constructs of power and privilege that accompany students' diverse identities can and should play a role in the micro decisions teachers make, decisions as small as when and how to call on students to share their work (Ball 2018). In this way, teachers' most minute and practical decisions are imbued with an ethical and political significance originating in social systems of power and dominance.

Furthermore, the responsibility to create an environment where students are respected in their diversity can require teachers to put aside their own beliefs and identities to build their

[9] In many cases different forms of residential segregation create concentrations of particular identities in particular schools or even classrooms, school and classroom environments can make openness about one's identity more or less possible or desirable, and specific grade levels can mean students are more or less open and aware of how they identify. Diversity levels change from school to school and classroom to classroom but are still present.

students' intergroup competence or autonomy. This characteristic can also create conflicts for teachers between their roles as state agents and caretakers, and between values of fairness and responsiveness (Hess and McAvoy 2015; Lipsky 2010). These ethical decisions may take on even greater weight when we realize that classrooms are one of the few social spaces in our society where diverse individuals are required to interact in close proximity along lines of difference.

Temporal Pressure

Jackson argues that classroom crowdedness is defined by "delay, denial, and interruption" (p. 16). Because of the size and compulsory closeness of classroom, as well as the many external and internal goals teachers must work with their students to meet, teachers' decisions are subject to temporal pressures. The origins of these pressures may be external and administrative: students must have learned certain material by a testing date or be ready and lined up according to school dismissal policy three minutes before the bell, for example. Or, they may be arbitrary and spontaneous, such as when a student's mom is in the office and needs to pick him up early or a sudden rainstorm cancels recess, throwing off the teacher's plans or students' behavior. In terms of crowdedness, these pressures often relate back to the distribution of scarce resources, of which time and teacher attention are paramount, such as when students sign up on the board and wait to share their work with the teacher. Temporal pressure may not seem unique to the classroom or like an element of crowdedness—after all, deadlines exist in work environments and for individuals too—but the specific pressures of constant delay, denied gratification, and interruption exist because of how the many competing needs of students interact in a bounded space.

As teachers make decisions about how to respond to interruptions, meet external goals in set amounts of time, or ask students to wait or delay their desires in response to the needs of the

group or external forces, they are making values tradeoffs that impact students' development and the teachers' ability to access their own moral rewards. When conditions are always interrupted, delayed, and changing, teachers must be able to make ethical decisions that are adaptive, responsive, and quick. They must make such decisions while keeping their moral center intact, despite these tradeoffs.

Group Dynamics

The final characteristic of the crowded classroom is a product of all the other characteristics. Size, compulsory closeness, diversity, and temporal pressure create the conditions for a unique group dynamic that has important implications for ethical decision-making. I break this characteristic into three parts: teacher as leader, teacher as member, and student dynamic.

Teacher as Leader

The traditional understanding of the classroom dynamic is that of teacher-as-leader. In this understanding, the teacher has full authority over students in the classroom: they make all the decisions, and all learning moves through them into students. Progressive and critical educators of the past two centuries have sought to transform this dynamic, recognizing that this is not a full picture of how learning and healthy relationships occur in the classroom or elsewhere (Duncan-Andrade and Morrell 2008; Freire 2000). Even as their ideas have greatly impacted educational thought and practice, the power dynamic of any given classroom still relies on the teacher as the authoritative figure and leader— and arguably should, as the teacher is the adult responsible for the well-being and safety of the children or adolescents in their care. The need for an adult to

maintain an environment of safety and structure must be taken seriously, even as it trades off against the imperative of student-centered learning (p. 13).

According to this element of the crowded classroom, teachers' ethical responsibility hinges on their use of authority to expand, not contract, students' "quality of life in the classroom" (p. 13). Teachers must make decisions that keep students' safe, which often require compromising student autonomy. They also must justify those decisions to their students to create buy-in or order. Often, teachers' ethical decision-making may involve how they justify their authority to students; through status-based justifications as in "because I'm the teacher," or through community-based justifications, as in collaboratively established classroom norms.

Teacher as Member

While the teacher is the leader of the classroom, they are also a member of it. The teacher must make decisions for a group of eighteen to twenty-five developing individuals while being part of the group dynamic themselves. Jackson argues that teachers have an "outsized importance" in the classroom: if teachers miss a day, the whole classroom dynamic is "off," whereas if an individual student is absent, the class can proceed normally. A teacher and their students spend so much time together that the classroom social network includes a unique and bidirectional relationship between the teacher and students (Hendrickx et al. 2016). Research on classroom peer ecology recognizes that "teachers are the one professional in a child's life who have the opportunity to view the whole child in relation to the social ecology in which he or she is embedded" and argue that this position allows the teacher to act as an "invisible hand" who can and should "shape the general peer ecology by discreetly managing classroom interaction patterns and activities" (Farmer, McAuliffe Lines,

and Hamm 2011, 248).[10] In other words, teachers' personalities and decisions impact students' group relationships, and vice versa (Gest and Rodkin 2011; Hendrickx et al. 2016).

While work on classroom peer ecology has yet to name teachers' role in classroom peer ecologies as explicitly ethical, the research has clear implications for teachers' ethical decision-making. [11] It suggests that teachers' ethical decision-making involves how teachers exercise the invisible hand: being aware of any preferences for students, controlling their demeanor, and understanding existing social dynamics between peers in order to develop positive norms of behavior in the classroom (Gest and Rodkin 2011; Hendrickx et al. 2016). It requires the teacher to have a nuanced understanding of classroom power dynamics in order to guide it in directions that support, rather than diminish, students' opportunities for flourishing.

Student Relationships:

A crucial element of the dynamics of the crowded classroom are the relationships students build with each other and the impacts these have on group operations. Obviously, individual student interactions can impact teachers' ethical decision-making, particularly in the tradeoffs teachers may have to make between prioritizing different student needs. Less studied, however, are the dynamics of the class as a unit. Teachers routinely note the formation of class "personalities" (the "certain spark" that Jackson's teachers described coming from a group of twenty to twenty-five students) that subsume students' individual dispositions (p. 142). A teacher might describe last year's class as "young" and this year's as "mature," or expect a section to be rowdy based on the students enrolled and come to find that they are focused when all together. Often, teachers locate

[10] Based in ecological systems theory, classroom peer ecology is a focus area in developmental psychology that uses social network analysis and sociometric status studies to research "the social environment of classroom peers in interaction with each other" (Hendrickx et al. 2016). This growing field may have many implications for the moral relationships between teachers and students but has yet to be interpreted through the lens of philosophy of education.
[11] Although several scholars research bullying and bystander culture in terms of classroom peer ecologies and the invisible hand in ways that all but name teachers' moral and ethical role.

the responsibility for classroom personality with one or two students or specific relationships: a teacher might note that "on days that John isn't here cracking jokes it's like we have a different group of kids," or "as soon as I put Anna and Brian in a group together, their energy and excitement was contagious," yet the ways these dynamics reverberate through the class group can feel mysterious and uncontrollable.

Work on classroom peer ecologies has begun to demystify this phenomenon. First, it has found ways to measure and characterize the unique "semi-autonomous social systems" that develop between peers interacting within an aggregated social unit (Farmer, McAuliffe Lines, and Hamm 2011, 248); finding that individual student behavior changes to become more like the aggregate behavior in the group over the course of a school year (Chung-Hall and Chen 2009). Second, it has found that teacher demeanor and student interactions change between one-on-one relationships and group interactions: for example, teachers may act very warm with the whole class but much more formal with specific students, responding to the behavior of the group differently than the behavior of individuals. As class personalities form, they impact whether and to what extent students can progress through the curriculum and attain educational goods like the capacity for economic productivity or personal fulfillment (Farmer, McAuliffe Lines, and Hamm 2011).

In this way, the peer ecology of the classroom shapes teachers' ethical decision-making. Teachers' decision-making becomes heavily dependent on what they feel they can accomplish with the classroom unit and how the group will respond. Even further, teachers' ability to teach according to their moral center may be constrained or enhanced by the group dynamic. They may be unable to achieve all their aims and values with their group; or, the group may expand their ability to achieve those aims and values.

Scholars across the field of education research argue that classroom dynamics are, to an extent, controllable: the teacher can help cultivate a sense of community among students that maximizes learning (LePage et al. 2005). However, this only occurs through deliberate decision-making attuned to the interplay of values such as care, consistency, and dignity, to name just a few. Moreover, it's dependent on student personalities, experiences, and relationships that exist outside and beyond the classroom space that the teacher cannot (and should not) control. Instead, the teacher must be responsive to and aware of the dynamic. This experience can feel unethical to teachers who worry that individual students may be negatively affected by the class unit; at the same time, the class personality may help other students realize their educational aims. The challenge for teachers is to respond to the group as a unit, as well as individually, to foster a productive and positive group dynamic.

The Crowded Classroom and its Ethical Challenges and Affordances

Each of these characteristics of the crowded classroom—*size, compulsory closeness, diversity, temporal pressures, and group dynamics*—have implications for teachers' ethical decision-making. I argue that there are three types of impacts on teachers' ethical decision-making that arise from the crowded classroom: linear, second order, and sui generis, and use a case study in educational ethics to think through their impacts.

Rocky Choices: The Case of Ms. Brown

Consider the example of Ms. Brown's third-grade classroom in Meira Levinson and Sigal Ben-Porath's fictional case study, "Rocky Choices: Scientific Inquiry, Discipline, and Mental Illness at Rivers Elementary" (Levinson and Ben-Porath 2016). Ms. Brown's decision-making in this case is centered on Kate, a special needs student. In second grade, Kate received an individualized

education plan (IEP) to help address and support her increasingly frequent emotional and physical outbursts and oppositional behavior, behavior that her family and school had trouble finding a cause for. Even with the support of her family and the attentive staff at well-resourced Rivers Elementary, Kate's frequent physical and emotional outbursts made it difficult for her to make progress and friends. By third grade, however, she takes part in Ms. Brown's mainstream classroom with IEP support. Ms. Brown is an experienced teacher, and the class group is one that "[feels] good about creating the kind of community where Kate could be successful" (Levinson and Ben-Porath, p. 40). At the same time, Kate's mood-related disruptions have created challenges for Ms. Brown and the class: students privately share that they are worried about their safety, the amount of attention Kate receives from Ms. Brown, and placating Kate when she gets upset.

The case focuses on a moment during a small-group science lesson. Kate, paired with academically-motivated Philip and reserved struggling reader Frank, becomes upset by the boys' engaged argument about rock classification. Ms. Brown, noticing Kate's increased agitation, must make a split-second ethical decision about how to diffuse the situation. She may choose to send Kate out of the classroom to the solitary school space the "Think Room," switch to whole-class instruction, intervene in Kate's small group by removing her or one of the boys or changing the topic, or any other number of pedagogical choices. Each of these choices comes with ethical challenges and affordances, the prioritizing of some students' needs over others, and the possibility of moral difficulties for Ms. Brown. Using the taxonomy of the crowded classroom, we can better understand how the environment impacts Ms. Brown's ethical decision-making.

Linear challenges

Linear challenges are ethical difficulties that scale up with classroom size. Some ethical decisions are simply harder to make with twenty-five students than with one, ten, or fifteen students: the complexity of those decisions make not significantly change, but they may feel more weighty or intense because they impact the lives of more students. Linear challenges can be understood as pure scale problems, as far as pure scale problems are an accurate way of describing human behavior. For example, if a teacher meets with one student at lunch to check in about what's going on at home, that means he can't meet with the six, fifteen, or twenty-two other students whose out-of-school concerns are also impacting their work. The moral difficulty of making distributive tradeoffs with his time may grow with the number of students with whom he cannot connect. In this way, linear challenges involve aspects of the crowded classroom's *size* (in terms of sheer individual numbers), *diversity* (in terms of competing individual diverse needs), and *temporal pressures* (in terms of time as a scarce resource).

In *Rocky Choices*, Ms. Brown's decision of where to expend her energy in this ethical dilemma can be partially understood as a linear challenge. When she notices Kate's agitation, Ms. Brown is helping a different group with rock classification. The first step in Ms. Brown's decision-making process involves whether to leave the students she's working with (who are confused about the basic task at hand) to focus on Kate, Philip and Frank (who are academically succeeding at the activity). Ms. Brown likely won't feel an exactly proportional amount of moral difficulty in deciding whether to leave the four members of her current group for the three members of Kate's group, but the group size and corresponding need may impact her decision making. Her decision may also have a proportional impact on her sense of satisfaction about her craft performance (Santoro 2018). Ms. Brown may feel like she is shirking her professional values by leaving four students before they fully understand the academic material, and this may feel worse to her than if

she was leaving a pair of students. Conceptualizing the decision in this way shows that linear challenges can also be about values conflicts. However, if she doesn't leave the group, Kate may cause a disruption for the entire class—which would be worse, in a utilitarian sense, for the class as a whole. The nature of linear challenges makes corresponding affordances unlikely.[12]

Second Order Challenges

A different scale problem altogether, second order challenges capture the moral difficulties that arise because classroom decisions impact not only one or more students in the moment, but how multiple students act and perceive a teacher's decision *over space and time.* In addition to size, diversity, and temporal pressure, second-order challenges reflect the importance of compulsory closeness in ethical decision-making. Compulsory closeness means that, spatially, teacher decisions are seen and heard by other students, so a teacher's decision changes the behavior even of students the decision was not meant for. Students watch how teachers respond to their classmates and calibrate their behavior, expectations, learning, and belief in the "moral contract" of the classroom as a result (Sizer and Sizer 1999).

Some of the options open to Ms. Brown may be understood in terms of second-order impacts. For example, Ms. Brown may choose to remove Kate from the classroom and send her to the Think Room where she can cool down in private.[13] This choice would be one that Ms. Brown made for Kate—ostensibly, it involves only the two of them. However, in the bounded space of the classroom, students will watch Ms. Brown make this decision, and will each have their own reaction to it. Moreover, each reaction will involve the student's perspective on Ms. Brown as an

[12] Although, not totally impossible. I leave this open for others to investigate.
[13] This choice would be ethically ambiguous for other reasons that are drawn out in the full case, including whether such spaces are ever ethical or developmentally-appropriate for students in Kate's position, and Kate's own complicated feelings about the space, including her gratitude towards it when school becomes "overwhelming."

ethical classroom leader. Some may be relieved she has taken charge; some may be jealous that she's letting Kate skip a lesson they dislike; some may feel sad for Kate. "Ms. Brown is in a bind," Meira Levinson discusses in her analysis of this case in "Theorizing Educational Justice" (2023). "What may *be* most educationally just from an adult perspective may not be *perceived* by the students as most just." Ms. Brown's knowledge of students' perceptions of her own ethical actions must factor into her decision-making as well. In the event that Ms. Brown makes a different decision about Kate sometime in the future, students will likely "take notice of [that] inconsistency, and will remind [her] of it later" (Murphy 2020).

This last point gestures to how compulsory closeness can cause increasing ethical difficulties for teachers over time. Given the length of the school year and the trajectory of child development, teachers have a responsibility to their students in the future as well as during the present moment of decision-making. When making a choice, teachers must anticipate its ethical consequences in the *moment*, the near and far *futures of the classroom environment* (an hour, a few days, a month or a semester ahead), and the near and far *futures of the child's academic, social and emotional development* over the course of their lives. It's impossible for a teacher to foresee all the potential consequences of a decision along all these dimensions, not to mention weigh them against the needs of the moment, and so the dilemmas arising from temporal second-order challenges seem intractable and unavoidable (Colnerud 1997). Ms. Brown is clearly concerned with Kate's well-being as she weighs her decision, but she also must think about the long-term flourishing of her other students, like Frank, who rarely engages academically yet has become excited about this lesson. She also must think of the long-term impacts on the whole group. Despite Ms. Brown's best efforts at making ethical decisions about Kate earlier in the year, we know that students' private concerns have already impacted their behavior: they "visibly [tense] up whenever

Kate was nearby," sometimes even "concentrating more on mollifying her than on the subject of the lesson" (p. 41). Students' "long memories" (Murphy, 2020) mean that Ms. Brown's decisions layer upon one another over time; even if she were to remove Kate from the classroom now, that decision and its tradeoffs could not be evaluated in isolation.[14]

Education philosophers Lauren Gatti and Paula McAvoy, however, provide a more positive perspective on the temporal nature of second-order challenges (Gatti and McAvoy (under contract)). In their research on teachers' ethical dilemmas, they develop the framework of an "ethical long view," the "forward ethical thinking that teachers need to be engaged in so they can see their work not just as right versus wrong, but as kind of a constant tinkering towards repair" (Welsh 2019). The fact that students and teachers must live together over the school year can lead to relationships able to withstand momentary ethical difficulties and provide ongoing opportunities for repairing harm and teachers' moral injury. What seemed like an ethical dilemma in the moment may resolve itself over time. Gatti and McAvoy point towards the temporal and spatial ethical affordances of the crowded classroom rather than only its challenges. Teachers have the impossible task of understanding the ethical implications of their decisions for many students over an extended period of time; but they also may be able to use these structures to resolve or repair ethical challenges over time.

Sui Generis Challenges

In contrast to the prior two ethical challenges that are both based in a unidirectional model of decision-making, *sui generis* challenges arise because of the interconnected classroom group dynamic. The "crowded classroom" is characterized by the spontaneity and unpredictability of

[14] For an excellent portrait of how second-order challenges shift over the course of the school year, see Murphy (2020).

many developing individuals interacting under temporal and spatial conditions, and students themselves are agents whose decision-making impacts each other and the teacher in a constant and complex iteration. These challenges aren't visible from linear perspectives on ethical decision-making. Nor do they arise out of the knock-on effects of 1:1 decision-making in conditions of compulsory closeness. Instead, they bring into play all aspects of the crowded classroom: size, compulsory closeness, diversity, temporal pressures, and especially group dynamics.

Thinking through how group dynamics operate in the crowded classroom can help parse out Ms. Brown's decision in *Rocky Choices.* Ms. Brown, as the classroom "leader," has an obligation to keep her students safe. This obligation likely shapes her decision to center Kate, to keep her and her classmates safe from her physical outbursts. But as a member of the classroom community, Ms. Brown's actions create iterative reactions from her students, which she can constrain—to a certain extent—by exercising her "invisible hand." For example, previously in the year, her students "had learned that Ms. Brown was not open to accusations that 'Kate messes everything up'" (p. 41). This knowledge of Ms. Brown's expectations presumably stops any oversized, immediate, negative student reactions to a Kate-centered decision. However, students had "privately expressed concern…. to each other when an exciting learning activity came to an abrupt end following one of Kate's mini explosions." The invisible hand directs, but does not control, possibilities for student reaction in the crowded classroom.

Moreover, student relationships, and iteration between teacher leadership and student agency, can help explain the development of the dilemma. This moment isn't determined solely by Ms. Brown and her relationship with Kate, it arises out of the peer ecology of the classroom—in which Kate's classmates welcome, yet have developed concerns about, her. These dynamics in turn were shaped by Ms. Brown's prior ethical decisions to lead "a number of conversations with

the students about inclusive communities that honor the many kinds of difference," a decision for intergroup competence development entirely appropriate for a group of diverse individuals bound by compulsory closeness. Her ethical-instructional decision was facilitated by a student grouping that somehow, as a unit, had the disposition to be "excited to identify their many differences and to discuss how classroom norms and procedures enabled everyone to 'be their best selves'" (p. 40). We can imagine another grouping of students who didn't have this disposition and instead were rude, dismissive, or outright exclusive to Kate; we can imagine another teacher who did not have the expertise or personality to draw out her students' "best selves;" we can imagine a classroom with four more students whose emotional needs were greater and more disruptive than Kate's. The peer ecology and ethical dilemmas in each of those communities would be very different.

The options available to Ms. Brown to resolve the dilemma would be very different as well. Ms. Brown has already leaned on the peer ecology to support her ethical decision-making in the leadup to this moment. She has leveraged what she knows about Phillip, Frank, and Kate to create a grouping that she thought might be positive for all students involved. (Of course, she was probably also making the same considerations for the other groups of three in the classroom, and maybe she didn't prioritize Kate's group as much as she could have, in terms of linear challenge tradeoffs). In the moment when Ms. Brown noticed Kate's agitation, she could continue to lean on group affordances further, perhaps bringing in Kate's closest friend from another group to mediate or taking Kate on a listening tour to experience the learning occurring around the classroom. She could exercise her invisible hand to prompt particular social arrangements in Kate's small group: as the case proposes, she could have the "boys present their argument to Kate for adjudication," or "move one of the boys out of the group." The peer ecology creates new opportunities for the

teacher-as-member, but these opportunities come with risks: Ms. Brown cannot control how students will react to these choices. Even if she tries to limit student interaction at this moment, in order to try to simplify the situation, by "[shifting] to whole-class instruction, scrapping the current lesson plan and perhaps diminishing all children's active engagement in learning," (p. 43), the children—individually and collectively—could continue to behave in such a way that continues to agitate Kate. Or, they could "be their best selves," and start the class on a riveting discussion about rock types that calms Kate down or makes her laugh. Teachers are not the only ethical decision-makers.

Or, even before Ms. Brown can act, perhaps another student drops a rock, and it shatters, shocking Kate out of her state. Perhaps the principal announces over the loudspeaker that it's time for the third-grade students to line up for class pictures. Thinking through sui generis challenges requires understanding the fragility of any decision in the face of interruption-- an essential, if random, aspect of ethical decision-making in the crowded classroom.

Teachers reading this case will know there are countless possibilities for Ms. Brown in this moment, each hinging on the sui generis impacts of the crowded classroom. The job of this essay isn't to resolve the case, but to understand its ethical complexity. Sui generis impacts change the options for peer-to-peer involvement and the emotional state of the student and teacher, shaping the teacher's decision-making. Rather than viewing the teachers' attention as the fundamental scarce resource, we begin to see students' attention to one another as almost infinite resources for growing students' capacity for healthy personal relationships, intergroup competence, treating others as equals, and the ability to achieve academically. Rather than viewing the teacher as the sole actor, we begin to see the students as ethical and community agents in their own right. In this

understanding, the challenge for teachers involves taking students' agency seriously while dealing with the natural dynamics of teacher as leader and teacher as member.

Conclusion

Technical research on teacher practice has shown teacher decision-making to be context-based and adaptive. Philosophical research on the teaching profession has shown it to be imbued with ethical and moral significance. However, much of this work has ignored the main environmental conditions in which teachers operate, and so have missed key parts of a theory of ethical decision-making in education. A sound theory of teachers' ethical decision-making must consider the environmental conditions of the classroom: the characteristics of size, compulsory closeness, diversity, temporal pressures, and group dynamics that make up classroom crowdedness and create linear, exponential, and sui generis challenges and affordances. This essay lays the groundwork for an environmental approach to theorizing teachers' ethical decision-making and does an initial exploration of that groundwork, defining the features of classroom "crowdedness" and thinking through how those features create ethical complexity.

If I'd had this language in my own crowded classroom, I imagine it would have helped me make sense of some of the dilemmas I faced. Perhaps I could have had it in the back of my mind while making in-the-moment decisions, or used it with colleagues during grade-level meetings to think through challenges in our practice—*why did this decision feel so hard to make? Could it be because it's a linear, second-order, or sui generis challenge? What are the "crowded" characteristics at play here? Could any of them be used to help me resolve this dilemma?* While I could imagine asking myself or my trusted colleagues these questions individually, I would have been much better positioned to consider them if I'd had supportive professional contexts in which to do so—like professional development opportunities that helped me name and discuss ethical

issues and recognized, rather than tried to reduce, the complexity of the classroom environment. Using this framework as context for developing my "invisible hand" and the kind of pedagogy that supports positive group dynamics might have helped me envision new possibilities for resolving dilemmas. Imagining these shifts in the field means imagining how to better support teachers in making decisions that preserve their moral center, resolve ethical dilemmas, and do right by their students in their busy, messy, moral environment.

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TEACHERS' ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING IN THE FACE OF INJUSTICE: DISCRETION AND PHRONESIS IN THE "ONE BEST SYSTEM"

Introduction

Teachers have a professional ethical responsibility to make decisions for the students in their care, decisions that allow students to grow, learn, and flourish. Yet teachers in American K-12 schools routinely express that they experience challenges to this responsibility stemming from the "system" or "structure" of schooling. Schools are places that are open to both "school-based" and "contextual" injustices, that is, the "lack of resources, training, and professional supports for educators, unjust rules and regulations, or inappropriate policies" in schools, as well as injustices that originate outside of the school, such as "poverty, trauma, lack of health care, and racial and economic segregation" (Levinson 2015, p.14). Both these types of injustices impact students, and teachers' professional responsibilities include attempting to mitigate these injustices through their individual ethical decision-making. However, constraints placed on teachers by the system of K-12 schooling in the United States, which assumes a managerial and hierarchical structure to their decision-making, make this individual ethical decision-making difficult.

Scholars attempting to understand how teachers exercise individual ethical decision-making within these constraints have used the frameworks of *phronesis* and *discretion* to describe how teachers mediate between policies and principles on one hand, and the particularities of individuals and contexts on the other. *Phronesis*, a concept originating from Aristotelian philosophy, has come to refer to the metacognitive "practical wisdom" teachers use to resolve ethical issues (Aristotle, 2000; Dunne, 1993; Kristjánsson, 2021; Noel, 1999). Discretion, a concept from political and managerial theory of street-level bureaucracy, refers to the professional responsibility of state workers (like social workers, police officers, and teachers) to determine how

policies are carried out given the complex human dimensions of their work (Lipsky, 2010). These two concepts have rarely been connected in the literature (see Rowe, 2012, for an exception). However, as frameworks for understanding teachers' ethical reasoning, they have several commonalities that can help illuminate the relationship between systemic injustice and ethical conduct in education. Empirical studies examining teachers' ethical reasoning through policy implementation cases can open the "black box" to see what phronesis and discretion look like on the fine-grained level of teacher decision-making in the face of school-based and contextual injustices.

This paper offers a descriptive study of how experienced teachers reason through a "normative case study in educational ethics" (NCS) that presents an ethical dilemma involving a tradeoff between systems-level policy and individual student need. This paper adds to the empirical literature on discretion and phronesis by describing themes in the ethical reasoning of 149 teachers working in a large city district where mitigating systemic injustices through their individual decision-making on behalf of students is a feature of their everyday practice. I describe three themes in their ethical reasoning that emerge during a professional development (PD) experience where they reasoned through a fictional NCS titled "Promotion or Retention?" (Levinson & Fay, 2016). NCS are richly-detailed and morally-nuanced depictions of ethical dilemmas in education, written to illustrate the injustices that shape educator decision-making and spark discussions of how best to resolve them. I analyze journal entries participants completed as they reasoned through the NCS, and transcripts of their small-group discussions about the NCS, to answer the following research questions:

1. **What are the characteristics of experienced teachers' ethical decision-making when faced with structural injustices in a dilemma of educational policy**

implementation?

2. **What do these characteristics illustrate about phronesis and discretion?**

This project aims to center work on ethics and justice in conversations among teachers themselves, whose perspectives are often marginalized in policy development. It reflects Iris Marion Young's (2022) suggestion that: "Rational reflection on justice begins in hearing, in heeding a call, rather than in asserting and mastering a state of affairs, however ideal. The call to "be just" is always situated in concrete social and political practices that precede and exceed the philosopher" (p. 5). This paper listens to the call from teachers that the system in which they work is unjust and that they want support on how to make decisions under these conditions. Over the course of the professional development, several teachers vocalized this call themselves, such as Joshua, who explained,

> "Students are falling through the cracks all the time, despite attempts to sort of create a net…that's something that goes beyond just resources that are delivered in schools. Students also then leave school and go live a life outside school, and there's additional resources and needs outside there that we're not meeting. So then I guess there's like another ethical question. If you are a teacher in that imperfect world, and you still have to do the best you can do, how do you respond?"

Joshua's question is a partially a *normative* one: he asks what just systems and ethical decision-making *should* look like. However, in this paper, I'll attempt to answer Joshua's question *descriptively,* to show what ethical decision-making in the current, "imperfect world" of K-12 education in the United States *does* look like, leaving normative claims for another project. First, I'll review how the current system is designed to answer this question, and how this creates some of the injustices teachers must mitigate in their practice; I'll also review what answers the literature on street-level bureaucrats and teacher phronesis may have about how teachers make ethical decisions. Then, I'll describe how I analyzed teachers' ethical reasoning

in the face of school-based and contextual injustices in the case at hand. I find that teachers' ethical decision-making in the face of injustices in this case had three characteristics: it was individually-focused, holistic, and pragmatically flexible. While these findings are limited by the specifics of this case and study, I close by suggesting possible implications for theory, practice, and future research.

Literature Review

Teacher Decision-Making in the "One Best System"

The structure of the American K-12 system of education contains several assumptions about how teacher decision-making operates. These assumptions make ethical decision-making at the individual level challenging for teachers. Historically speaking, the structures of the modern urban school system were designed at the turn of the 20th century as a "one best system" to efficiently house and process large numbers of children at one time in order to serve a basic childcare function and prepare students for an industrialized capitalist economy (Tyack, 2001). This design followed the top-down administrative structure of, first, the factory, and then the corporate, model, creating hierarchical school districts where the superintendent is in charge of the principals, who are in charge of the teachers, who are in charge of the students (Kaestle & Foner, 1983). In this system, teachers are expected to simply implement policy decisions made above them in the hierarchy (Mehta, 2013a). Age-graded classrooms and "egg-crate" environments in which classrooms are separated by age, run by a single teacher, and nested within large buildings are vestiges of this factory-model design. State-standardized tests and traditional grading policies, which play a specific role in the case at the heart of this study, support standardized decision-making at various levels of school bureaucracy and operations. This design works to limit teachers' autonomy (Au, 2011; Jackson, 1990; Mehta, 2013b).

However, at the same time, this system is "loosely coupled," meaning that, in reality, there is considerable wiggle room and imperfect oversight as decisions move through the institutional hierarchy. This means that teachers have opportunities to exercise their own decision-making power in this system (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Weick, 1976). Moreover, in the "egg-crate" environment, teachers are usually alone in their classrooms with their students--and so are the only ones physically present to make in-the-moment ethical decisions about their care. These realities put teachers in the fraught position of exercising considerable judgment within their classrooms while limited by a structural design outside of their control. This is an impossible burden that poses a challenge to teachers' ethical decision-making, makes it difficult for teachers to mitigate social injustices in their classroom, and may constitute a "school-based injustice" in its own right (Bates, 2010; Levinson, 2015).

Teacher Discretion: Ethical Decision-Making that Mediates Between Policies and Individuals

From this structure arises the role and dilemmas of the street-level bureaucrat (SLB). The teacher, as SLB, is expected to implement policies designed by leadership who are removed from their context. They must use their discretion to tailor the policy to meet the needs of their students, and to choose how to implement policy when the sheer number of decisions they must make render it impossible for anyone to monitor them all (Mehta, 2013a, p. 251; Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977). While it has long been acknowledged that, as actors in loosely coupled systems, SLBs have discretion (Lipsky, 2010; Weick, 1976), only more recently have scholars begun to think about the moral, ethical, or justice-related aspects of that discretion. Kelly (1994) recognizes that teachers, as SLBs, use discretion to orchestrate outcomes that are compatible with their "visions of justice." In her interview study with teachers, Kelly finds that the

organizational cultures of district systems and specific schools shapes and constrains teachers' ability to make decisions that are compatible with their vision of justice. However, Kelly's explanations of teachers' reasoning about justice in the resource-scarce schools in which they work is one of simple tradeoffs between the teacher's "ideal" and "second-best principle" of distributive justice.[15] While helpful, this may oversimplify how teachers make decisions within the complex ethical environment of the classroom, as discussed in Chapter 1. The field would benefit from further studies of teachers' ethical reasoning that recognize a larger range of ethical challenges and decision-making constraints beyond resource distribution in schools.

In his ethnography on social workers, Zacka argues that SLB discretion is expressly tied to complex, environmentally-situated challenges of moral decision-making for justice. Zacka, discussing morality rather than justice but clearly linking the two, notes the complexity of how "proper implementation of public policy depends on [SLB's] capacity to act as sensible moral agents who can, among other things, interpret vague directions, strike compromises between competing values, and prioritize the allocation of scarce resources" (Zacka, 2017). Like Kelly, and as noted elsewhere about teachers working in the "one best system," Zacka finds that SLB's moral discretion is constrained by their working environment (Phelan & Janzen, 2021). Zacka argues that to manage this discretion and the "cognitive dissonance" between their ideals about justice and professional ethics and the reality of policy implementation, SLBs develop "moral dispositions." These patterns of professional ethical decision-making are pathological in that they are reductive and limiting, "eroding" their moral attunement over time. Zacka's findings suggest a pessimism about SLB decision-making to mitigating injustice—that it eventually fails in the face of the bureaucratic environment.

[15] For discussions of how educational justice can be conceptualized as and beyond distributive justice, see Brighouse et al., 2018; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007.

Phronesis: Ethical Decision-Making that Mitigates Between Principles and Particulars

A more optimistic picture of teachers' ethical decision-making comes from the concept of *phronesis* in philosophy of education, which conceptualizes ethical and moral reasoning as a dynamic "metacognitive capacity" developed through professional practice (Kristjánsson, 2021). Eisner describes phronesis as a "kind of morally pervaded practical wisdom" that is

> "deliberative, it takes into account local circumstances, it weighs tradeoffs, it is riddled with uncertainties, it depends upon judgement, profits from wisdom, addresses particulars, it deals with contingencies, is iterative and shifts aims in process when necessary… Its aim is to arrive at good but imperfect decisions with respect to particular circumstances" (Eisner, 2002, p. 375).

Conceptualizations of phronesis in the philosophy of education literature abound and have recently seen a resurgence in the field's shift away ethical codes of conduct towards situated resolution of complex ethical dilemmas (Burbules, 2019; Cooke & Carr, 2014; Flyvbjerg, 2011; Levinson, 2015). Linked to Schon's creative model of the reflective practitioner and the feminist "corporeal turn" for theorizing professional practice through lived experiences in the specific places where it occurs, phronesis is a counter-framework to the managerialism of the "one best system" (Eisner, 2002; Kinsella, 2010; Pickup, 2020; Schön, 1983). In fact, Pickup (2020) suggests that phronesis could serve as the preferred decision-making framework of teachers "committed to a social justice agenda" because of how it supports social values in contrast to the "top-down management of learning" of the current education system. Like discretion, phronesis is a way of conceptualizing how professionals make decisions that mediate between high-level or abstract thinking (policies, in discretion; moral principles, in phronesis) and the particularities of individuals, contexts, and circumstances. However, in contrast to Zacka's vision of moral attunement eroding over time, phronesis conceptualizes ethical decision-making as developing over time.

Though phronesis has been theoretically used to describe how teachers and school leaders make decisions, it has been difficult to study empirically (Halverson, 2004; Kristjánsson, 2021). Because phronesis typically occurs in-the-moment and intuitively in teacher practice, it can be difficult to observe or understand through self-report. The field does not have many empirical studies illustrating how teachers reason through ethical dilemmas in education using phronesis. Phelan (2005) illustrated the development of phronesis in a single teacher education candidate case study through interpreting documents, classroom observations, and interviews. Halverson (2004) suggests that artifacts, such as policies and programs, can "serve as occasions to document the expression of phronesis in context." And Kristjanson (2021) recommends an educational research program in psychology to study phronesis and its development. However, these are exceptions that prove the rule. Thus, in current philosophy of education and teacher practice discourse, phronesis functions mostly as an umbrella term, lacking the specificity that would help it serve teachers calling for guidance on how to act ethically.[16]

Recently, promising visions for studying phronesis have come out of literature on case-based reasoning and discussion. Levinson and Fay argue that normative case studies—with their attention to particularities, context, and relationships in the ethical dilemmas they portray— require phronetic ethical reasoning (Levinson & Fay, 2016). While not speaking of NCS specifically, Eisner also posits that the kind of deliberation inspired by context- and detail-rich cases may be able to illuminate phronesis (Eisner, 2002, p. 382). NCS provide a sort of controlled space in which to study ethical reasoning: case users must consider both ethical principles and the richly-textured, realistic contexts of the case study in their case reasoning, but they are able to do so at a remove from personal, in-the-moment decisions. Moreover, journal entries and discussion transcripts can

[16] Many thanks to Jal Mehta for this point.

capture educators' reasoning about the dilemma as it unfolds, rather than retrospectively about a decision made in-the-moment.

In terms of connecting discretion and phronesis, an NCS that explores the conflict between managerial policy implementation and meeting individual need can help illuminate the kinds of ethical reasoning that teachers display when trying to mitigate injustice in the gap between policy and individuals. In the next section, I describe a study that used such an NCS and how a thematic analysis of teachers' ethical reasoning about the case may be able to illustrate features of phronesis and discretion.

Methods

Study Context and Positionality

The NCS-based ethical reasoning analyzed in this paper comes from 149 teachers who participated in a professional development (PD) centered on NCS discussion. This PD was part of a research-practice partnership between the Justice in Schools program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and the Equity and Social Studies Department (ESSD)[17] of a large city school district. The partnership aimed to "advance discussion of ethical dilemmas for equity and civic life," supporting individual educators and school groups to "engage in difficult conversations for equity and justice, and grow as connected, ethical participants in our schools, city, and world" (see Appendix 1 for an anonymized version of our partnership overview). This research-practice partnership built on the district's prior work using NCS to strengthen educators' capacities for civic engagement by discussing ethical dilemmas with colleagues. Our partnership team consisted of the director and assistant director of the ESSD and the PI and research assistants from the Justice in Schools Initiative at Harvard. Many of the partnership team members had, at one point in their

[17] This department title, and all participant names, are pseudonyms.

careers, been classroom teachers in large urban districts. All the Justice in Schools initiative members had a background in philosophy or philosophy of education and had been trained to use NCS as a philosophical practice as well as a pedagogical one—that is, they had been trained to listen for values and normative claims in participants' reasoning through the case.

As a longtime member of the Justice in Schools research team, I had previously helped project manage and develop the multimedia NCS used for the PD as well as the PD structure and content, (both described below). I also led several sections of the PD discussions, and led the management and analysis of the PD data for our research team. To help develop the multimedia NCS and lead the PD, and through subsequent data analysis, I drew from and negotiated my identity as a former public-school teacher in a district similar to our partner's. My identification with many of the experiences of the teachers in our study impacted my analysis: I approached the study looking for "goodness" in their experiences and perhaps defaulted to an "insider's" identification with the teacher role in relationship to the district, especially as I viewed this project as a way to connect teacher voice to policy development (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; McCorkel & Myers, 2003). I am grateful to my research team members and many interlocuters for helping to balance my perspective throughout the analytic process.

Data Collection

Participants were recruited for the PD and associated study through emails and outreach from the ESSD. Participation in the PD was limited to district educators. The PD proceeded in two parts: in Part 1, educators completed an online multimedia NCS independently and on their own time. In Part 2, they met with 6-10 colleagues and a trained facilitator in a synchronous online PD session to discuss the dilemma using a protocol. Participants needed to complete Part 1 in order to receive

a Zoom invitation to Part 2, and they needed to provide consent in order for their data to be collected and used for this study. (See Appendix 2 for detailed information on the PD and associated study timeline and sampling strategy). Ultimately, 149 educators completed both parts of the PD and consented to participate in the study.

Our research team collected data from several sources over the course of this experience: a pre-survey that gathered participants' demographic information as well as open response questions about their experiences discussing ethical dilemmas; click data and open-response journal entries gathered as participants worked through the NCS independently; group discussion transcripts; and two post-surveys evaluating and following up on their experience. To analyze participants' ethical reasoning about the case for this paper, I focused on their journal entries (open responses to broad questions about their reasoning process that they were prompted to complete at intervals as they worked through the NCS) and discussion transcripts (group responses to broad questions about the case and their reasoning). (See Appendix 5 for more information about each data source, the journal prompts participants responded to in Part 1, and the discussion protocol used for Part 2).

Case Study

The PD used an online, interactive multimedia version of the NCS "Promotion or Retention?" (Levinson, 2016). This fictional case presents the dilemma of the eighth-grade teaching team at "Innovation Academy" as they decide whether to promote or retain an eighth-grade student, Ada, who is performing far below grade level and has recently experienced significant trauma. Of special consideration in the case is a question of the relationship between policy implementation and individual need: Innovation Academy, under pressure from the state through a turnaround

effort, had recently created strict grading and promotion standards. Ada is currently not meeting the standards for promotion.

One way to interpret the central dilemma of the case is whether the eighth-grade teachers should use their discretion to bend district and school-based policies for Ada, given her circumstances, and send her to either the traditional feeder high school or the district alternative school for overage, under-accredited students. The case is written to include school-based and contextual injustices that would likely shape and constrain the decision-making of an educator facing this case (Levinson and Geron, forthcoming). For example, Innovation Academy's district is large and resources are scarce, so they have canceled summer school—a possible workaround for Ada—to save funds. Additionally, Innovation Academy is facing a teacher staffing problem and hired a long-term substitute with a theater degree as Ada's science teacher. Ada is also facing many contextual injustices. She is currently in foster care, grieving after the death of her brother by gun violence. These contextual details require discretion and *phronesis* to understand and make a decision for Ada.

As an interactive, multimedia experience, participants experienced the narrative of the case through short videos and explored the complexities of the case by interacting with artifacts, such as Ada's report card, the Innovation Academy school profile, and research on promotion and retention statistics. (See Appendix 6 for examples). At multiple points throughout the hour-long experience, they were prompted to pause and record their current thinking about the dilemma in light of the case materials they had just seen or interacted with.

Sample, Context, and Limitations

Our participants arrived to the PD rich in the practical wisdom of serving students within the "one best system." The 149 participants who completed the PD and consented to participate in the study represented 95 different schools and had a median experience of 7 years in the district and 9 years in the profession. The majority of the participants taught middle school and high school; given the focus of the partner department, social studies teachers were over-represented in the sample. The majority of participants identified as female; 40% identified as non-Hispanic White, 38% identified as African American, Hispanic, AAPI, multiracial, or other, and 22% declined to identify themselves racially. The racial and gender demographics of our sample closely mirrored those of the district (see Appendix 4).

As teachers in this particular district, the participants were also quite experienced in dealing with school-based and contextual injustices. The district had a storied history of conflict between its central bureaucracy and classroom educators that stretched back to the districts' original 19th-century adoption of "the one best system" and managerial control of teachers. More recently, this conflict had extended into the 21st century with a revolving door of superintendents and a teaching force opposed to their technocratic reforms. In addition, the city's contextual injustices of poverty, structural racism, and gun violence, as well as its community resilience and activism, were part of the fabric of school life in the district. Given its limited resources, this was a district that routinely asked the impossible of its educators.

Given these realities, the teachers in this study were experienced in making ethical decisions to mitigate school-based and contextual injustices and experienced in using their discretion to mediate between hierarchical policy development and the needs of individual students. However, this context also made them quite skeptical about their role in implementing state policy; in fact, several participants expressed anger about or made efforts to distance

themselves from the state system in which they worked. At the same time, the PD was part of a district partnership, and run by a department known for its investment in district movements for racial and social justice. Our educators chose to participate in the PD and associated study. Indeed, even if they were skeptical about their state role, they were willing to engage with district-offered programming about justice issues and invest time in their own development in this area. Their reasoning should not be taken as representative of American K-12 educators, but as the extreme end of a spectrum of more-to-less fraught relationships between the individual and the state and experiences with mitigating injustice. This makes their reasoning even more urgent to study. Moreover, their reasoning will likely be recognizable to educators across that spectrum in American K-12 education: educators who enter the profession wanting to create meaningful learning experiences, caring relationships, and better life outcomes for their students, and who have a complex relationship to the systems that employ them and make achieving these goals more difficult than they believe it has to be.

In analyzing their decision-making, we should also consider how the case itself may influence their reasoning. The details in a normative case study and the bounds of the "world" it creates shape the opportunities for resolution and, by extension, reasoning about the case Levinson and Geron (forthcoming). The same holds true for the relationship between the case readers, their context, and the details of the case they are discussing. "Promotion or Retention?" focuses on a decision made about an individual student in a grade team meeting; it does not portray a decision made on-the-fly in a classroom environment. The characteristics of the "crowded classroom" discussed in chapter one are less salient in this case, but the grade team is still considering linear, second-order, and sui generis challenges stemming from their decision's possible future impacts and other student reactions. Because the environment in which ethical decision-making takes place

shapes those decisions, a different case, or the same case taking place in a different venue, would almost certainly elicit different forms of reasoning and different characteristics related to discretion and phronesis. Additionally, the details about Ada, including her physical appearance in the multimedia case experience and her gender, may have influenced participating educators' reasoning about the case. A follow-up study that engaged educators in multiple NCS experiences could clarify the ways in which ethical reasoning shifts across cases and contexts.

Analysis

Keeping these limitations in mind, I analyzed the data using the multi-step flexible coding process outlined by Deterding and Waters (2021), adapted to journal response and transcript data. I began by indexing the texts according to participants' *decision-making process*, coding large chunks of text that displayed *case reasoning* or provided *justification for their case decision* (Deterding & Waters, 2021, p. 19). In this first stage of coding I also created topical index codes, using the concepts of "contextual" and "school-based" injustices to locate places where participants discussed systemic factors that created barriers to decision-making in the case, such as Ada's low attendance due to changes in her foster care placement and problems with teacher staffing. I wrote memos about patterns I was seeing in these discussions, including how some teachers explicitly used the language of "injustice" to describe what Ada was experiencing in and out of school and many others used the language of "systemic problem" or "broken system." Analyzing these barriers using the lens of contextual and school-based injustices helped me to articulate how teachers' reasoning through the case attempted to mitigate injustices at the "systems" (school and societal) levels. This added a new dimension to the idea of participants' reasoning as "ethical": participants were not only attempting to make a decision that aligned with their professional ethics

and values (see chapter 3), they were attempting to make a decision that was shaped by, and had implications for, justice at the systems level.

In my second stage of coding, I began looking at the relationship between the process (reasoning) and topic (systemic injustice) codes, tracking themes of how these injustices impacted their case reasoning or the justification for their case decision. For example, many participants described how the fact that Ada had a long-term substitute as her science teacher was a school-based injustice (inferred from quotes such as "the idea that she would in any way be punished for a structural situation [of being taught science by a long-term sub] which was not her fault made me very uncomfortable"[18]) that changed their reasoning about the case (as in, "I wouldn't hold her failing science so hard against her, given the fact that the teacher himself is not a science teacher."[19]) In another example, many participants described how the trauma that Ada had experienced was a result of contextual injustices ("barriers to learning outside the school's control"[20]) that changed their reasoning about the case ("I think the trauma Ada suffered… must be considered. To hold her back due to school and government tough standards would do her a disservice."[21]) In this phase, I used code frequencies and wrote cross-case memos to identify commonalities in how participants reasoned about the dilemma given these injustices. I identified several themes in participants' ethical reasoning, including "using knowledge of student," "focusing on individual student," "using NCS resources," and "using personal experiences." I flagged emblematic and surprising quotes in each of these categories (Deterding & Waters, 2021, p. 20) and did an in-depth analysis of those quotes to refine and synthesize the themes (for example, synthesizing "using knowledge of student" and "using NCS resources" into the code "holistic

[18] Kelly, discussion group transcript
[19] Shayla, discussion group transcript
[20] Alex, journal entry
[21] James, journal entry

evaluation"). Through additional memo writing and sharing preliminary findings with my research team and outside readers, I developed three codes to describe commonalities in participants' ethical reasoning in the face of the school-based and contextual injustices in the case.

It's worth noting that a different attempted coding strategy that tied codes more specifically to the literature did not pan out. When I attempted to categorize participant reasoning processes by specific decision-making principles or theories, it became clear that very few participants (n=7) explicitly shared a principle that guided their reasoning (i.e. "children are more than a score.") Attempting to classify reasoning processes as "policy discretion" was similarly challenging, as participants rarely explicitly described their reasoning that way. Instead, coding their ethical reasoning required becoming attuned to *characteristics* or *themes* of that reasoning, rather than specific forms, moves, or principles. In this work, I drew from Santoro's (2015) "multidisciplinary hermeneutic approach," iteratively using philosophy to interpret the ethical significance of teacher's journal and discussion responses, and teacher's responses to clarify and refine philosophical concepts. Rather than disproving the literature on participant ethical reasoning, this challenge reinforced the idea that ethical reasoning involves highly situated judgments.

Findings

I found three characteristics of participants' ethical reasoning that point the way to a more specific understanding of phronesis and discretion. Their reasoning was individually-focused, holistic, and pragmatically flexible.

Focusing on the individual

In their ethical decision-making about Ada's situation, participants in this sample frequently reasoned that Innovation Academy's promotional policy was insufficiently responsive to the needs of individual students, particularly students, like Ada, who were experiencing school-based and

contextual injustices. As a result, many reasoned that implementing the policy without modification would lead to unjust life outcomes for Ada.

To mitigate this potential or perceived school-based injustice of insufficiently responsive policy, they overwhelmingly focused on the individual student, Ada, as the "primary object of moral concern" (Brighouse & Swift, 2003). Arguing that "the mission and vision of the school should be considered when making these decisions, but ultimately, it's about Ada and what's best for her as a whole," (Devin, journal entry) teachers displayed "ethically individualistic" reasoning, arguing that the most ethical decision was one that prioritized Ada and led to the most just outcome possible for her.

In one sense, this is a clear example of SLBs using discretion to prioritize their responsibility to a single client over a) their responsibility to the classroom collective of clients and b) their responsibility to the system as a whole. However, as Devin's statement showed, this "ethical individualism" did not force an either/or distinction between the individual and the other levels of the system. Teachers also considered other students, the school, and the way the school appeared to the state in the turnaround process, in their reasoning. Rather, it meant that they made a decision about school and state policy implementation based on how the policy "would affect Ada and her life" (Katelyn, journal entry). If they reasoned that the policy would likely create an unjust outcome for Ada, those "ethically individualistic" considerations outweighed considerations about procedure or the needs of the school given its previous turnaround status.

In deliberating about tradeoffs between Ada's individual outcomes and fairness to other students, teachers considered other students' needs but focused on "each child independent of other children," and how their decision-making benefited the least advantaged individual (Laura, journal entry). As Nadia wrote, "Other kids may have similar stats, but other kids did not lose a brother

this year - and they still have their parents… She really is her own case." Teachers reasoned that "other students shouldn't be the standard that Ada should be held to," and "what is right is not always fair" (Phoebe, journal entry). Ultimately, most explained that mitigating the injustices Ada faced required ethical reasoning that prioritized the individual. As Arianna deliberated in her journal,

> "As a teacher, I need to put Ada at the center of my decisions. My decision will affect the students on many more levels that I can possibly imagine… Do I have the right to create another burden in her life or do I become an agent for her progress in the right direction? What worth does Ada's best work and effort have in my decision-making process? Ada definitely has the potential to do more and be better in the future - let's not take that opportunity away from her."

Like Arianna, several teachers spoke about how this reasoning was grounded in their motivation for entering the profession and beliefs about what made a "good" teacher. As Regina explained, "I understand the whole, you know, school thing and how the school looks. But that's not what we're educators for. We're not educating a building, we're educating a child."

This kind of reasoning and use of discretion to mitigate the injustices experienced by disadvantaged students requires *phronesis*. Teachers must be able to adapt their guiding principles and professional values to the particularities of the school, the district context, and the individual student herself. They must think through multiple potential outcomes at "more levels that I can possibly imagine," as Arianna put it. Moreover, this process is speculative, as outcomes are uncertain, and "those worries [for her future] will exist no matter our decision" (Nadia, journal entry). Furthermore, it's possible that teachers exercise this type of reasoning for multiple students with multiple policies at one time, to determine how to benefit the least advantaged students. Their ability to reason in this way reflexively and quickly—as shown in journal entries as they learned the details of this case, and discussions as they deliberated the outcome—can be understood through the lens of *phronesis*.

However, there are many arguments against teachers focusing on individual students, instead of the classroom collective, the school community, or the district needs when exercising *phronesis*. At best, this kind of ethical reasoning is inefficient; at worst, it could bring about even worse injustices for students: individual teachers could exercise bias, discrimination, or poor judgment if left to make such decisions by themselves. Perhaps because this participant sample was experienced with students facing multiple forms of injustice, they generally seemed to trust their ability to accurately evaluate student needs and use discretion to modify policies to meet that need. However, new teachers or those with less experience and understanding of how contextual injustices impact students would likely need significant support in developing phronesis to this effect.

Holistic Evaluation

Educators in the study evaluated Ada holistically in order to make an ethical decision about her that could mitigate the injustices she had experienced. They rejected the system's reliance on standardized testing measurements as an incomplete, and potentially unjust, view of a student's complex, context-based situation. As Cindy wrote in her journal, "I am looking at Ada as a complete person not just a number which unfortunately our society bases a great deal of things on. We need to give people the opportunity to show what they are capable of regardless of a numerical value." The implication—often inferred, but sometimes made explicit—was that standardized forms of measurement that did not take student context into account were unjust means of evaluation. "I do not think it's fair to deny a hardworking person success because it doesn't [fit] the artificial standards of some individuals," Franklin wrote. Others, like Joshua, went so far as to argue that "there's way too much value being placed on the integrity of any grading system."

To mitigate the potential school-based injustice of insufficiently contextualized evaluation, participants synthesized information from artifacts presented in the multimedia experience, including her report card, a writing sample, a look at items in her locker, her standardized test scores, and a school profile, to reason about whether Ada's failing grades were accurate portrayals of her ability. Teachers did not reject grades and test scores outright, but they did scrutinize and judge them in context (for example, most dismissed the grades she received in science since they came from an inexperienced teacher who didn't know the material). They used their professional content knowledge and experiences with prior students to evaluate her writing sample, report card, and a short video of Ada talking about her year.

This didn't mean that teachers all came to the same conclusions; in fact, they interpreted her work differently depending on their grade level, school context, and content knowledge. For example, some teachers argued that Ada's work sample showed "she definitely is engaging deeply with the social studies curriculum and her thoughts are spot-on, despite grammatical errors" (Kylie, journal entry) while others thought it showed "glaring deficits" (Alex, journal entry). In this section, I'll refrain from evaluating their reasoning to focus on its common form: even for teachers who came to different conclusions, evaluating "a complete person" meant synthesizing professional knowledge about the student's academic ability beyond grades and test scores with knowledge about their emotional state and social context.

In their reasoning, teachers often discussed that one injustice of an insufficiently responsive system was that the "one size fits all model…does not take into [account] the impact loss and trauma has on the child" (Lena, journal entry). Teachers argued that it would be unethical to hold Ada responsible for how social injustices out of her control that caused her trauma impacted her learning. "When children experience a traumatic event, or multiple, it impacts their brain and how

they learn. Ada is not at fault for that, that's a result of society, systems, and marginalization," wrote Joline. Mitigating this injustice through ethical reasoning meant bringing knowledge of Ada's trauma, the supports she may need, and her unique ways of coping into evaluating her work. Over and over again in their responses, teachers rejected any evaluation that did not address Ada's emotional needs.

Several teachers also reasoned about how unjust systems of power impacted individual evaluation methods, viewing Ada as "the recipient of a broken system" (Candice, discussion group). Latisha described how the case "speaks to the level of inequity that takes place when it comes to children of color. Like, you're going to fail a grade, because you get a bad score on one test. That doesn't happen everywhere." While Latisha's example here wasn't the case for Ada (whose report card included failing scores on multiple tests and assessments), her point illustrates how teachers in this study, experienced in a district dealing with structural racism, evaluated students like Ada (who is Latina) in the context of larger societal injustices.

Synthetic, holistic evaluation as illustrated in this study is also a matter of *phronesis*. It requires nuanced professional judgement about student learning and assignment quality, real-world experience of school-based injustices, and understanding of how contextual injustices impact students. This kind of knowledge and evaluative skill is a matter of building professional judgment, content expertise, and relationships with students over time. Similar to the prior section, early-career teachers, and those with fewer opportunities to develop their content knowledge and expertise with social-emotional learning and trauma-informed instruction, could exercise poor judgment in evaluating the capabilities of students like Ada. Heela, an outlier who argued for standardized grading procedures, spoke to this from her own experience. As she explained to her discussion group,

> "I'm straying away from teachers making those really tough decisions. Because me as a third-year teacher versus me now is so drastically different… I was *that* teacher who only thought in that linear way. And now, I have just adapted and grown so much. And I think that's how teaching is… If I'm so different from who I used to be, I just don't think we can place those decisions on teachers, especially at schools where they've been teaching for like 1, 2, 3 years."

However, what Heela was asking for wasn't a traditional standard grading system; she admitted she no longer trusted those. She was suggesting that a systems-level assessment that built in more holistic evaluations, like standards-based or portfolio grading, could help even less-experienced teachers accurately evaluate Ada. However, in the absence of changes to standard grading and evaluation practices, participants were left to exercise discretion and *phronesis* and evaluate Ada by their own synthetic judgment.

Pragmatic Flexibility

Teachers displayed flexible, pragmatic reasoning to make an ethical decision that brought about the most just outcome possible for Ada. In the face of school-based injustices such as the loss of summer school, inadequate staffing, and the lack of special education evaluation for Ada,[22] participants devised flexible workarounds based on their knowledge of district operations. These flexible workarounds displayed *phronesis* and discretion in how they modified decision-making principles to the particularities of school and district context.

Several participants discussed how this need for pragmatic flexibility arose from the inherent uncertainty of the teaching profession. They described educational decision-making as fraught with "constantly changing social issues" and the diversity and dynamism of children and their development. They explained that this reality contrasted the way the "one best system" assumed teachers would implement decisions developed out of context and handed down from above— with fidelity. As Anyeli described, "we're dealing with human beings, and they're all

[22] The first two of these are explicit premises of the case; the third was a premise inferred by many participants.

going to, you know, have different backgrounds to you, they, they're all gonna deal with trauma different ways, learn different ways, it's hard to just say, like, 'it's black and white, and these are the expectations and everybody has to meet them,' because that doesn't really work when you're dealing with children." James puts it more bluntly: "If you're a carpenter, the two by four doesn't set off. But in education, we're just working with so many dynamics." While participants didn't claim that the assumption of fidelity made decision-making in the "one best system" unjust per se, they expressed concern that decision-making that remained inflexible even when contextual workarounds could be possible could lead to unnecessarily unjust outcomes for Ada.

For example, as Carson explained in his discussion group, "I think it's extremely important that the elementary school play a role in finding [her] a good fit [for high school]." Using his discussion group member Drea, a high school teacher, as an example, he played out how he would go about trying to create a pipeline of support for Ada based on his relationship with other teachers in the district. "I need to go to Drea's high school and say Drea look here, I got [this] girl [who's three years] behind. I need you to wrap your arms around them…I can't worry about the fact that she should have got staffed [with an IEP] and all that stuff. We know that. I need the next step to be the best step." To take Carson's ethical reasoning as an example, pragmatic flexibility meant two things. One, it meant taking Ada's current non-ideal situation as the ground, and then focusing on how potential actions could lead to a better, if imperfect, outcome.[23] Two, it meant understanding and navigating the dynamics of a large city system, using one's understanding of personnel, policies, and resources to supplement or circumvent policy mandates. Outcomes for Ada thus became more or less just based on contextual details, such as "which adults will be at her receiving end" (Olivia, journal entry), whether "the classes are tracked in high school" (Kerry,

[23] Many thanks to Doris Santoro for suggesting this point.

discussion group), or whether the alternative school is "academically focused or behavior support [focused] or… [broadly] open to kids who just didn't 'fit'" (Eliza, journal entry).[24] In this way, teachers' discretion hinged on practical wisdom about the district context.

Uncertainty and dynamism are permanent features of teaching, both because teachers work with children and adolescents in development and because they work within frequently-changing organizations (particularly in large city districts that experience frequent staff turnover). These features themselves are not unjust— in fact, dynamic social groupings may create opportunities for just outcomes of ethical decision-making (as discussed in chapter 1, and as suggested through Carson's reasoning). The injustice in this case may be that the "one best system" expects managerial control and standardization when carrying out rules and procedures. In *Promotion or Retention?*, teachers are expected to make decisions within strict time frames according to procedures that don't fit how individuals grow and change as part of a classroom or district collective. We know that discretion requires SLBs to understand the details of their environment in order to mediate between the individual and collective. That understanding may also be an element of *phronesis*.

Implications & Conclusion

Teachers in this study displayed several common characteristics in their ethical reasoning about how to mitigate school-based and contextual injustices for Ada. These characteristics each illuminated and illustrated dimensions of discretion and phronesis.

First, their decision-making considered outcomes at multiple levels of the "one best system," but ultimately focused on the needs of the individual student. Teachers in this sample displayed phronesis in how they thought through potential outcomes of the policy for Ada and

[24] In the NCS narrative as well, teachers in the eighth-grade team offer contextual knowledge about the alternative school functioning as a "school-to-prison-pipeline." Participants frequently cited that contextual knowledge as key to their decision-making in the case.

weighed the needs of the other students, the school, and the district against her needs. If they determined that the policy would lead to unjust outcomes for Ada, they used discretion to shape the policy to her needs.

Second, they holistically evaluated the individual student by synthesizing professional knowledge about Ada's academic ability in context, her emotional state, and contextual injustices impacting her life. They based their decision and use of discretion on this evaluation, rather than standard grades or state test scores. They exercised phronesis in how they brought content knowledge, knowledge of the individual student, and knowledge of student context into their synthesis, and used this evaluation to implement policy at their discretion.

Third, they made decisions flexibly, accounting for the specific contexts of individuals interacting in the classroom and throughout the district. They exercised phronesis in their pragmatic forethought and responses to environmental changes and used discretion to shape the policy to the affordances and challenges of the given context.

While teachers in our sample considered the importance of implementing the standardized policy with fidelity, the characteristics of their ethical decision-making ultimately sharply contrasted the assumptions about decision-making made in the "one best system." The "one best system" was designed to limit and constrain teacher decision-making. However, the need to fit policy to individuals and context suggest that its design is flawed. In fact, teachers in our study frequently suggested that overly constrained decision-making could lead to unjust outcomes for students, particularly those experiencing multiple disadvantages in the form of school-based and contextual injustices. Given that reality, teachers must exercise phronesis to use policy discretion wisely and mitigate such injustices. Experienced teachers who have developed phronesis over time in particularly unjust district and school contexts without totally "checking out" of those

contexts—like the teachers in this study—may be especially adept at ethical decision-making that leads to just outcomes for students. Their concerns are especially worth listening to, and their practical wisdom in discretion especially worth learning from.

But the system cannot rely on phronesis alone. Not all teachers are adept at this kind of ethical decision-making, and those who are bear an impossible burden under this system design. Teachers in our study recognized this, and throughout the PD their responses called for systems change. As Stacey presciently stated, echoing Joshua's call that began this inquiry, "I don't think there's ever going to be an easy solution. Because we're not dealing with equitable outcomes, we're not dealing with equitable systems or teaching situations. And so until we figure out how to fix what's going on systemically, we're gonna always be wringing our hands and pulling our hair, trying to make the best decisions that we can make as humans." Teachers in our study claim that ethical action in unjust systems eventually requires reforming that system.

Even further, their reasoning suggests an important link between ethical action and justice as a feature of system design. Participating teachers reasoned that their ethical decision-making on an individual level could mitigate injustice, including school-based injustices caused by that flawed system design. This is a powerful role for teachers and calls for a renewed look at discretion in policy implementation, and the relationship between systems and individuals, as an aspect of justice. Perhaps educational decision-makers at the policy level would do well to see teachers as Cindy described: "Initially [in our discussion], when I thought of systems, I was thinking, Oh, I'm anti-system. But now that I go back and I reflect on that, when those teachers were talking, they needed to kind of embrace the power that they had." And perhaps teachers would do well to see themselves as Diana described: "We are the system. It's not somebody else. That's so easy in the teaching profession-- oh, you know, this is what *they* want us to do. No, I am the system. Directly."

An education system designed to support the realities of ethical decision-making for teachers—that is, an education system designed to facilitate individually-focused, holistic, and pragmatically-flexible reasoning—would look quite different from the "one best system." Imagining that redesign is beyond the scope of this paper, but the ethical reasoning described here may help spark new visions for systems design and policy implementation. As we embark on that re-envisioning, however, it's important to remember how the findings in this study are bound by the case and sample. The illustrations of ethical reasoning provided by participants in this study are not indicative of what ethical reasoning looks like among American K-12 teachers broadly, nor are they necessarily indicative of what all ethical reasoning should look like. As discussed throughout the findings section, there are good reasons why ethical decision-making should not be the responsibility of individual educators. However, perhaps the findings in this study can point in the direction of what just decision-making systems in education could look like if designed with teachers' realities in mind: they could leave more room for individual responsiveness, holistic evaluation, and pragmatic flexibility. And rather than constraining teachers' decision-making, they could support teachers in developing the phronesis to tailor policies to individuals and contexts in these ways, leading to more just outcomes for individuals like Ada.

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"CREATING JUSTICE IN MY PRACTICE:" DEVELOPING TEACHERS' VALUES THROUGH A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN EDUCATIONAL ETHICS

Introduction

The ethical dimensions of teaching are key to teacher professionalization, yet professional development opportunities for teachers rarely engage teachers' values and core beliefs. This paper focuses on a professional development experience (PD) provided to 149 K-12 educators and central office staff in a large urban school district that developed their capacity to reflect on their professional values individually and with colleagues. As its primary tool, the PD used a *multimedia normative case study* in educational ethics: a richly detailed, morally nuanced interactive case study of an ethical dilemma in education, developed to be accessible and recognizable to practitioners and policymakers (Levinson & Fay, 2016, p. 3). Used globally in teacher professional development, the normative case study method is emerging as a promising way to surface the ethical issues inherent to education in realistic, nuanced ways familiar to those in the field (Ta et al., R&R).

As part of the PD pedagogy, teachers were given the opportunity to reflect on and discuss the values important to them in their practice and how those values informed their decision-making about the case. The PD pedagogy was designed as an opportunity for teachers to reflect on their own values and the values at play in the case and discuss those values with colleagues. Notably, data from the PD shows that participants extended their values reflection and understanding beyond some of these intended outcomes. This paper describes and interprets moments where participating educators became aware of the power of values in ethical decision-making and demonstrated new insight into their own core values and how they impact their practice. Across participants and PD activities, these "aha" moments clustered into themes: the subjectivity of values interpretation, the importance of values flexibility in service of individual

student well-being, and the necessity of deliberating shared school values. My findings section will focus on three educators whose PD experiences illuminate these themes and the power of reflecting on and discussing one's values in education practice. Along the way, I will describe the set of practices the PD used to support teachers in articulating and discussing their values. Overall, this analysis shows the possibilities for teacher professional development when teachers' values are taken seriously as a central element of their decision-making.

Literature Review

Values are a central component of a teacher's professional identity. Scholars in sociology of education, teacher practice, and philosophy of education have made clear links between educators' values and their professional decision-making: from their choice to enter and remain in the profession to the daily decisions they make as part of their practice. Hansen (1995, 2021) calls the choice to enter the teaching profession a "vocation," given the role teachers' values play in motivating and sustaining that decision. Lortie (1967, 2002) describes the normative commitments particular to the teaching profession as those that articulate what a teacher believes their students, families, and communities deserve ("client responsibility") and what good teaching requires ("craft performance"). Santoro (2018) explains how, over time, the commitments teachers hold towards their students and to their profession inhere in their "moral center:" the internal compass that gauges how well they are living up to those values in their practice. Teachers must believe their practices align with their values to feel they are achieving success and doing "good work" in their position (Gardner et al., 2002). All these terms— "good work," "moral center," "craft performance," and "vocation"—capture the moral and ethical commitments, beliefs and principles that center a teacher's professional practice. Though there are nuances between these ideas, I call this set of motivations, beliefs and principles "values"

because it's an encompassing term that's accessible and recognizable to practitioners and philosophers alike.

Values play a role in teachers' everyday decision-making (Campbell, 2003, 2006; Ehrich et al., 2011; Lyons, 1990). Teachers draw on their values to weigh options, assess outcomes, and deliberate tradeoffs for decisions that range from the consequential, such as whether to report a students' major disciplinary infraction or how to respond to a parent who disagrees with the school curriculum (Levinson & Fay, 2016, 2019), to the mundane, such as whom to call on in class, what lesson materials to choose, or how to organize small groups (Ball, 2018; Campbell, 2003, 2006).

But the ubiquity of values-based decision-making in teaching creates many ethical complexities for educators. Given the nature of the classroom environment and the institutional realities of teaching, and as discussed in the previous chapters, educators are rarely able to enact their values without experiencing ethical conflict (Colnerud, 1997; Ehrich et al., 2011; Levinson, 2015). Severe instances of such conflict take the form of what scholars call "ethical dilemmas" in education: scenarios where any decision the teacher makes will require tradeoffs between their values (Levinson & Fay, 2016; Colnerud, 1995). An educator's concern in an ethical dilemma may be that the mandates of their school or district conflict with their values (Börü, 2020; Helton & Ray, 2006; Santoro, 2018; Zacka, 2017), that any decision they make will achieve some of their values while short-shifting others (Brighouse et al., 2018), or that their institutional context makes no just action possible— meaning they will inevitably harm the students whom they are personally and professionally committed to care for (Levinson, 2015).

Working through ethical dilemmas can have major consequences for teachers' ethical decision-making and their professional identities. When teachers are prevented from enacting

their values, for example by policies that run counter to their professional ethics, they may experience "demoralization:" the inability to access the moral rewards that sustain them in their profession (Santoro, 2018). When they are forced to reckon with ethical dilemmas day in and day out, they may develop "reductive dispositions," patterns of decision-making that truncate their values sensitivities and their ability to perceive the complexity of their students' moral needs (Zacka, 2017). When they knowingly and inevitably harm the students whose well-being they value, that harm reverberates back as a form of trauma Levinson calls "moral injury" (Levinson, 2015). Teachers may also become demoralized when their moral concerns aren't taken seriously or are seen as technical problems of practice rather than moral challenges (Santoro, 2018). All these potential consequences point to a need for professional experiences that take teachers' values seriously and support them in reflecting on, developing, sharing, and enacting their values to improve their decision-making, support their students, and withstand the ethical difficulties of the profession.

However, this crucial aspect of teacher decision-making is rarely a core and distinct part of teacher preparation and professional development, which typically focuses on foundational theory and technical practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Heilbronn & Foreman-Peck, 2015; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2016).[25] Even if values development is part of a teachers' preservice curriculum, it may occur without giving pre-service teachers the option of questioning their program's values system or how it maps onto their own. Moreover, once teachers leave their program, they are given few, if any, opportunities to reflect on their values and how they are

[25] It's worth noting that the anti-bias and identity-based professional development work gaining ground, particularly in large districts serving communities of color, is a crucial, long-overdue, and celebrated exception to this status quo. The project this study was based on was developed as way to compliment and extend this work in our partner district. More research on the synergy between these types of professional development initiatives would be welcome in the field.

realized or changed in context, even though philosophy and adult learning scholarship shows that values can change and grow over time (Callard, 2017). Instead, teachers typically field difficult ethical decisions on their own, rather than risk the judgment of their colleagues, even as they ask for support in articulating their values, discussing them with others, and reasoning through ethical dilemmas (Campbell, 2003; Hansen, 2021; Husu & Tirri, 2001). Kohli, Picower, Martinez and Ortiz (2015) argue that teachers, specifically those invested in radical social change, need opportunities to engage in "critical professional communities:" ongoing intentional PD and organizations that take teachers seriously as "politically-aware individuals who have a stake in teaching and transforming society" (Kohli et al., 2015). Santoro (2018) finds that giving teachers opportunities to engage in "authentic professional communities" that allow teachers to connect around shared values can support teachers in fulfilling their moral center, including those less inclined towards political action. The key element in both is a community built around shared values and beliefs.

However, the ability to identify and articulate one's values varies among teachers. Not all educators are attuned to the moral dimensions of their practice; some are more concerned with its functional aspects (Campbell, 2003; Santoro, 2018) and others articulate aims and "psychic rewards" for their practice that aren't based in value conceptualizations (Lortie, 2002). Others recognize that they have normative commitments and aims for their work that are connected to deeply-held values, but struggle to conceptualize and share those values (Joseph & Efron, 1993) or feel they are prevented from doing so by institutional norms such as a focus on technical practice or collegial loyalty (Campbell, 2005; Colnerud, 1997; Hansen, 2021; Husu & Tirri, 2001). Such teachers may benefit from personal reflection on values as part of, or even before, engaging in authentic and critical professional communities. Values-based professional

development likely needs to be differentiated to meet teachers' wherever they are on this continuum.

The bottom line is, despite understanding the importance of values development in teacher professionalism, the field has yet to articulate best practices for supporting teachers in reflecting on their values, discussing them with colleagues, and developing them in context to better resolve ethical dilemmas, remain responsible to their clients and craft, and improve their decision-making for and about their students.

This paper describes and analyzes a professional development that aimed to do just that. In March of 2021, our research team partnered with the Equity and Social Studies[26] department of a large urban school district to offer a professional development for educators and central office staff. Our goal was to support district capacity-building around discussing ethical issues in education with colleagues to better serve students. We aimed to teach a common language about values in educational decision-making and foster an environment where teachers could share and question their values with each other, breaking down field-related barriers including discomfort sharing ethical uncertainty and the assumption that teaching, and communities of teaching practice, are purely technical and practical endeavors. Our research team was well-positioned to provide this learning: as a group of educational philosophers with teaching backgrounds, we had found that learning to talk about our educational values using the language and tools of philosophy had enriched our understanding of ourselves and our profession. In the next section, I describe the case and PD experience in detail, before explaining the research and analysis methods I used to answer the following research questions:

[26] All names in this paper are pseudonyms

1. **How did participating educators describe their values prior to the professional development experience?**
2. **How did their descriptions of their values change or develop over the course of the professional development experience?**
3. **What, if any, new or emerging ideas about values did participants display over the course of the PD?**

Methods

The Case: Promotion or Retention?

Our professional development experience centered on a multimedia case study (MMC), the first of its kind: an immersive online experience that put users in the shoes of a grade team deciding whether to promote or retain an eighth-grade student, Ada, who is performing far below grade level and has experienced significant trauma.[27] The professional development proceeded in two parts: participants' independent completion of the multimedia case study, and an online synchronous session that included a 75-minute discussion of the case in small groups. Participants had one week to complete the case study, which was expected to take about an hour, before engaging in the synchronous online session.

The case itself takes place at "Innovation Academy," a K-8 school in a large urban district that has recently reopened after failing a turnaround effort. Ada is a fifteen-year-old eighth grade student who has been held back once before, in second grade. She began the year reading at a third-grade level but improved to a fifth-grade level with inspiring effort, including significant afterschool help from her ELA teacher. Even so, her subject grades for the year did

[27] The multimedia case is based on a written case of the same name in Levinson and Fay 2016.

not meet the Innovation Academy standards: she had a 55% average in social studies, and a failing science grade (in part because her science teacher had been replaced midyear by a long-term substitute who held no science degree). Ada had experienced significant trauma earlier in the year with the death of her older brother from gun violence, a death she had witnessed, and which led to her moving between foster homes. She had missed seventeen days of school as a result. Objects in her locker and a conversation with Ada that participants view at the beginning of the multimedia case show that Ada's teachers and friend group at Innovation Academy were an important anchor for her during this difficult year.

As the case develops, users learn that Innovation Academy's reopening hinges on new school standards they developed for promotion, making the decision of whether to retain Ada more fraught. Ada would have two options for high school if she were promoted: the traditional feeder school, and an alternative school. Summer school is not an option—the district removed it due to budget cuts. Users also learn that several of Ada's classmates were also at risk of retention. The case shares stories of how these peers put in the effort to graduate, or the grade team determined that redoing the year was best for them.

Ada's four teachers each have a different perspective on whether or not to promote Ada. Her Social Studies teacher, Ms. Angly, worries that retaining her will cause her to drop out and "become another poverty and pregnancy statistic." Her math teacher, Mr. Rodriguez, who grew up in Ada's neighborhood, is concerned that promoting her sends a message to her classmates and school community that grades and effort don't matter. Ms. Castro, her Social Studies teacher, is concerned that Ada won't be able to keep up in high school. Mr. Beecher, her substitute science teacher, wonders if the alternative school is a viable alternative. At an impasse, and at the principal's deadline, the team must make a decision.

The multimedia case simulates this experience, placing the user in the role of a fifth educator at the grade-team meeting. Participants choose their role—teacher, school administrator, or guidance counselor (the role choice does not meaningfully change anything about the experience—only, potentially, the internal processes of the case user) and move through the case narrative. Participants are introduced to Innovation Academy, Ada, and her teachers via short videos and are prompted to explore interactive resources such as Ada's locker and samples of her work, the school report card, interviews with practitioners and education scholars, and research on retention, foster youth, and alternative schools (see Appendix for examples). At points throughout the experience, users are prompted to write journal entries reflecting on the case and their decision-making processes, and twice during the case they are asked to rank a list of values in the case (see Appendix 5 for prompts and values ranking exercise). The case culminates in a simulated meeting, where the four teachers have a conversation that the user must respond to by choosing whether to promote Ada, retain her, or send her to the alternative school. On average, the case study takes users about 45 minutes to complete.

Recruitment and sampling

Our partners in the Equity and Social Studies department advertised the PD and associated research study through their email listservs. The department had a track record of offering engaging PDs, and this history helped attract a sample who was likely predisposed to care about values such as equity and diversity in their work. Several participants remarked during discussion that they elected to participate because of their relationship with the staff members who sent the emails or their previous participation in department PDs. The department also invited four schools who were part of a partnership program with the department; these schools

elected to discuss the case as school groups (see Appendix 1 for our Partnership Overview document).

Our final sample consisted of 149 school and central office educators from 95 schools across the district. 280 educators completed an initial registration to indicate interest in the PD, and of these, 230 educators consented to participate in research and completed a research pre-survey. Final participation (in the PD and the study) was limited to those who completed the multimedia case in advance of the PD (n=153). Four non-consenting educators were still able to take part in the professional development, but we did not retain any of their data nor record the discussions in which they participated (see Appendix 4 for PD timeline and sampling breakdown, and Table 1 for demographic information in relation to the district as a whole). The central focus of the synchronous session was a 75-minute case discussion in breakout rooms of 6-10 participants. The discussion, led by an experienced facilitator, included introductions, norm-setting, and a discussion protocol (see Appendix 5). Four discussion groups, comprising 26 educators total, were made up of school teams who participated in the PD together. In the rest of the groups, participants did not know each other prior to the session.

We ran six PD sessions over three weeks at various weekday evening times to accommodate as many participants as possible. Each session had between 30-60 participants divided into discussion groups of 6-10. All participant data was de-identified using pseudonyms before analysis.

Table 1a: ***Comparison of Demographics of Sample to District***

	Participants (n=149)	**District (n>20,000)**
Experience		
Median years in education	9	N/A
Median years in district	7	7
Racial/Ethnic Identification		
Non-Hispanic White	40%	49%
African American	15%	21%
Hispanic	10%	23%
AAPI	4%	4%
Multiracial + Other	9%	1%
Did not respond or prefer not to say	22%	N/A
Gender		
Female	58%	63%
Male	19%	37%
Non-Binary	1%	Data Unavailable
Did not respond or prefer not to say	22%	N/A
Role in Education		
Teacher	81%	55%
School Administrator	7%	1%
Central Office Staff	6%	4%
Grades Taught		
PreK–5	11%	District data unavailable
Gr. 6 through 8	30%	
Grade 9 through 12	31%	
Multiple grade divisions	8%	
Not applicable	20%	
Subjects Taught		
Only social sciences	27%	District data unavailable
Social sciences and other subjects	32%	
Other subjects only	41%	

Data Gathering

While the primary goal of this experience was professional development, our research team also led an associated study that gathered several different types of data over the experience. Below I explain the breadth of our data gathering, with attention to the data most relevant to my research question (see Table 2).

Before the PD, participants took a pre-survey that collected their demographic information as well as Likert scale- and open-responses about their experiences with ethical issues discussion in their schools (Appendix 5a). Along with questions such as, "how often have you engaged in conversations about ethical issues with colleagues?" the survey asked, "what values are important to you in education, and why?" This data shows how educators described their values prior to the PD.

The research study captured several types of data as participants independently completed the MMC. (See Table 2 for a list of data collected during the study and used for this paper). The case prompted participants to complete journal reflections throughout the MMC, including a response to the prompt, "what have you learned about Ada's teachers' values, and how do they compare to your own values?" (Appendix 5b). Additionally, participants had to complete two values ranking exercises (Appendix 5c). Directed to "rank the following values by dragging and dropping them in order of importance to you when working in schools," participants sorted the following list of values: accountability, achievement, care, community, consistency, effort, equality/equity, fairness, integrity, and justice. The case presented the list without definitions or explanations for these terms. Participants first completed the ranking exercise at the beginning of the case. Halfway through the case, after hearing from the case characters and reviewing materials, participants were prompted to review their initial values sort

and asked if they would like to change their rankings based on their experience so far; they were then prompted to write a journal entry sharing whether they changed their rankings and why. 63 participants reported in their journals that they changed their values ranking, and 56 participants reported in their journals that they did not. These values-based journal reflections and the rankings exercise provide a window into participants' thinking about values during the independent reflective portion of the professional development.

Table 2: ***Data collected during the study and used for this paper***

PD Time Point	**Data Collected** (Bolded data used for this paper)	**Values Prompts Wording**
Pre-Survey	Likert scale questions Demographic questions **Open-response questions**	"What values are important to you in education, and why?"
Part 1: Independent Multimedia NCS	Click data **Values rankings (2)** **Journal reflections** Case decisions	"What have you learned about Ada's teachers' values, and how do they compare to your own values?" "Did you change your values ranking after reviewing the additional case materials? Why or why not?"
Part 2: Group NCS Discussion	**Discussion transcripts** Exit ticket reflection	"What values are at stake in this case, and why?" Comments made about values throughout the discussion
Post-Surveys (2)	Likert scale questions Demographic questions Open-response questions	N/A

The research study captured further data about values during the discussion sessions. Each conversation was recorded and transcribed. As part of the discussion protocol, participants were asked to consider the "values and principles at stake in the case;" participants also spontaneously

brought up considerations of values and value development during the discussions (Appendix 5d). The 23 discussion groups varied in terms of how much of their conversation concerned values, from groups that barely touched on values to groups that deliberated about them for almost their entire time. Most groups were somewhere in the middle: values conversations arose when prompted by the facilitator and wove through the larger discussion throughline. Immediately following the discussions, all participants completed a brief post-survey; though it is not the focus of this paper, it is worth noting that 97% of participants reported in this survey that the PD experience was a valuable way to engage in ethical dilemmas discussion..

Data analysis

To analyze the values-based PD data, I engaged in a multi-step flexible coding process using the qualitative research software NVivo (Deterding & Waters, 2021). My initial goal was to identify themes in how participants discussed values at the three time points at which we collected values data: before the PD, during MMC completion and during the discussion. Looking at each time point separately, I identified categories and subcategories based on emergent themes and relevant philosophical concepts, noting discrepant evidence that led to the creation of new codes and outlying data (Maxwell, 2010). I flagged similar themes occurring in each time point. I then read through each participants' full data set and codes *across* the time points (Bazeley, 2021). Using analytic memos, I noted whether the participant invoked the same values via the same language in their pre-survey, journal entries and discussion groups or whether they shifted the values they focused on or language they used; whether or not they changed their values ranking, the reasons they gave, and whether they brought up these changes in their group discussion; and any "aha" moments about values that seemed to occur in journal entries or discussion transcripts.

The spectrum of experiences across the 149 participants was broad, but I identified several patterns in values development and individuals whose data across the study was emblematic of those patterns. I also identified deviant voices, particularly participants who discussed values in a manner too varied to indicate particular patterns or did not show much development over the course of the PD (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). I chose three case studies of participants who showed clear values development that mirrored the major themes across the set and did an in-depth interpretive analysis of their data. At several points in the process, I shared my codes and analysis with advisory groups, including members of the research team, as a validity measure. Previously, preliminary findings had also been shared with our partners at the ESSD (Maxwell, 2010).

Values in a combined PD and Research Study

It's important to note that, while we collected data throughout this experience, this was in no way designed as an experiment that captured descriptive or causal data. Nor is this paper an evaluation of the PD experience, that is, an analysis of whether we met our learning goals. The values data gathered over this experience provides real-time snapshots of how educators' thinking about values in their decision-making develops over the course of an ethical dilemma deliberation, on their own and with colleagues, when they are prompted to attend to those values and given space to do so.

Given that this PD was designed to be a learning experience, it's important to explain how and what it *explicitly* communicated about values. The recruitment materials mentioned values and the pre-survey primed the participants by asking them to share the values important to them in education and why they were important. Thus, participants knew from the start that values were going to be a central theme of their experience and that their colleagues, strangers to

them, would be thinking about their values as well. The MMC opens with an introductory video that defines ethical dilemmas, explaining that they are daily practices for educators who must "choose which values and beliefs to prioritize, and how to best realize them" in moments when "it is often hard, if not impossible, to realize all important values at once, and there is rarely one "right answer." However, the case does not define values at this point, nor deliver expectations about how participants should think about values.

However, after the opening narratives introducing Innovation Academy and Ada, the case moves users into a "pause and think video," where the case introduces several points about values in ethical decision-making:

- Tensions between colleagues when making collective ethical decisions are often caused by a difference in values.
- Frequently, people may say they embrace the same value but interpret it differently.
- Even when people agree about what values mean, they might disagree about which values are most important for a situation, or how they apply in this case.
- Ultimately, ethical decision-making requires that that we make decisions about how to best realize the values that matter to us and others.

After this video, participants are prompted to complete their first journal entry. This can be thought of as a moment to reflect on what they are learning about values.

Finally, later in the experience the case names substantive values that the Innovation Academy teachers seem to be invoking. For example, Mr. Rodriguez is described as valuing "integrity." The subtext is that Mr. Rodriguez's understanding of integrity is linked to his argument for retaining Ada based on school policy, but that the value of integrity might be interpreted differently by different individuals. Altogether, it's clear that the professional

development communicated certain ideas about values. As I present my findings, I'll take care to parse out when participants seem to be considering ideas that they were likely assimilating from the learning experience, as well as new thinking about values that emerged through reflection and deliberation.

Findings

In the pre-survey, journal prompts and discussion groups, participants explained how they "weighed," "interpreted," "balanced," and "prioritized" values to create, as one participant put it, "justice in my practice." To show how this process occurred across the experience, I present three case studies of participants whose experiences are emblematic of patterns in the data overall.

Paul: Values interpretability through the lens of equity

Paul, a high school social science teacher who confidently chose to promote Ada, provides one representative example of values development in which a strong and consistent sense of one's values complexifies and deepens over the course of the PD. Paul was an educator who came into the experience already able to articulate the values at the center of his practice: in his pre-survey responses, Paul named "equity" and "access" as the values important to him in education, "because these haven't been the focus of our education system in the past." With this articulation, Paul, who identified as a white and Hispanic male, aligned himself with several participants who not only named their values in the presurvey but described how they adopted those values in response to racial and social historical injustices. Aliya, a high school administrator wrote, "equity is important to me. Looking closely at the systems and structures in schools and in educational policy that continue to lead to poor outcomes for historically marginalized students." Sebastian, a high school science teacher explained, "Equitable Access is an important value in education to me because through equitable access we can begin to close

gaps we see in society." Like Aliya, Sebastian, and others, Paul centered equity as his core value as a response to these injustices.

As he moved through the case, Paul began to explore the concept of equity more deeply and interrogate how it can change meanings for those using it. In his first journal entry, he wrote,

> The issue of "equity" is interesting here, in that what some seem to think is fair differs greatly from what others seem to believe. I vehemently disagree with Mr. Rodriguez's conception of equity, seemingly being the application of impartiality and viewing impartiality as fairness… For me, equity is fairness, yes; but equity is the idea that fairness is each person getting what they need to be on a level playing field. Couple the academic situation with the reality that Ada has experienced loss and a reentry into the foster system, and it is clear that she has not had an equitable school experience.

By considering how the case characters conceived of equity, Paul was able to further articulate his own interpretation of the value. In his second journal entry, he shared that he changed his value ranking because of the difference between his own interpretation of equity and how he believed equity was interpreted by the characters in the case. "I changed my top value from equity based on the working definition of equity being different from what I understand it to be/how I apply it in my practice." He raised this issue in his discussion group:

> For me the interesting dilemma is we've got conflicting definitions of equity that people can display. That word just gets tossed around so incredibly much… to be honest, it seems like it kind of reflects, like, it's just kind of a mirror to how you view the world rather than the actual definition of equity. Right? It also gets used as like a cudgel a lot all the time… So whose definition of equity wins? And prevails in a conversation? Maybe it depends on power.

Paul's original survey response and journal entries show a commitment to equity and an attunement to power in terms of historical context, but his analysis of how the case characters interpret equity differently seems to prompt a deeper understanding that power determines how equity is *used*.

This takeaway both captures and extends the learning goals of the PD experience. The multimedia case explains and demonstrates *values interpretability*: the idea that different people

can interpret the same values differently and thus come to different decisions in the case. Like Paul, many participants picked up and ran with this understanding, particularly in their journal entries about whether they changed their values ranking.

A subset of participants (n=21) who changed their ranking explained that they did so because of how the interpretation of a value by a character in the case connected to or diverged from their personal interpretation. For some of these participants, it wasn't that their own beliefs changed, but that they gained a new understanding that their interpretation was different than how the value was defined or operationalized in the case. These participants came to "a better understanding of some of the terms. For example, I moved "integrity" down after realizing that it was not personal integrity, but institutional integrity with regard to standards of promotion", that was at play in the case. Others explained that the case shifted how they defined or interpreted a value that they had previously "misinterpreted." Some of these participants adopted the values interpretations of the characters in the case; others clarified their own definition using the case interpretations as a foil. As one participant wrote, "I understood community as relationships, consistency as in a student being consistent with their work, and achievement as standardized test scores. By the end, I understood community as relationships, consistency as being in one place with the same people, and achievement as success, good life, and graduating." Finally, a few participants explained that they did *not* change their values ranking because they *already* believed that values could be interpreted differently by different people, and their own interpretation of their values did not change based on the details of the case. Several of these participants described a concern about relativism in values interpretation. In all these cases, the concept of values interpretability seemed to spark new understandings about participants' own values or their moral center.

As Paul realized, values interpretations can be fraught with power dynamics, tension, and conflict. Many of the discussion groups took up and extended this idea as they discussed values interpretability and how different interpretations were operationalized. "All of us will sit here and say, Yes, all of this list [of values] is important," explained one participant, "But where the differences come into play, and where the tensions are, is what that looks like to us." "It's almost disturbing," another shared to her group, that "people can interpret [the value I care about] so many different ways." When this topic arose, participants often helped each other work through competing interpretations and clarify their values as a result.

> **Natalie:** I just have a question for Valerie, Victoria, and Janae. Because I think I heard all of you saying, "achievement." Like, Janae, you were like, "make sure that she achieves…" But when I saw achievement, I put that near the bottom [of my rankings] and put something like care at the top. But I feel like I put care at the top because I want [Ada] to achieve for all the same reasons that you said. So I'm having a hard time with that this is more a definitional issue. Like, what do we mean by achievement?
> **Janae:** I put achievement as like success, good life, graduating. Mostly.
> **Victoria:** I didn't put achievement at the top, I put achievement in the bottom too… for me is not achievement in school, like you know, get good grades and graduate … That's why I always tell my students just try your very best, you know, for me, that's what achievement is all about is I work the hardest and try your very best and that's your achievement.
> **Valerie:** See, for me, achievement means happy and productive. Achievement means that you're happy and productive member of society.
> **Victoria:** Yes. and work hard. I always tell [them] so you have to work hard, you know, right… So I think for me achievement is like, like, you know, Valerie is a productive and not a burden on society. That for me is achievement.

In other exchanges, the facilitator played a key role, drawing new voices with different experiences into the discussion, further enabling participants to clarify their values.

> **Eliza:** I think one that stood out to me, and this is probably because it was very high on my personal list, was the concept of care, and how people demonstrate and receive care; that what I interpret as showing care for this human being might be very different than the decision another teacher makes, who would also use the same justification of showing that they care about the child… they all seemed very passionate, they had good justification for their position. And it kept coming to my mind that each of these people

seems to feel that they were showing a level of care and investment in this student, but they were doing so in very different ways.
Facilitator: I'm curious if anybody has a similar thought to Eliza, were there other values that you thought might be getting interpreted differently? Or even have you been in that situation as teachers in similar positions where you felt a different interpretation of some of these?
Diana: Yeah, definitely. I totally agree with what Eliza said… especially real-life scenarios where a teacher is thinking that they have the best intention, you know, "I care so much that I want her to have success." "That's how much I care about her that I want her to meet the standards, because I care so much." And then another person's interpretation of "I care so much for her that I don't want her to be humiliated, and just do the exact same thing for another solid year for the same result." That happens every day at the workplace, and then the two are trying to convince each other.
Lauren: I agree, care was really high up for me. And it's a really interesting interpretation of you guys saying everyone thought they were caring in their own way. Even though I feel like I definitely related to one of the characters much more than the way she was showing care. Like, no, *that's* the way I interpret care!

Here, we see how participants were able to clarify and complexify their values through self-reflection and sharing their reflections with others. As we saw in Paul's case with equity, both the reflection and discussion elements of the PD supported these participants in deepening how they understood the values core to their practice. In particular, thinking about how individual educators interpret their core values differently pushed many participants to reconsider not only their core values, but how they defined and operationalized those values.

Emma: learning to articulate a focus on the individual

For Emma, a middle school social studies teacher who had been working in the district for about a decade, it was the discussion activity where her values articulation came alive. Emma's presurvey and journal entries did not convey a particularly deep or nuanced conception of her own values. Of course, this isn't to say that Emma didn't have a strong sense of her own values, just that, if she did, she didn't share them in her written responses. Emma answered the pre-survey values question with a list of terms, many of which are currently "buzzy" in teacher practice: "equity, persistence, diversity, self-worth/self-love, growth mindsets, curiosity." She

did not elaborate on her one-word answers, so it was difficult to understand whether she had conceptual definitions in mind or was using them as a signaling device.

Emma's answers were similar to those of a small group of participants (n=11) who answered the pre-survey question with practices or curricular components such as "growth mindsets," "culturally-responsive curriculum," "reading," "social-emotional learning," and "non-dominant narratives" that weren't recognizable as values that would drive their decision-making. They also reflected a larger group of participants (n=44) who answered the pre-survey with one-word answers that were recognizable as values —like equity, integrity, or community—but did not explain why those values were important to them. In addition to these groups, 38 participants skipped the survey question entirely. There could be many reasons for this, including lack of time or lack of interest in written, out-of-context, or non-dialogic consideration of values. All told, there seemed to be room for many participants to develop their ability and willingness to articulate their values and how those values played a role in their ethical decision-making.

Emma was one such participant. The values discussions in her journal entries, like her presurvey response, were brief. "For me, it's clear I really value effort," she wrote, "Her other teachers and I share some values, however those that value achievement beyond all else are not on my same page." Emma didn't explain why this was or where her focus on effort over achievement originated; she also didn't change her values ranking and didn't elaborate on why.

However, the PD experience was designed so that participants had the chance to share their thinking across multiple modalities, and Emma's engagement changed during her discussion group. There, Emma was enthusiastic and responsive, lively and warm with her groupmates. In that environment, Emma began to clarify her own beliefs and identify nuances within them:

> **Emma**: I guess I value like, care, effort and circumstance in some ways. I know, that's not one of the values that was listed. And maybe it's not something that I it's, maybe it's not a value, but it's something that I would pay much more attention to. So what is that, empathy? I guess? I value empathy?
>
> **Facilitator:** Can you talk more about what you mean by circumstance?
>
> **Emma:** Yeah, I mean… equity is a very important word in this situation. I think, you know, I'm not saying equal, I'm saying equity for a reason. And I think that that's really important when you're handling education, no child is the same. So I guess another value that I would throw in here would be flexibility. And, like more of a humanization of this process, if that makes sense.

As Emma deliberated with her group mates, she began to draw out and question her assumptions and connotations about different values, and where those assumptions come from.

> **Brenda**: I think rigidity comes when we're married to just one of these qualities, right? If I only think about the community and that's all I'm focused on, I'm not able to look at anything else. But when we're able to be fluid and think about all different aspects of each student then we're able to look at things case by case and make the best decision for each one.
>
> **Emma:** I completely agree with you, Brenda, for the for the most part, I just have to say I don't think that all of these [values] are made equal. And I think the reason is, because I think-- specifically accountability and achievement, maybe it's because we're programmed this way, because we're American public school teachers right now-- but they, those words have way more baggage than any of these other words, in the sense that there are there are repercussions that are going to be negative for everybody involved if we're not, you know, pushing those up. Like care, community consistency, effort, equity, fairness, integrity, justice, you can't have too much of those things! But I think accountability and achievement… when we do focus on just those things, really negative consequences come from them. And so that's why I don't think that they're equal. But um, you know, at the same time you need it. Like, of course, I'm not saying that you don't need achievement, or you don't need accountability. But for whatever reason, those have spurred on I think, in some ways, more negative consequences than actual positive consequences, long term, big picture for our American public school system.

Through the group discussion and facilitator prompts to consider her values in more depth, Emma connected her values to the systems, patterns, and context of educating in the accountability era. And with her group mates acting as interlocutors whose comments she was willing to challenge, extend, and learn from, Emma began to articulate her "core" values:

> I'm hearing what you're saying, Jack, I just, I don't think that what she needs is a kick in the pants. I think that she is recovering from a traumatic experience. And I think, like,

> what she needs is to heal… and restorative justice, like I really, I really believe in it, like to my core. I push for the situation that is going to bring about healing and positive growth… the most important thing is figuring out what the kid does need and understanding that whatever the consequence is, it needs to be in the mindset and in the spirit of furthering growth and restoring back to a happy situation.

As Emma's commitment to flexibility, effort, care, growth, and healing, and her resistance to accountability, achievement, and rigidity came into clearer focus, she was able to articulate how those values impact her practice and decision-making. Rather than just citing the program "restorative justice," she demonstrated that she values healing as an element of prioritizing student need and how she would use these values and practices to make a decision that centered Ada's growth. Whether this is evidence of a change in Emma's understanding, or evidence of the efficacy of a two-pronged, differentiated PD structure in supporting teachers' values articulation, it's indicative of the possibilities for values-based PD that uses both individual reflection and group discussion to explore participants' moral centers.

Emma's articulation here speaks to another theme in the data: a focus on the individual in developing and acting on values. Notably, this wasn't a learning goal of the multimedia case, but a takeaway that emerged in journal entries and group discussions. In journal entries describing why they changed their values rankings, many participants (n=27) described how Ada's individual needs—or a principle of prioritizing individual need— prompted them to rethink or clarify their values ranking. These participants described changing their rankings because "we have to do what's right for each individual student, even when there's a chance that it might be perceived from the outside as being unfair," "addressing each situation on a case by case basis [seems] the most appropriate since all students and people are different and might require different supports, next steps, and problem solving," and "in the end the student should be at the center." The most extreme example of this thinking came from Carolyn, who, like Emma, explained it in terms of values flexibility: "I think when looking at each student's case, you can't

assign a set of values or your own values, you have to look at each child individually to determine what will help them move forward. It's not that my values changed, I just reorganized them based on Ada's needs." Several discussion groups, like Emma's, reiterated this theme in their conversations. As Irene put it, "I think we need to make a conscious decision and tell ourselves, no, you know what, my ideals are not a priority right now, these children who [are] vulnerable take priority."

Irene, Carolyn and their counterparts responded to the MMC and activities by developing a focus on individual need that was not evident in the pre-survey responses. Their developing values articulation suggested that values should be flexible based on the circumstances of a situation and instrumental to a larger goal of prioritizing student needs and future growth. This is a complex understanding of the role values can play in decision-making on behalf of students, one that would likely benefit from more research and analysis. For now, it's fair to say that the PD experience drew out new nuances in the role values play in Emma, and others,' decision-making.

Jonelle: the importance of shared school values

Jonelle, an early-career middle school Social Science and English teacher, came to a different conclusion about whose needs to prioritize through values-based decision-making: the needs of the school and school system. Jonelle vacillated between retaining and promoting Ada throughout the PD, but the center of her decision-making seemed to be an interest in how values operate at the school and systems level. In her pre-survey, Jonelle named "transparency" as her most important value, because "I believe it is important for both teachers to be transparent with each other regarding biases and for teachers to be transparent with students when teaching them something they a) have no direct knowledge of, or b) know it be factually untrue despite how it

is presented in a curriculum." While Jonelle didn't elaborate on what specific subject matter most concerned her, her response acknowledged teachers' role and responsibilities within a system of education, not just to individual students.

This focus on the school system continued in Jonelle's journal entries as she weighed Ada's decision within the "politics" of schooling. In her first journal entry, Jonelle leaned "promote" and identified with the case characters: "her teachers' values mirror my own in that they value hard work and setting high expectations for students, while also showing care and concern for them as people," she wrote. As she moved through the case, however, she began to consider the conflict between these values in actual policy operationalization. She described changing her values ranking *three* times, prioritizing first achievement, then care and effort, and finally integrity as she considered the case details. Eventually, she determined that her "final decision [was] to follow current policy and work towards improving the standards of the school going forward" by retaining Ada. "What informed my decision was thinking about how school is very much political. Real change does not come from making exceptions on a case-by-case basis. Ada's situation is not uncommon for many students like her. Therefore, it should not be about this year… it should be about how to have trauma informed processes, accommodations, and support services in order to give students the best opportunity to pass without exception." Jonelle's answer reflects the position that focusing on Ada's individual needs won't create the "real change" the system requires, and her belief in the future possibility of balancing care and consistency.

Jonelle's analysis of the tradeoffs between prioritizing school systems or individuals and the role values play in that decision-making did not end there: they continued to develop in her group discussion. When prompted to identify the dilemma, Jonelle again focused on the level of

the school, not the individual. “The dilemma really is with the process as a whole and what is the school actually doing,” she shared, “you can’t always look at it as a case-by-case basis. It has to be like actual methods and procedures in place ahead of time.” This comment launched her group on an in-depth discussion of how school systems and leadership shape ethical dilemmas. As her groupmates discussed the conflicts between case teachers’ beliefs, Jonelle synthesized these lines of analysis to consider “an organization's values versus a leader's values.” “When I think about teaching, I really don't know my colleagues' values. We'd never have discussions around these things,” she explained. “That could be an issue, especially if we're sharing students, but I also think that… there should be a shared value system within that school. And then that should, you know, be what guides [decision-making].”

Here, Jonelle hit on the importance of shared school values in ethical decision-making on behalf of students. At the close of the conversation, she shared that she was now leaning “promote,” because “certain things have to be in place” in the school for retaining Ada to go well, and the school wasn’t cohesive enough to ensure that stability.

Overall, Jonelle’s interest in the role values play at the school level seemed to drive her decision-making. By the end of the PD experience, Jonelle had circled back to her original value of transparency between teachers, adding the understanding that a strong shared school culture should include transparency around *values* as well as procedures and policies. Her focus on improving the system began to include values discussion.

Jonelle’s conclusion echoes a major takeaway from many of the discussion groups. Groups determined that a “shared values system within the school” could bring about sound *ethical* decision-making, not just efficient procedural decision-making. Like Jonelle, several groups agreed that the lack of a shared ethical foundation made decision-making at Innovation

Academy and in the case especially challenging and ethically ambiguous. As another participant, Randall, parsed out, with help from his Facilitator,

> There's no overarching mission… no guidance… It seems like to me there was a missing piece that was not there in the foundation of the school, but also the way that teachers could all connect their beliefs to. So it was really hard to make the decision as a part of that community because I didn't have anything to really fall back on, but my personal beliefs, and when that happens, there's too much subjectivity.
>
> **Facilitator**: it seems to me like you're pointing to this tension between the personal beliefs of all of the different teachers with a lack [of] mission of the school… that, of course, brings in the question of when there isn't necessarily consistency, do we rely on subjectivity or objectivity? And how to allow those things to influence the decision as well? Did that capture your thoughts?
>
> **Randall**: Yes…I think it could have been solved if there was a consensus about their beliefs prior to making this decision.
>
> **Deirdre:** Each teacher was kind of using their values to choose their own action to intervene with Ada. And that was not a coherent strategy. And she needed a more cohesive support system.

By the end of their discussion, Randall and Deirdre's group had concluded:

> **Deirdre:** It did make me think about the importance of aligning values, and approaching, you know, from the beginning, getting everyone on the same page and cultivating shared values. So that, approaching ethical dilemmas, people are coming from more of a community standpoint, and collaborative standpoint.
>
> **Stacey:** Aren't our values supposed to be aligned with our vision and mission statements at our schools? [the group members smile and laugh knowingly].
>
> **Facilitator:** And maybe that goes back to the idea of having conversations like this to check in about whether that alignment is there on a regular basis.

Their group, and others, concluded that shared values can "guide" or provide a "pathway" for collective ethical decision-making, while leaving room for teachers' own values. Continually discussing and aligning values as a school—rather than simply taking the mission and the vision of the school for granted— should be a crucial part of educator ethical decision-making.

This conclusion reflects the theory of change of the PD, as well as the literature on teachers' values development. When teachers can engage in authentic, critical professional

community built around shared professional values, ethical decision-making on behalf of their students can improve. While this one-time PD could only approximate that kind of authentic community, it is notable that so many participants left the PD seeing the importance of engaging in whole-school discussions about values and wanting to engage with their own school communities in this way. These "aha" moments about whole-school values development was not an explicit learning goal of the case, but arose from participants' reflections and discussions with colleagues.

Implications

Paul, Emma and Jonelle's experiences show what's possible when teachers are prompted to engage with their values in a professional community. Teachers enter their work with a set of values that drive their core decision-making but are rarely given the chance to reflect on how their values originate, operationalize, or connect to those of their colleagues or their school and district. When teachers receive the time, space, and scaffolding to consider their values, they can develop new, complex understandings of how those values connect to larger systems and structures and improve their ability and willingness to articulate them. As Paul, Emma, Jonelle and others recognized, centering values can help teachers make better decisions for their students and create a more cohesive school community.

There are several aspects of the MMC itself and the PD structure that facilitated this development. First, there is some direct instruction about values in the MMC: participants view a video that explicitly discusses how values are interpretive and applied differently based on that interpretation, and how these differences can lead to tension among colleagues. However, participants rarely cited this moment of direct instruction as influential to their thinking about values. Rather, they frequently linked their thinking to implicit elements of the case: how the characters in the case model reflexivity about their values and values interpretability, acting as

foils against which participants could clarify what they believe; how the case details placed emphasis on Ada's individual needs, serving to prompt reflection on values flexibility in the service of student growth; and how the case materials pointed to the possibility for improved cohesion around values at Innovation Academy. Thinking through the case individually and as a group, rather than consuming direct instruction about values, seemed to be what facilitated participants' values development.

Second, the structure of the PD itself seemed to scaffold participants' values development. Participants were able to think through their beliefs first, before sharing them with the group, and were offered multiple prompts and opportunities to do so through journaling. Journaling, both on its own and in tandem with the values-ranking exercise, required participants to put language to their beliefs but allowed them to choose how much time and effort they put into that language. Simultaneously, the values-ranking exercise lifted tradeoffs and interpretations of values to the fore, prompting deeper thinking. The discussion brought this thinking alive, with trained facilitators prompting values deliberation and offering new language and concepts and district colleagues offering diverse perspectives and challenging positions. For participants, like Emma, who may have found one modality more fruitful than the other, having both available could allow for supportive differentiation.

As a one-time offering, this PD is but a stepping-stone to necessary "professional communities" that engage educators in ongoing values reflection and action on a transformative level. Though more research pinpointing which practices are most efficacious, and how to build these one-time experiences into authentic communities, is needed, this study offers a promising start. It suggests that building these best practices into teacher professional development using normative case studies and multimedia case studies can help educators articulate and develop the

ideas that already inform the core of their practice. We know this because, by the end of the experience, the educators themselves justified why articulating and developing values was a crucial element in ethical decision-making: because it could help them make better decisions for Ada, better decisions for their students, and a stronger and more cohesive school community.

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CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A MIDLEVEL THEORY OF EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE

The three papers in this dissertation open the black box of teachers' ethical decision-making to show how that decision-making is shaped, constrained, and supported by teachers' environments: the classrooms, bureaucratic systems, and communities of practice in which they work. Theories of justice in education must account for these environments in order to be responsive and supportive to practitioners. This focus of environment means that focusing on *educational* justice illuminates something important about justice in general: how justice occurs at a midlevel position between individual and collective, and the individual and the state.

Political philosophers disagree over whether to focus on the basic structure or individual behavior as the proper site at which to think about justice.[28] This disagreement happens in part because they've also disagreed about whether it's more helpful to think in terms of "ideal" or "non-ideal" forms of justice.[29] However, according to Levinson, one of the reasons current theories of justice, at least since Rawls, fall short in guiding action is that

> "they are developed to address a different level of decision-making than the agent is confronting. For example, an ideal political theory may focus on institutional design or establishment of the "basic structure" while ignoring questions of individual action. A moral theory may do the opposite, focusing on interpersonal morality while ignoring broader socioeconomic, cultural, or political context… this fails to recognize how policies, institutions, and even basic structures are brought to life and instantiated by aggregated individual action—and also how the meaning and import of interpersonal actions depend fundamentally on the context in which they are performed" (Levinson, 2016).

Justice occurs in the *interaction* between institutions and individuals. These interactions are teachers' daily work: as street-level bureaucrats mediating between the state and students, and as the "invisible hand" shaping the classroom collective (Farmer et al., 2011; Lipsky, 2010;

[28] See Cohen, (2002); Murphy (1998); Pogge (2000), Julius (2003). Many thanks to Harry Brighouse for pointing this out.
[29] See Robeyns (2008), Swift (2008), Valentini (2012).

Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977). In the classrooms and the systems where they practice, teachers occupy an important place at society's "midlevel."

First, as discussed in chapter 2, teacher decision-making occurs in the space between policy mandate and individual discretion. As street-level bureaucrats—agents of the state tasked with carrying out state policy through their individual interactions with clients—teachers' role sits at the "midlevel" between the individual and the basic structure. Teachers—at least, public-school teachers— aren't policymakers deciding what justice entails on a macro-level. Neither are they simply individual citizens deciding how to enact justice in a flawed system that they have no special obligation to (like we might consider parents to be, if we are focused on a child's growth and development). They have a special obligation to the state, who employs them and sanctions their profession as integral to the state's function. This obligation is both practical—public school teachers can get fired if they don't adhere to rules developed at the state level—and normative—teachers should have a democratic responsibility to respect the decisions of state officials and their constituents. As Lipsky described in *Street-Level Bureaucrats,* this midlevel role requires immense discretion in implementing state policy to fit the circumstances of individual citizens, so much that the decisions that teachers make when implementing policy effectively become the policies themselves.

The other reason why teacher ethical decision-making bridges the individual and collective, as discussed in chapter 1, is that teachers make decisions on behalf of groups of people in the crowded classroom. This makes their work different than other agents of the state, such as social workers, or other care professionals, such as doctors, who typically exercise ethical discretion in one-on-one encounters. It also makes their work different than school administrators or education policy makers who typically do not encounter—much less work

daily with— the individuals they make decisions for. Moreover, the teacher-student dynamic is iterative and interactive: teacher decision-making responds to student decision-making, and vice versa, creating feedback loops of action, consequence and justification that constrain and enable teachers' options for ethical action. In a democratic society, classrooms are the building blocks for democratic habits and dispositions, and so how justice is enacted through this dynamic decision-making process is essential for understanding one way justice is carried out in, and in spite of, the state. Understanding how justice is enacted at this "midlevel" between state and individual, and between individual and collective, should be a crucial project of political theory, and the unique position teachers occupy there should be of special consideration.

The three papers in this dissertation each examined a different aspect of context and complexity in teachers' ethical decision-making at the midlevel. Chapter 1, *Ethics of the Crowded Classroom,* described the complexity of the classroom context that shapes ethical decision-making at the midlevel of the classroom grouping, in the interplay between the individual and the collective. Chapter 2, *Teachers' Ethical Decision-Making in the Face of Injustice: Discretion and Phronesis in the One Best System*, described the complexity of decisions made in the discretionary midlevel between the individual student and the state system of education. And Chapter 3, *Creating Justice in My Practice: Developing Teachers' Values Through a Professional Development in Educational Ethics,* focused on the role of teachers' personal values in shaping their midlevel action, suggesting the possibility of a movement from individual to schoolwide values-based decision-making. Together, they point in a new direction for theories of justice and ethical decision-making in education: a direction that moves outward from individual "muddling through" to systemic change based on collective deliberation about the questions that matter most in education.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Partnership Overview[30]

Civic Conversations for Equity

Advancing Discussion of Ethical Dilemmas for Equity and Civic Life

We all bring our social and political worlds with us into our schools everyday, along with our own beliefs and biases. As our national political divide grows, educators increasingly find themselves challenged to learn and talk about difficult topics with students and with one another. ***How can educators and students engage in difficult conversations for equity and justice, and grow as connected, ethical participants in our schools, city, and world?***

EdEthics Multimedia Case Study Project (EdEthics) led by Harvard Professor Meira Levinson and the Equity and Social Studies Department (ESSD) are partnering to explore this question and learn with educators through collaborative discussions about the ethical dilemmas in education that we all face.

In 2018, [District] Public Schools revised its mission to ensure we prepare every student for college, career, and civic life. In 2020, we finalized a new vision for realizing this commitment, providing a framework of powerful practices and a call to action for every district stakeholder to do their part and participate. The Powerful Practices this project emphasizes are to **Examine Who We Are** and to engage in **Discussion and Deliberation.** These practices are both instructionally powerful and critical for the health of our communities and democracy. This year, thanks to the support of [Foundation,] ESSD is offering **an opportunity for 6 school teams** to participate in the ethical dilemmas in education project, in partnership with Harvard University.

Participation in the project includes:

- Participating school teams will receive a $1,000 planning grant to support completion of project deliverables (below).
- Each member of the school team will receive a copy of Meira Levinson's book, Democratic Discord in Schools

Participating schools agree to:

- Independently complete an online interactive case study
- Participate in a 2 hour virtual professional learning workshop and discussion.
- *Optional: participate in the research study completing pre and post surveys and a possible interview.*

[30] The partner organization has been anonymized in this document. This document was originally used to recruit school teams to the initiative, but similar language and explanation was used for individual educator recruitment.

- Lead 1 ethical dilemma discussion at your school with colleagues and/or students.
- Meet with the project team to participate in an interview to share more experiences and reflections.

Important Dates:

- Register for this opportunity by Friday March 5th. *Space is limited!*
- Complete the online case study by your selected PD date (see date options below).
- Attend a virtual discussion in March.

STEP BY STEP GUIDE FOR PARTICIPATING

STEP 1: Assemble your team.

- Identify 8-10 staff members to participate in this initiative.
- Identify a date that works best for your team from the following options:
  - ~~Tuesday, March 9, 3:30 PM - 5:30 PM~~ - FULL
  - ~~Tuesday March 16th, 4:00 PM -6:00 PM~~ FULL
  - Wednesday March 17th, 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM **newly added
  - ~~Monday, March 22, 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM -~~ FULL
  - ~~Wednesday, March 24, 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM~~ FULL
  - ~~Thursday, March 25, 3:30 PM - 5:30 PM~~ - FULL

STEP 2: Each member of your team needs to sign up individually for the EdEthics Community. To get started, click "Not a Member?".

STEP 3: Select [District] Public Schools as your institution. You will then have the opportunity to sign a consent form related to whether you are willing to participate in a research study about this work. Research participation is totally optional.

STEP 4: Complete the registration form and select the virtual discussion date that your team has agreed upon. **Each member of your team will have to sign up for the same date.**

STEP 5: If you opted into the research, you will get another quick survey about your own background and beliefs.

STEP 6: Each member of your team will receive an email confirmation and calendar invite for your virtual discussion date. Save the date!

STEP 7: Complete the multimedia case that has been embedded into the EdEthics Community experience - it should take approximately 1 hour. We recommend that you complete the case within two weeks prior to your discussion session.

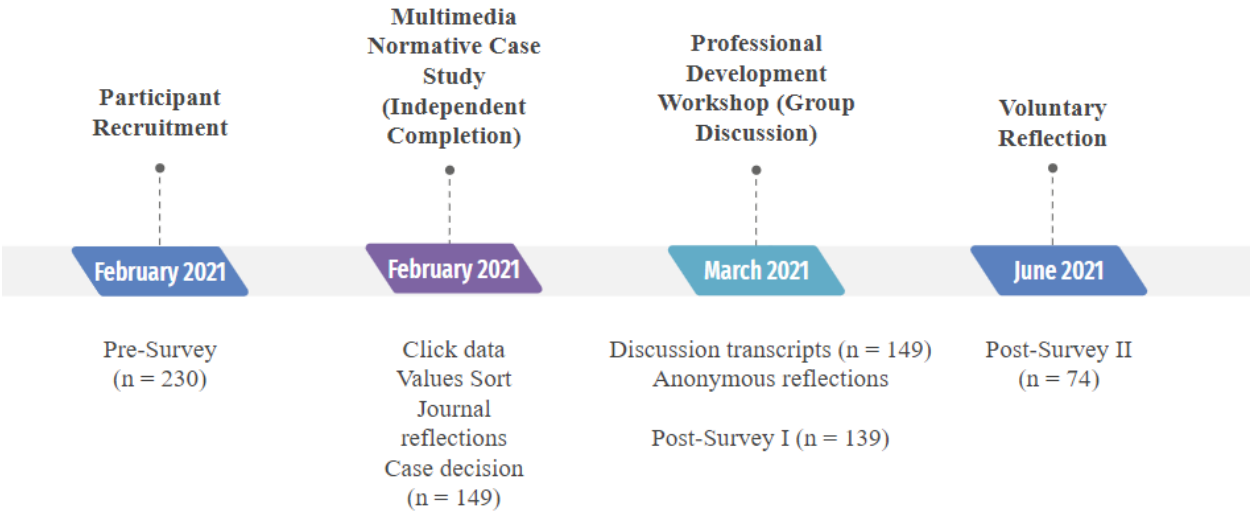
STEP 8: Attend the virtual discussion on your team's assigned date.

STEP 9: Fill out the follow-up survey at the end of the discussion session. If you chose to participate in the optional research opportunity, you will also receive another quick follow-up survey about a month after the event.

STEP 10: Lead your ethical dilemma discussion at your school and share reflections with ESSD.

Appendix 2: Timeline of Professional Development and Associated Data Collection

Figure 1: *Timeline of Professional Development and Data Collection*



Appendix 3: Table 1b: Comparison of Demographics of Sample to District

	Participants (n=149)	District (n>20,000)
Experience		
Median years in education	9	N/A
Median years in district	7	7
Racial/Ethnic Identification		
Non-Hispanic White	40%	49%
African American	15%	21%
Hispanic	10%	23%
AAPI	4%	4%
Multiracial + Other	9%	1%
Did not respond or prefer not to say	22%	N/A
Gender		
Female	58%	63%
Male	19%	37%
Non-Binary	1%	Data Unavailable
Did not respond or prefer not to say	22%	N/A
Role in Education		
Teacher	81%	55%
School Administrator	7%	1%
Central Office Staff	6%	4%
Grades Taught		
PreK–5	11%	District data unavailable
Gr. 6 through 8	30%	
Grade 9 through 12	31%	
Multiple grade divisions	8%	
Not applicable	20%	
Subjects Taught		
Only social sciences	27%	District data unavailable
Social sciences and other subjects	32%	
Other subjects only	41%	

Appendix 4: Data Sources

4a. Pre-Survey Questions

1. How often do you talk with your colleagues about moral or ethical values related to your work in education?
   Never (1) Rarely (2) Sometimes (3) Frequently (4) Constantly (5)
2. How often do you talk with people more senior to you in administration about moral or ethical values related to work in education?
   Never (1) Rarely (2) Sometimes (3) Frequently (4) Constantly (5)
3. How often do you talk with people outside of CPS about moral or ethical values related to work in education?
   Never (1) Rarely (2) Sometimes (3) Frequently (4) Constantly (5)
4. How often do you talk with your students about moral or ethical values?
   Never (1) Rarely (2) Sometimes (3) Frequently (4) Constantly (5)
5. What values, if any, are important to you in education? Why are these important to you? <Open-response>
6. How often, if at all, have you felt morally or ethically unsure about what to do in your work in education?
   Never (1) Rarely (2) Sometimes (3) Frequently (4) Constantly (5)
7. How often, if at all, do you discuss challenging ethical or moral questions with other professionals in your school or work context?
   Never (1) Rarely (2) Sometimes (3) Frequently (4) Constantly (5)
8. How often, if at all, do you discuss challenging ethical or moral questions with your students?
   Never (1) Rarely (2) Sometimes (3) Frequently (4) Constantly (5)
9. How often, if at all, were moral and ethical questions discussed in your preservice training?
   Never (1) Rarely (2) Sometimes (3) Frequently (4) Constantly (5)
10. If you discuss challenging ethical or moral questions with other professionals in your school/work context, please share your thoughts on the experience(s). <Open Response>
11. If applicable, please describe the role of controversial issues or dilemmas in your pedagogy/work with students. <Open Response>
12. Have you engaged in discussions of controversial issues, ethical dilemmas, or difficult topics during professional development? If so, please describe the experience. <Open Response>
13. How many years have you worked with the Chicago Public School System?
14. How many years have you worked in K-12 education?
15. What is your gender?
16. What is your racial/ethnic identity?
17. Please select the choice below that, generally speaking, best describes you politically:
    Strong Liberal (1) Liberal (2) Moderate (3) Conservative (4) Strong Conservative (5) Other (6) Prefer not to answer (7)
18. What U.S. political party, if any, do you identify with?
    Republican (1) Democrat (2) Green (3) Independent (4) Other (5) Prefer not to answer (6)

4b. Journal Prompts

1. How has what you've learned about Ada influenced your thinking about where to send her next year? What have you learned about her teachers' values? How do they compare with your own values?
2. What themes did you notice in the documents you reviewed? What evidence have you found for promoting Ada, retaining her, or sending her to the alternative school?
3. Did you change your value rankings after reviewing the Additional Case Materials or did you leave them unchanged? Why or why not?
4. Did the conversation with the rest of the team lead you to change any ideas?
5. What informed your decision? What did you find most compelling? What questions or concerns remain? How did your thinking about values and ethics evolve?

4c. Values Ranking Exercise

People who work in schools, such as teachers, school administrators, and guidance counselors, regularly make decisions that have ethical significance. Often, they have to decide which values to prioritize, as it can be hard (even impossible!) to realize all values simultaneously. Click the "My Value" tab in your Toolkit. Then as a <role>, consider the values that you might take into account when making decisions.

Rank the following values by dragging and dropping them in order of importance to you when working in schools, with 1 being most important and 10 being least important.

Accountability
Achievement
Care
Community
Consistency
Effort
Equality or equity
Fairness
Integrity
Justice

4d. Discussion Group Protocol

1. Introductions: share the following info, 30 seconds each (**10 min)**
    a. Your name
    b. Your role in CPS
    c. What inspired you to want to take this PD?
    d. What is one thing you're looking forward to as the weather warms up?
2. Discussion norms: share discussion norms adapted from Sustained Dialogue and the University of Michigan CRLT Guidelines for Classroom Interactions. Ask if there is anything they'd like to change or add (**5 min)**
3. Discussion Logistics
4. What are the dilemmas in this case, and for whom? (**5-10 min**)
5. Why are these dilemmas? (**15 min**)

What values or principles are at stake? Do people disagree about which values matter, which should take precedence, or how they apply in this case?
What practical and/or policy considerations are at stake? Do people disagree about which considerations are relevant, which should take precedence, or how they should be addressed in this case?

6. What practices support ethical work? What policies support ethical work?
7. What do you think should be done in this case, by whom? Why?

4e. Post-Survey Questions

1. Now that you have had the opportunity to talk about the case with colleagues, what is your final decision?
   Promote Ada (1) Retain Ada (2) Send her to alternative school (3)
2. How confident are you in your decision? (Rate yourself on a scale of 1-5, with 1 = totally unsure and 5 = 100% confident)
3. Talking with others in the breakout group changed my perspectives.
   Strongly disagree (1) Somewhat disagree (2) Neither agree nor disagree (3) Somewhat agree (4) Strongly agree (5)
4. What, if anything, would you like us to know about your answers above?
5. Going through the online case on my own was a valuable experience.
   Strongly disagree (1) Somewhat disagree (2) Neither agree nor disagree (3) Somewhat agree (4) Strongly agree (5)
6. Participating in this in-person PD session with others was a valuable experience.
7. Strongly disagree (1) Somewhat disagree (2) Neither agree nor disagree (3) Somewhat agree (4) Strongly agree (5)
8. What, if anything, would you like us to know about your answers above?
   <open response>
9. I would recommend this PD experience (online case plus in-person discussion) to colleagues.
   Strongly disagree (1) Somewhat disagree (2) Neither agree nor disagree (3) Somewhat agree (4) Strongly agree (5)
10. I would be excited to participate *as an individual* in additional PD using case studies to explore challenging ethical dilemmas and controversial issues.
    Strongly disagree (1) Somewhat disagree (2) Neither agree nor disagree (3) Somewhat agree (4) Strongly agree (5)
11. I would be excited to participate *as a member of a team from my school or department* in additional PD using case studies to explore challenging ethical dilemmas and controversial issues.
    Strongly disagree (1) Somewhat disagree (2) Neither agree nor disagree (3) Somewhat agree (4) Strongly agree (5)
12. I am interested in using this or other case studies to engage *my colleagues* in ethical case study discussions.
    Strongly disagree (1) Somewhat disagree (2) Neither agree nor disagree (3) Somewhat agree (4) Strongly agree (5)
13. I am interested in using this or other case studies to engage *students* in ethical case study discussions.
    Strongly disagree (1) Somewhat disagree (2) Neither agree nor disagree (3) Somewhat agree (4) Strongly agree (5)
14. What, if anything, would you like us to know about your answers above?
    <open response>
15. Is there anything else you want us to know?
    <open response>