

Teaching the General Capability of  
*Ethical understanding in the Australian Curriculum:*  
Classroom teachers' perspectives

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# Abstract

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This is a study of ethical understanding and secondary school curriculum. It investigates how ethical understanding, framed as a 'general capability' within the *Australian Curriculum*, is engaged with by teachers working in the curriculum areas of English, History, Mathematics and Science. It explores teachers' views and experiences as they attempted to integrate ethical understanding into topics specific to their curriculum field. Its concern is with the aims and enactment of ethical understanding as a general capability across curriculum areas, rather than a study of ethics as a separate, specialised subject. The capability approach to ethics is critically situated within debates on moral, values and character education and wider considerations about the place and purpose of ethics in the classroom.

The key research questions for the study were:

- What understandings of ethics and ethical understanding do teachers hold?
- What understandings of ethics and ethical understanding emerge when teachers explicitly teach *Ethical understanding* in their discipline areas?
- What are teachers' views about the place of *Ethical understanding* in their subject?

To address the research questions, a multi-site qualitative case study was designed wherein teachers were asked to prepare and teach a unit of work in their subject area explicitly incorporating *Ethical understanding*. The responses of participants were examined through reflective semi-structured interviews and journal writing undertaken as they developed and taught these units. The analysis was developed with reference to Jürgen Habermas's three knowledge interests and a relational account of ethics as espoused by Emmanuel Levinas and developed by a number of philosophers of education.

This thesis developed three main arguments. First, that ethical understanding is a broad and diverse concept which evolves dynamically in practice. It is inevitably shaped by contextual variants such as disciplinary epistemologies and personal beliefs and dispositions. In the study many participants drew on more than

traditional rationalist paradigms bringing relationality to the centre. They perceived ethical understanding to be a means of cultivating care, empathy and interpersonal relationships. This framing is connected with a contemporary turn in philosophical Ethics and educational philosophy.

Second, this study argues that the Australian Curriculum's new and distinctive approach of integrating the capability of Ethical understanding into the Learning areas offers affordances for student learning. The experience of participants suggested the infusion of an ethical element into subject content heightened student engagement and deepened disciplinary knowledge. This contributes to the wider debate about what knowledges should comprise the school curriculum. Some argue that the move to capabilities denies students access to powerful disciplinary knowledge. This thesis argues, from the perspective of teachers' practice, that the two can be mutually complementary. Teachers, it is further argued are not simply curriculum implementers, they are curriculum makers.

Third, the study found that the experience of teaching the ethical capability challenged teachers to explore their teacher selves as ethical identities, in ways that were transformative of their practice.

Overall, this thesis argues that the teaching of an ethical capability can be a positively disruptive presence in the classroom for teachers and students alike.

# Declaration

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I declare that:

- 1) The thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD except where indicated in the Preface;
- 2) Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used;
- 3) The thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length exclusive of tables, maps, references and appendices.

Julie Christine Mitchell

# Acknowledgements

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I would like to thank my supervisors, Professor Julie McLeod and Professor Lyn Yates for their guidance, patience, good-humour, generosity and encouragement. They have shared their extensive experience, knowledge and wisdom about Education and the Academy in ways that have gently nurtured my progress and development. I have appreciated their sensitivity to my various needs. They have known when to press for more, and when to allow space.

A PhD thesis begins, grows and comes to completion in the context of many years of ordinary life. Consequently, those connected to the writer are inescapably connected to the thesis. I would like to thank my friends and colleagues for the support, understanding, perspective and encouragement they have offered over these years as I have laboured to bring this work to completion.

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I extend deep gratitude to Dr. Marlene Marburg, my spiritual director of many years, who has accompanied me throughout my candidature. She has shared her insight, gentleness, loving commitment, steadiness and trust in the long view of all things. I know that without Marlene's gifts to me, I would not have arrived at this moment.

My neighbour of almost forty years, Lyn Harper, has listened to rants and raves about all manner of 'things PhD'. She has provided cups of tea, glasses of sherry, meals and in recent years we have walked our dogs often in nearby parklands. Such friendship over decades is a remarkable blessing and it has enabled me to return over and over again to the computer screen unburdened, encouraged and refreshed.

Above all, I am grateful to God, in whom I live, move and have my being.

## Dedication

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I dedicate this work to my parents, Alma and Les, and my brother John.

I also dedicate this work to Ellen Barns, friend and teacher. Ellen shared with me her love of poetry, her love of God and loved me without judgement from the time I sat in her classroom in 1972 until she died in 2007. Ellen inspired me to become an English teacher and if she were here, she would be very proud of the achievement this thesis represents and we would celebrate with gusto.

## Explanatory notes

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In this thesis the words ethics and ethical understanding appear frequently. When the *Australian Curriculum* General Capability is being referenced, it appears capitalised and in italics, *Ethical understanding*. When the philosophical subject or discipline is referenced it is capitalised, Ethics. In all other usage, the terms are neither capitalised nor italicised. This represents usage in general discourse which is broad and varied and not as specific as the instances delineated above.

All interviews were conducted in the same year, 2013. In the text of the thesis, I have referenced the day and month for substantive quotations. The interview schedule was as follows:

	Interview 1	Interview 2
School A	July 25 <sup>th</sup>	November 13 <sup>th</sup>
School B	April 18 <sup>th</sup>	August 15 <sup>th</sup>
School C	April 3 <sup>rd</sup> & 4 <sup>th</sup>	July 29 <sup>th</sup> & 30 <sup>th</sup>

Participants were asked to date journal entries. Some did this occasionally, but most failed to do this. Some journals were organised according to activities, some used lesson numbers, some headed an entry with the focus topic. However, all journal entries by all participants were made at points between the first and second interviews, as per the dates in the table above.

## Glossary

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ACARA	Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank. A rank showing a student's achievement in relation to other students.
ATC21S	Assessment & Teaching of 21 <sup>st</sup> Skills Project
DET	Department of Education and Training, Victoria, Australia
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Australian Government
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage. ICSEA provides an indication of the socio-educational backgrounds of students. This scale is used on the Australian Government 'My School' website: <a href="http://www.myschool.edu.au">www.myschool.edu.au</a>
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCK	Pedagogical Content Knowledge
PCK&S	Pedagogical Content Knowledge and Skill
PLT	Professional Learning Team
PLC	Professional Learning Community
SES	Socio Economic Status. Used in Australia, SES is a measure of people's access to material and social resources.
SSI	Socio-Scientific Issues
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VaKE	Values and Knowledge Education



VEGPSP	Values Education Good Practice Schools Project, Australian Government
VEP	Values Education Project, Australian Government
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education. The VCE is an accredited certificate for the final two years of secondary schooling in Victoria, Australia

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# Chapter One: Introduction

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## Global context

There is no shortage of commentary in the media, the academy, amongst politicians and policy makers about the levels of change, disruption and conflict that mark human experience on a global scale at this time in history. The development of digital and other technologies in the last decades has enhanced communication and participation, connecting and providing access to many of those previously isolated. In many societies the physical quality of life has been markedly improved, through mechanisation, the development of solar power and the availability of cheap medicines to mention a few examples. And yet, sometimes the very advancements wrought in one area have brought difficulty and dislocation in another. Machines replacing human manual labour has led to a crisis in employment in many manufacturing industries. The process of globalisation has likewise compromised previously secure local production and challenged the value and vibrancy of local cultures and practices. The availability of cheap labour has seen an increase in exploitation and human rights abuses, especially for women and children. In the midst of this turmoil we discover that our voracious consumption throughout the twentieth century has brought us to the brink of environmental disaster and ecological unsustainability. The increase in and scale of natural disasters leaves many homeless and with little hope for the future.

Such a milieu of turbulence makes it possible for fundamentalist ideologies, both religious and political, to take root and grow. And so, we have witnessed increasing conflict and war for example, in parts of Africa and the Middle East, bringing profound dislocation to societies with the result of the flight of peoples on a scale not witnessed since the second world war. The tensions and challenges of global society on the brink of the twenty-first century as represented in the Delors report *Learning: The Treasure Within* (UNESCO, 1996), remain potently contemporary over twenty years on in 2018.

This is the context in which schools seek to enable children and young people to live in their present reality, and prepare them to take up their lives as adults in the

world. Clearly, how schools undertook this work fifty years ago cannot be the blueprint followed today. The knowledge, skills, dispositions and personal attributes needed to function, flourish and make a positive contribution in such an unstable, unpredictable and inequitable environment, now look radically different.

## **A curriculum response**

Governments and their education authorities around the globe have responded to such challenges with varying degrees of urgency, through both curricular and extra-curricular channels. In the curriculum arena there has been a flurry of activity around core competencies, generic skills, twenty-first century skills, citizenship courses, personal and social learning and education about religion. These aspects can be found in a variety of places within curriculum frameworks throughout western educational systems (Canada, the United States, Scotland, England, New Zealand, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development member countries, Australia) as well as in 'international' curricula taught in schools throughout the world, for example, the programs of the International Baccalaureate Organisation. In some instances, these emphases partially represent a response to the changing conditions of the nature of work and the workplace and the impact of the digital revolution. In this respect they are responses to economic imperatives, yet there is nonetheless also evident a significant emphasis on intercultural and interpersonal awareness and capacities.

Australian responses are consonant with trends in global responses. In Australia, the *Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians* (2008) provides the aspirational framework for school education and explicitly frames educational endeavour for Australia's children in terms of global economic, social, environmental and political challenges. The broad aspirations of the *Melbourne Declaration* are given substance in the *Australian Curriculum*. The *Australian Curriculum: Foundation – Year 10*, is built around the central importance of disciplinary knowledge, skills and understanding. However, alongside these disciplines sit a set of seven General Capabilities that comprise an integrated and interconnected set of knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions that are pan-disciplinary in nature and designed to, 'equip students to be lifelong learners and

be able to operate with confidence in a complex, information-rich, globalised world' (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], n.d., d). There is a clear recognition here that the challenges of, and changes in global realities and contexts require the cultivation in children of something beyond the traditional disciplinary knowledge of school subjects. Locating the General Capabilities within the disciplines honours the primacy of disciplinary knowledge on the one hand, but also points to the need for such knowledge to be leveraged with particular skills of care, sensitivity and creativity. This is particularly so if it is to bring peace, justice, harmony, health, wellbeing and flourishing to human societies and the physical environment. One of these capabilities, *Ethical Understanding*, 'involves students building a strong personal and socially oriented ethical outlook that helps them to manage context, conflict and uncertainty, and to develop an awareness of the influence that their values and behaviour have on others' (ACARA, n.d., e). This capability captured my particular interest because of my work in the field of Values Education between 2002 - 2010.

## **The Australian background**

A number of troubling events at the turn of the new century on the global and national stage brought to the fore sharp divisions within the Australian community in respect of dispositions and action towards those who are deemed to be 'other'. Beyond Australian shores the al-Qaeda attacks in the United States of America on September 11, 2001 and the terrorist bombings in Bali, Indonesia in 2002 were key events contributing to this climate. Within Australia, the refusal of the Australian government to allow the Norwegian freighter *MV Tampa* carrying 433 rescued refugees passage through Australian waters in 2001 and the rise of the populist right-wing nationalist political party 'One Nation' added to the intensity of debate and discord. Politicians, educators, sociologists, and journalists alike highlighted their concern that the fabric of Australia's civil society was experiencing unprecedented pressure and the possibility of a significant rupture was alarmingly nascent. Added to this was a growing concern about youth engagement, or rather disengagement, and young people's alienation from the institutions of mainstream society. In response to such concerns the

Commonwealth Government announced its *Values Education Study* in December 2002, through which a number of schools were provided with financial support to develop innovative projects that would encourage the development of values such as tolerance, trust and respect in students. Then Commonwealth Minister for Education, Brendan Nelson, said in his press release, 'More than ever, students need the capacity to exercise judgement and responsibility in matters of morality, ethics and social justice and accept responsibility for their own actions' (Nelson, 2002). Some viewed this move as a cynical exercise to bolster a specific political agenda. Jones (2009) references such views as prevalent in the framing of her study of Australia's national values education policy. However, whilst there may have been elements of this behind the initiative, it nonetheless appeared to signal a wider set of concerns to do with moral and ethical priorities, in contrast to a narrower citizenship agenda which underpinned the Commonwealth Government's *Discovering Democracy* program of the 1990s.

My involvement in Values Education in this period began when I was employed by The Council for Christian Education in Schools in 2003 and 2004 to write a set of textbooks for students and teachers in the subject area of English, exploring worldviews and values in popular classroom English texts and the themes which emerged from them. This work led to an invitation to join the Commonwealth Government's *Values Education Project* (VEP), initially as a Project Officer and thereafter, over a period of several years, as a consultant writer. By this time, the *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools* (2005) had emerged from the *Values Education Study* (2003). This was endorsed by State, Territory and Commonwealth education ministers, and published and distributed to all Australian schools in June 2005. The document was designed to promote improved values education in Australian schools by: articulating a vision; providing an agreed set of *Values for Australian Schooling* - nine shared values, and describing some guiding principles and key elements to inform school practice. The purpose of the *National Framework* was to assist schools in providing values education as a core part of schooling. Following on from this, the subsequent Australian Government committed \$29.7 million to a range of values education initiatives across 2004-2008 (Australian Government Department of Education,

Science and Training, 2005, August). The centrepieces of this period were the development and distribution of new values education curriculum and professional learning resources for every school in Australia and the two-stage *Values Education Good Practice Schools Projects* (VEGPSP). In each stage, selected clusters of school communities designed and implemented their own local projects in order to explore ways of improving approaches to values education using the *National Framework* as a guide (see VEGPSP1 and VEGPSP2, 2006 and 2008).

The resources and projects within the VEP were to focus on developing whole school approaches to Values Education. However, the integration of values into the formal subjects of the curriculum was not an aspect widely embraced, even though extensive materials were produced to support this. Popular approaches included service learning projects, developing shared language and common understandings of the designated nine values for Australian schooling and a focus on embodying the values in interpersonal relationships within the classroom and school communities. *My* work in Values Education was focused rather on the integration of values perspectives into the intended curriculum of traditional learning areas and subjects. This reflected a personal and professional commitment to the belief that values are operative both consciously and unconsciously in all dimensions of our lives and endeavours, not simply the realm of personal relationships.

Values education then, had certainly been in the spotlight for the first decade of the twenty-first century in school education in Australia. In 2009 however, attention and energy turned to the development of the new national curriculum, the *Australian Curriculum*. Having been significantly involved in the VEP with a particular focus in curriculum and having moved into working in pre-service teacher education in 2006, I was interested to see if, how and where Values Education would appear in this new curriculum framework. As Values Education had been a dominant feature in the educational landscape since 2002, I also wondered what a new iteration of the entity would mean for the practice of teachers. Until the advent of the *Australian Curriculum*, what I will broadly call *moral* education had been undertaken either in the domain of the personal, for example in non-academic subjects called 'Personal Development' and extra-

curricular programs, for example service learning projects, or the realm of Civics and Citizenship education. I have already noted that this was largely the experience in the period of the VEP. This positioning was consonant with the global curriculum landscape - and indeed widely remains the case, as seen, for example, in the United Kingdom's national curriculum with separate subjects of Religious Education and Sex and Relationship Education, or in Quebec, Canada with its Ethics and Religious Culture Program (see [www.learnquebec.ca/ethics-and-religious-culture1](http://www.learnquebec.ca/ethics-and-religious-culture1)).

## **The Australian Curriculum**

The new *Australian Curriculum* framework (Foundation - Year 10) was structured as a three-dimensional curriculum, ascribing importance to disciplinary knowledge, skills and understanding; General Capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities. As noted earlier, what is novel and distinctive in this structure is the particular integrative approach taken to the two non-disciplinary dimensions, General Capabilities and Cross-curriculum priorities (the focus in this study is on one of these two dimensions, the General Capabilities). Each of the General Capabilities is explicated through an introduction that describes the nature and scope of the capability, its place in the learning areas and its evidence base; organising elements and sub-elements that underpin a learning continuum, and a learning continuum (see Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA] n.d., d). They are however not 'subjects' in themselves, and are not to be examined as separate entities but explored contextually within the study of the eight disciplines and their constituent subjects. This approach could be viewed as a means of 'super-charging' disciplinary knowledge to address the profound challenges outlined earlier that are faced by twenty-first century peoples, societies and environments. Arguably what has been denoted historically as the Values area is found articulated in three of the seven General Capabilities in the *Australian Curriculum: Personal and social competence, Intercultural understanding* and *Ethical understanding*. I was particularly drawn to the capability of *Ethical understanding* as it contained strong resonances with my previous work in the Values field. However, I also noted its substantively different shape and

focus to the emphases generally found in the VEP experience which would have been most familiar to teachers. In *Ethical understanding* the key elements - Understanding ethical concepts and issues, Exploring values, rights and responsibilities, Reasoning in decision-making and actions - appeared to me to have been shaped by two fields, Critical thinking and philosophical Ethics. Such a marked contrast to the strongly personal and interpersonal focus of much of the VEP experience caused me to wonder how this capability would be understood by teachers and subsequently implemented within their subject classrooms.

## **Which knowledge?**

A further interest in the General Capability of *Ethical understanding* and its implementation within subject-based classrooms arose from my curiosity as to what this 'new' capability could potentially *carry*. Might it be a vehicle through which to cultivate the capacities and dispositions that would assist students to engage thoughtfully, compassionately, and confidently with the complexities of their multiple and diverse worlds? Influenced by the thought of Jürgen Habermas, I wondered if this curriculum entity of *Ethical understanding* when embodied in the classroom would possess the capacity to move students to a place of transformative thinking and action. Drawing on Habermas' *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1968) a number of scholars and educators (for example Bouchard and Morris, 2012; Deakin-Crick and Joldersma 2007 and Lovat 2010) have applied his tripartite typology of knowing to developing an understanding of the school curriculum and learning. Habermas considers knowledge as inextricably related to human interest. Three 'interests' are identified: the technical or instrumental; the hermeneutic or interpretative, and the emancipatory or critical (see Lovat, 2010).

Technical or instrumental knowing is a vital part of our 'being' in the world, but when it is regarded reductively and given the status of whole rather than part, that 'being' is circumscribed. Hermeneutic knowing which enables communication and shared understanding, in and of itself does not necessarily lead to freedom and flourishing of humans, as this shared knowledge may be based on inaccurate or flawed assumptions. The third knowledge interest however, the emancipatory or critical, cultivates self-reflection and critical distance in the knower which, in turn,



promotes freedom and the capacity for transformation. Cranton and Roy (2003) underscore that technical and hermeneutic knowing remain essential and valuable, but their limitations must be recognised, 'If we do not question current scientific and social theories and accepted truths, we may never realise how we are constrained by their inevitable distortions and errors (the world is flat, the Aryan race is superior)' (p. 89). The risk and fear they highlight is that without the presence of critical questioning an entire culture can become captive to these limitations and blind to the distortions and errors in their midst. Lovat (2010) explains that the development of the emancipatory knowledge interest leads to 'communicative capacity' and ultimately 'communicative action':

...which is when the self-reflective knower comes to see his or her own life-world as just one that needs to function in a myriad of life-worlds, and of 'communicative action', where the self-reflective knower takes a step beyond mere tolerance of other beliefs and values to take a stand both for justice and for oneself. (p. 493)

The philosophical ideas of Emmanuel Levinas also shaped my wondering about this ethical capability. An ethics shaped by Levinas' thinking is relational in essence, always seeking and privileging understanding of the *other*. This orientation appears pertinent at this time in global history as we witness the largest movement of peoples since the second world war. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates the global number of refugees to be just over 16 million at the end of 2015 (see UNHCR, 2016, p. 13). Its 2016 report on forcibly displaced people notes, 'The global population of forcibly displaced people today is larger than the entire population of the United Kingdom. If they were a country, the forcibly displaced would be the 21st largest in the world' (p. 6). This phenomenon, playing out against a backdrop of global terrorism, has resulted in a growing fear of the 'other' in many countries where displaced persons seek refuge. This migration is not an imaginary global crisis. It seems that understanding rather than fear would be a productive first step in addressing it, and the thinking of Levinas might be illuminating.

In a world where pluralism and diversity appear in this historical moment, to be leading predominantly to fear, fragmentation and inequity, I see the need to

develop a deep understanding of those labelled *other*, and the emancipatory knowledge interest, to be clear and urgent. This study provides an opportunity to observe whether the capability of *Ethical understanding* as put to work within subject-based classrooms by teachers, manifests the emancipatory dimension of knowing as posited by Habermas and an *other*-centred Levinasian disposition.

## Research questions

It is within this context that I framed the research questions for this study:

- What understandings of ethics and ethical understanding do teachers hold?
- What understandings of ethics and ethical understanding emerge when teachers explicitly teach *Ethical understanding* in their discipline areas?
- What are teachers' views about the place of *Ethical understanding* in their subject?

These questions were to be explored through two interviews with each participating teacher. Between the two interviews each teacher was to take their views into practice by teaching a unit work foregrounding what they perceived to be the ethical dimension/s raised by the material of the unit. Participants were sought who taught in one of the four Phase One subjects of the *Australian Curriculum*: English, History, Mathematics, and Science. The classes involved ranged from Years Eight to Eleven. Although Year Eleven falls outside the scope of the Foundation to Year Ten curriculum, the particular group involved, a 'general' Mathematics class, were still working with Year Ten level curriculum material. As one of the aims of the study was to understand how teachers conceived of ethical understanding when contextualised within their subject in a specific unit of study, in the interest of achieving a clear view of this process, my directions to participants in respect of their actions were kept to an absolute minimum. The only support material provided was the curriculum documentation produced by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) for the General Capability of *Ethical understanding*. Participants taught their units of work incorporating their understandings of what ethics involves and linking this to parts of the unit where they believed opportunity arose for this type of exploration. The units and this exploration occurred in timetabled classes across three to five

weeks. Some constraints operated on choice of unit topics because of previously agreed curriculum schedules. This meant that the content of some units did not always have immediately clear links to ethical understanding, however participants wrestled creatively with this.

## Wider debates

What actually occurs in the ‘implementation’ of curriculum is a delicate affair that involves the intersection and interplay of a range of factors and ‘players’. However, having been a secondary teacher for over two decades myself, I was aware of the central role and influence of those who stand in the gulf between the intended curriculum, contained in documented frameworks, scope and sequence statements and course guides and descriptions and the enacted curriculum as experienced by students in classrooms. Those who occupy that gulf are of course classroom teachers, and despite the many external and internal pressures that shape their practice, they are more than transmission funnels or relay signallers. Their role and work are active, not passive; they are curriculum *makers*. I draw here on the work of Clandinin and Connelly (1992) in exploring images of teachers and their endeavours. Craig (2008) explains that Connelly and Clandinin’s work ‘provided an alternate image to the teacher as implementer, the historically dominant image in the curriculum, change, and administration literatures. To Connelly and Clandinin, teachers actively make curriculum alongside students, not merely implement curriculum as dictated by policy makers’ (p. 21). Honouring this agency, I sought to hear what meanings teachers would create for this new entity of *Ethical understanding* in their subject classrooms. Of particular novelty and interest in this case of curriculum innovation, was the fact that teachers were not being asked to introduce new curriculum content from within their area of specialist knowledge, but to bring a lens from beyond that body of knowledge to illuminate it. What knowledge/s and understandings would teachers draw upon and privilege in undertaking this task?

In considering the third question (What are teachers’ views about the place of *Ethical understanding* in their subject?), I was cognisant of a wider debate concerning the turn to a capabilities focus within curriculum frameworks. Linda

Darling-Hammond (2010), writing about school education in the United States in the context of globalisation and its impact on both the manufacturing and knowledge economies, observes, 'education can no longer be productively focused primarily on the transmission of pieces of information that, once memorised, comprise a stable storehouse of knowledge' (p. 4). Advocates of the capabilities, capacities and competencies movement - which have been loosely called *Twenty-first century skills* - point to the fact that we are still operating under a factory or production line model of education developed in the nineteenth century as a response to needs generated by the industrial revolution (see Darling-Hammond, 2015). Much of the impetus around the twenty-first century skills movement has emanated from the business community and large corporations, especially those whose focus is digital technologies. It would be preferable to believe that educational altruism, a commitment to furthering human rights, social equity and democratic practices lie behind this interest. However, with an eye to having a work force ready to undertake the challenges presented by a global environment marked by unpredictability and rapid change, this engagement is likely an example of transparent self-interest in the first instance. In 2009 for example Cisco, Intel and Microsoft established the *Assessment and Teaching of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills Project* operating out of The University of Melbourne. The *Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning* (P21) established in 2002 in the USA is another example of this phenomenon. Despite the dominance of the economic and workplace paradigms in these initiatives, competencies and capabilities for life beyond the workplace also figure in the taxonomies presented. Yates and Collins (2010) note this aspect in their review of Australian curriculum development, 'Essential Learnings and Capabilities represent an Australian version of a move away from traditional academic content knowledge towards, not vocational knowledge, but personal procedural knowledges seen as being of future value to students across all aspects of their lives' (p. 97). This recognition reflects the work of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in its *Definition and Selection of Competencies* (DeSeCo) project in the first decade of this century:

From a broader social perspective, knowledge, skills, and competencies are important because of their contributions outside the domain of economics and work. They contribute to: increasing individual participation in

democratic institutions; social cohesion and justice; and strengthening human rights and autonomy as counterweights to increasing global inequality of opportunities and increasing individual marginalisation. (OECD, 2018)

This turn in curriculum framing has not occurred without significant criticism from a number of perspectives. A potent critique has emerged from social realist theorists such as Michael Young and Lisa Wheelahan. Their concern focuses on the displacement of theoretical knowledge in the curriculum that has traditionally been organised into academic disciplines. Following the tradition of Basil Bernstein, Wheelahan (2010) argues that ‘access to abstract theoretical knowledge is an issue of distributional justice’ (p. 1). She elaborates on this by invoking notions of citizenship and participatory democracy, ‘Access to theoretical knowledge is important because it provides access to society’s conversation about itself’ (p. 2). Wheelahan further argues that recent emphases in curriculum theory namely constructivism, instrumentalism and conservatism, and the curriculum frameworks that have emerged from such perspectives, have displaced theoretical knowledge that empowers learners and knowers. She suggests that the movement towards generic skills and competencies which ‘underpins the vocationalisation of the curriculum’ (p. 72), is actually a movement away from equity.

Because the approach in the *Australian Curriculum* is distinctive in contextualising capabilities within disciplines, I was keen to appreciate what impacts this approach might have on the integrity of disciplinarity and its affordances as suggested by Wheelahan and Young. I considered that the participants in this study would be well placed, through their experiences and reflections, to contribute practitioner perspectives to this debate.

## **Thesis outline**

This first part of this chapter has offered a broad brush-stroke account of the challenges presented to educators and schools by contemporary global social, political, economic and environmental realities. A pattern of response to these challenges is identified in curriculum approaches, characterised as a ‘turn’ to

generic skills, capabilities and competencies. The *Australian Curriculum* and the constitutive elements of its framework is placed within this context. My own background and interest in this topic have been outlined and linked to the formation of the research questions which are stated.

Chapter Two reviews relevant areas of research literature. Firstly, approaches to 'Moral' education are considered, with particular attention given to 'Values education' as the field most closely aligned to *Ethical understanding*. Scholarly and policy debates surrounding the twenty-first century skills movement and its interface with disciplinary knowledge are then examined. Jürgen Habermas' frame of three knowledge interests is afforded particular focus for its relevance to the relationship between the character of the contemporary context of the study and the nature of *Ethical understanding*. A selective discussion of literature addressing the relationship between pedagogy and professional knowledge follows. Finally, research on the role of teachers in policy implementation is surveyed. The warrant for this study is established in identifying the gaps in the literature and the opportunities this affords, and its distinctive contribution is delineated.

Chapter Three provides a discussion of the methodological approaches employed in the study. The study is a small scale qualitative project drawing upon the approach of hermeneutic phenomenology. It comprises two semi-structured extended interviews with eleven secondary school teachers in three contrasting schools, their written reflective journals, a sample of teaching materials and limited student responses, gained indirectly via teachers' comments. A key aim in the study was to privilege the voices and experiences of teachers, whose views are often marginalised in matters of curriculum change and innovation. The study has greatest resonance with a case study approach, particularly in the way in which it attempts to document the narrative threads of the lived experience of a group of teachers engaged in curriculum innovation.

Chapter Four is the first of four chapters that present and interpret the study's data. Chapter Four is divided into two parts. Part One considers philosophical debates about ethics and education and represents scholarly perspectives. It begins with an initial discussion of normative Ethics, the branch of philosophical

Ethics most pertinent to this study. Recent ‘turns’ and trends of particular relevance to educational philosophy are explored. Here the focus is the ethics of care and the philosophical approach of Emmanuel Levinas. This provides an interpretive frame for what follows in Part Two and subsequent chapters. Part Two draws on the first interviews with teachers and delineates participants’ views about what they see as the substance of ethics and ethical understanding. The views of each participant are analysed in turn. The overall argument advanced here is that notions of ethics held by the teachers are diverse, but a strong emphasis on the relational aspect is present.

Chapter Five explores the lived experience of participants in teaching their units of work that foregrounded the ethical wherever they considered this to be relevant and appropriate in the respective disciplinary area. The data that is examined in this chapter is drawn from the second interviews with participants and their reflective journals. Again, each participant’s experience is examined and discussed, but there is also an emphasis here on the subject area and how this context impacted (if at all) upon their understanding of the ethical. In this endeavour, I seek to uncover emerging patterns in understanding and link these to the wider discourse about the nature of ethics and ethical understanding in educational contexts. The findings suggest that the teachers’ experience of taking *Ethical understanding* into the classroom altered, enlarged and in some cases transformed, previous thinking about the capability. Patterns also emerged as to how *Ethical understanding* is shaped by the subject context in which it is enacted.

Chapter Six presents participants’ responses to the question of the place of *Ethical understanding* in their subject area and classrooms. All data sources - both the interviews and reflective journals - are drawn upon to explore their views. This material is framed by a consideration of the various positions that have been taken up in the debate concerning curriculum integration and its impact upon disciplinary knowledge. An important aspect of this analysis is the focus upon the interaction between what is deemed to be the ethical dimension or element of the topic being studied, and the actual subject content of that topic and the implications, if any, for the integrity of the latter. Thus, in this chapter, the analysis of participants’ experiences is developed not from individual viewpoints as in the

two preceding chapters, but from the perspective of each discipline area. Participants' individual experiences are presented within this framing. The overall argument in this chapter is that an ethical dimension can be readily nested within subject specific content. Participants found that this approach enhanced student engagement with, and understanding of, subject knowledge.

Chapter Seven provides an account of the impacts of teaching for ethical understanding on teachers' practice and professional identity. This was an area that was not an explicit or intended focus of the research questions. However, it emerged as such a potent thread in the narratives of participants that it could not be ignored and demanded substantive attention. The pedagogical practices embraced by teachers are reviewed in respect of the ways in which they support the development of ethical understanding. This chapter argues that the pedagogical disruption caused by the request to incorporate ethical perspectives in subjects was positive and productive for both students and teachers.

In Chapter Eight the key findings and recommendations are presented. I argue that the capability of *Ethical understanding* in its current form is a limited version of what teachers want and need it to be in their classrooms. This study has demonstrated the role of teachers as *curriculum makers* and advocates for their place at the table in the process of reviewing this capability. The unique qualities of this capability, it is argued, challenge pedagogy and professional identity, and as such, offer opportunity for transformed practice. The strengths and limitations of the study are considered, along with recommendations for future research.



## Chapter Two: Literature review

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This chapter provides a critical review of three bodies of literature relevant to this study: moral education; 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, capabilities and competences, and teachers and curriculum change. In surveying this literature, the key themes and debates pertaining to each area will be examined, and considered in light of the questions and concerns guiding this thesis. The main pre-occupations, tensions, silences as well as gaps within each body of literature will be noted, with a view to explaining how this thesis is positioned in relation to and contributes to these respective scholarly fields. The review thus elaborates the warrant for this research, in critical dialogue with existing relevant scholarship. In doing so, it indicates how this study builds on current understandings and maps its potential to contribute new insights to the field of ethics, curriculum and teachers' professional learning. Incorporated into this review is a consideration of how these different perspectives relate to the *Australian Curriculum's* General Capability of *Ethical understanding*, which sits at the core of this study.

### Moral education

As noted in the first chapter of this thesis, the General Capability of *Ethical understanding* within the *Australian Curriculum* can be located within a field designated 'Moral education'. Research from this field can illuminate and help to build a clearer understanding of this General Capability. The field of Moral education is broad, encompassing both religious or faith-based formation frameworks and 'secular' approaches, for example those which trace their lineage to Aristotle and philosophical ethics. To complicate the landscape further, a range of terminology and phrasing is used interchangeably when speaking of moral education, the most common of these being 'character education' and 'values education'. A review of these approaches affords some clarity in delineating the scholarly space in which the General Capability of *Ethical understanding* might or might not be placed.

There are also various other ways in which writers slice the moral education pie. Some writers have divided approaches in this field into two camps - the prescriptive and descriptive (see Halbert, 2009, p. 42), with the former drawing on behaviourism and the latter constructivism. Approaches to moral education might also be categorised according to the outcomes sought - whether these be primarily cognitive (knowing 'about') or affective or disposition-forming in nature. These categorisations cut across the main areas considered in this section, and also contribute to understanding ways of conceptualising the General Capability of *Ethical understanding*.

## **Character education**

Character education is often used as a grab-bag term for moral education. Philip Cam (2016) suggests it is more appropriately restricted to approaches that 'seek to directly mould character and are concerned with conduct primarily as indicative of character' (p. 5). Cam distinguishes between *moral education*, 'a field or aspect of study within the curriculum', and *moral training* which, 'goes along with behaviour management and the social training that students receive from a wide range of school activities' (p. 6). It is this 'moral training' paradigm that has dominated the character education landscape in the latter part of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century, particularly in the United States of America, and which has attracted trenchant criticism. As is often the case, initial visions and understandings of a concept can be dramatically altered, distorted or transformed when the various demands of context come into play. This is perhaps the case with Thomas Lickona's (1992) vision of character education and the narrower, reductionist programs that have been built out of it. Kohn (1997) notes the dominance of behaviourist approaches in such programs which do not capture the complexities of Lickona's work, 'The point is to drill students in specific behaviours rather than to engage them in deep, critical reflection about certain ways of being' (p. 2). Marshall, Caldwell and Foster (2011), similarly describe the defining features of this diminished approach, arguing that some character educators 'focus on rewards for self-control and behavioural follow through...while others focus on specific "character lessons" to teach prescribed virtues' (p. 51).

Scholars such as McLaughlin and Halstead (1999, pp138-139), reiterating earlier critiques set forward by Purpel (1997) and Nash (1997), view these approaches to character education as simplistic, surface-level responses or remedies to what is typically diagnosed as a rising tide of social ills and 'disorder'. Others characterise such responses as being framed by the 'genre of discontent' and 'litany of alarm' (Lapsley and Narvaez, 2007, p.258). A strong critique levelled at this version of character education is that it is conservative in nature. Kohn (1997) quotes Purpel describing its aim as, 'acculturating students to conventional norms of 'good' behaviour [which] ...resonates with neoconservative concerns for social stability' (p. 5).

Winton (2008), in examining the Ontario character education program '*Character Matters!*' and the US *Character Education Partnership* (CEP), similarly claims such approaches are essentially tools to shore up neoconservative ideology. Following Purpel, she remarks that these programs 'reproduce[s] inequities in society more generally by focusing on individuals rather than investigating how economic, political, or cultural factors affect character and behaviour' (p.312). She further proposes that such a 'focus allows political, economic, and cultural institutions to remain unchallenged...and perpetuates the status quo' (p. 312). In the programs she examines, Winton draws particular attention to the negative framing of young people and their behaviour as problematic and notes that in positioning teachers as models of 'good character', 'they also model conformity and compliance' (p. 311). In this she amplifies Kohn's observation that key character education vocabulary, such as 'respect', 'responsibility' and 'citizenship', is often used euphemistically, shrouding a lack of critical perspective in relation to institutions of authority.

Following such critiques, Nielsen observes (2005), recounting an experience of a school assembly where 'students of the week' were congratulated for exhibiting desirable behaviours, that some approaches to character education border on indoctrination. Nielsen follows Tan (2004) in characterising three ingredients of indoctrination, 'one is told what to do or think, provided with no reasons, and given no alternatives' (p. 4). He remarks, 'as long as we provide *reason* and explore *alternatives* alongside the teaching of our preferred core values, we may have

explicit values education without indoctrination' (p. 4). However, he cautions, if 'we forget the two other clauses - providing reason and alternative - we actually indoctrinate, however noble our 'core' values and intentions' (p. 4).

Another approach to character education has emerged, however, in the last twenty years, predominantly in the United Kingdom. It is based in Aristotelian philosophy and focuses on education in character and virtues. Its lineage in recent times can be traced to the substantial body of work by David Carr, British educational philosopher. Carr's (1991) *Educating the Virtues: An Essay on the Philosophical Psychology of Moral Development and Education*, is a seminal work in this field. Walker, Roberts and Kristjánsson (2013) describe the approach as, 'foreground[ing] the cultivation of moral character...which measure[s] success primarily in terms of changes to students' *hexeis* rather than in terms of other prosocial variables' (p. 81). They describe *hexeis* as, 'settled states of character, concerned with morally praiseworthy conduct in specific significant and distinguishable spheres of human life' (p. 81). It is not character education, 'in the narrow sense in which it has frequently been used in educational discourse to designate a certain US-based approach to moral education...that many commentators have written off as overly behaviouristic, nostalgic and conservative' (p. 81). Curren (2016) characterises the divergence of approaches starkly, 'Habituation that cultivates the right desires, pleasures, emotions, and perceptions, has dominated the character education landscape, while the critical thinking, inquiry, understanding, moral knowledge, and good judgment that are often essential to navigating morally challenging situations are neglected' (p. 522). Further, Arthur and Carr (2013), contend that this 'virtue ethics' approach avoids the false binary of the cognitive and affective often present in some moral education programs:

...whilst virtue ethics concurs with Kohlberg and other moral rationalists on the importance of the development of reason for moral education, and also with care ethicists...on the moral value of feeling and emotion, it avoids the stark opposition of feeling to reason characteristic of such other perspectives. For virtue ethicists, whereas practical wisdom is deeply implicated in the affective side of human nature and has a clear

‘desiderative’ dimension, the desires, volitions and passions of moral agents also have a clear and distinct ‘cognitive’ or ‘ratiocinative’ aspect’. (p. 28)

Despite these differences of approach, McLaughlin and Halstead (1999) nonetheless note a key commonality in character education, arguing that, ‘all conceptions of “character education” have in common the belief that adults, in particular teachers, have a duty not merely to teach children about character...but also to develop qualities of character and virtue in the children themselves’ (p. 136). However, they also explicate differentiating features and speak of using a continuum to locate various approaches to character education using end points running from *expansive* to *non-expansive*. They detail ‘non-expansive’ approaches as belonging to Cam’s ‘moral training’ genre, exemplified in programs like *Character Counts*, and others mentioned above, that are prolific particularly in North America. In respect of ‘non-expansive’ praxis in character education, they quote Gutmann’s 1987 observation of the paradox that often lies at the heart of moral education, ‘Moral education begins by winning the battle against amorality and egoism’, it ends, however, ‘by struggling against uncritical acceptance of the moral habits and opinions that were the spoils of the first victory’ (p. 153). In summary, McLaughlin and Halstead note that a feature of non-expansive approaches to character education, ‘is their neglect of moral reasoning, however conceived’ (p. 137). They contrast this with expansive approaches that, they argue, ‘offer a sophisticated and nuanced account of the nature and requirements of a liberal democratic society as a context for their argument’ (p. 137). Accordingly, the qualities of character and the virtues that become the focus for development in students go well ‘beyond the fundamental and basic, narrowly conceived...there is a fuller characterisation of, and emphasis upon, the nature and scope of reasoning’ (p. 137).

Examining the General Capability of *Ethical understanding* in the *Australian curriculum* in the light of approaches to character education described above, it appears that *Ethical understanding* is less like those developed in North America and more like those evolving in the United Kingdom. It thus sits towards the ‘expansive’ end of McLaughlin and Halstead’s continuum. The language that frames the ‘Organising elements’ and the ‘Learning continuum’ in the *Ethical*

*understanding* material is open and invitational rather than closed and prescriptive: words like ‘understanding’, ‘recognise’, ‘exploring’, ‘consider’, ‘reflect’, and ‘examine’ abound. It is language associated with ‘the rational’. Peacock, Lingard and Sellar (2015) note that many contemporary curriculum theorists characterise new curricula as swinging between explicating ‘what’ students ought to know and ‘who’ students ought to become. They see in the particular structure of the *Australian Curriculum* that it ‘is a traditional discipline-based curriculum, but these subjects are accompanied by “cross-curriculum priorities” and “general capabilities,” both of which are focused on who the curriculum wants young Australians to become’ (p. 368).

The striking of this balance between *what* and *who*, accompanied by postulated productive outcomes for students arising out of this interaction, seems to be the intent of the writers of the *Australian Curriculum* (see McGaw, 2013). However, the element of *becoming* which appears integral in all manifestations of character education canvassed above, is strangely absent, or rather perhaps hidden and implicit in the *Ethical understanding* documentation.

*The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (2008) is the aspirational broad policy or vision statement for schooling in Australia. The *Australian Curriculum* framework has been constructed upon this foundation. In enunciating the second goal for all young Australians (to become ‘successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens’), the language is particularly focused upon personal capacities and qualities of character: ‘confident’, ‘creative’, ‘optimism’, ‘collaborate’, ‘honesty’, ‘resilience’, ‘respect for others’, ‘appreciate’, ‘value’, ‘responsible’. However, in the documentation of the General Capability of *Ethical understanding* the focus, whilst ‘expansive’ is cast predominantly in cognitive, academic terms. Here I draw upon examples from Level 6, the highest developmental level in the continuum: ‘critique’, ‘distinguish’, ‘investigate’, ‘analyse’, ‘evaluate’, ‘explain’, ‘prioritise’. This vocabulary has resonance with the skills of critical thinking, which certainly contribute in specific ways to the development of a person and their worldview, but the bridge from the critical cognitive dimension of ethical understanding into a person’s affectivity is not visible. This element of disconnection between the

cognitive and affective came to prominence in the study as teachers enacted the capability of *Ethical understanding* in their classrooms.

Part of the reason that this is the case, can be found in the history of the development of this General capability. Philip Cam (2016), one of the writers of *Ethical understanding*, recounts the issues surrounding this capability's original name, 'Ethical Behaviour':

Since the curriculum for each subject was to have the general capability of Ethical Behaviour embedded in it, assessment in a subject would have to reflect the extent to which achievement standards for Ethical Behaviour were met. This suggests setting up curriculum standards for ethical conduct and grading students accordingly. It presents the peculiar prospect of adjusting marks in academic subjects on the basis of non-academic performance. [This] confus[es]...things that belong to one logical category with things that belong to another category. (pp. 7-8)

This is a most helpful distinction and gives a clear verbal explanation of the widespread dis-ease many educators experienced with the label 'Ethical Behaviour' and why the focus falls in the new version of the capability upon the critical cognitive aspects.

However, this does not, I suggest, provide a satisfactory resolution to the tension that remains. Cam's concluding comment about this matter is significant as it highlights the active and profound shaping presence of assessment requirements, and he observes that, 'Happily, the general competence [now called 'capability'] on which we were working was eventually changed from Ethical Behaviour to Ethical Understanding, a title that reflects normal academic criteria and assessment standards' (p. 8). It would seem that in the face of the dilemma posed by the tyranny of measurement in relation to aspects of personal formation, a decision was taken to keep the capability firmly rooted in the academic/cognitive sphere, with perhaps the 'hope' present in the background that some process of moral osmosis might also occur. Of course, behind the description in the documentation, there exists an implicit conception of 'the ethical person' and their attributes, but this remains inferential, not explicitly stated. In my view, complex and seemingly contradictory impulses and emphases exist between the foundational *Melbourne*

*Declaration*, ACARA's understanding of the nature of General Capabilities as being distinct in essence from the nature of the disciplines, and the expression of the substance of the capability of *Ethical understanding*. This study examines how teachers have navigated this conflicting landscape in their enacting of this curriculum in their classrooms.

Another 'expansive' approach to character education is evidenced in the work of the *Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues* based at the University of Birmingham in the UK. In its *Framework for Character Education in Schools* (2017), character education is described as, 'helping students grasp what is ethically important in situations and to act for the right reasons, such that they become more autonomous and reflective' (p. 2). In this view, the aim and purpose of this endeavour is 'the development of good sense or practical wisdom: the capacity to choose intelligently between alternatives' (p. 2). In this description an emphasis on a constructivist rather than behaviourist approach is evident, as well as the integration of the cognitive and affective aspects of persons. A major project of the *Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues* developed through 2015 and 2016, indicates an element of 'expansiveness' that has resonance with the approach stated by ACARA that underpins the General Capabilities of the *Australian Curriculum*.

The suite of curriculum materials produced, titled *Teaching Character Through Subjects*, is based on the premise that, 'character education, both implicit and explicit, can and should permeate all subjects as well as the general ethos, culture and community of a school' (Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, n.d., p. 4). To this end, teachers developed, trialled and reviewed teaching materials across fourteen subjects for students of eleven to sixteen years of age. In introducing the materials, the approach adopted is presented as a means of integrating public knowledge with personal worldview. They propose that, 'Educating character through curriculum subjects enables students to develop a personal rationale for why character is important' (p. 4).

Although not sitting under the banner of 'character education' per se, an approach similar to that adopted in the *Teaching Character Through Subjects* materials (i.e.



integrating moral education into the 'academic' subjects of the formal curriculum) is one investigated and advocated by Nucci, Creane and Powers (2015) in their study of eleven teachers and 254 middle school students in the United States. Applying social cognitive domain theory to a school curriculum context, teachers in their study were asked to prepare and teach history lessons which embedded issues of morality into the academic content. The researchers posited the success of this endeavour by noting the fact that teachers continued to use the materials generated for the study even a year beyond its completion. They found that, 'teachers saw no discontinuity between the goals of moral education as enacted through this integration within their history classes and their academic goals as history teachers' (p. 496).

These integrative approaches echo that commended, and scaffolded into, the *Australian Curriculum*, as discussed earlier. Both seek to contextualise 'what is ethically important' for students, avoiding dichotomous thinking and promoting holistic learning. It may be the case that outcomes such as those described in the two programs above may be what is experienced through teacher and student engagement with the *Ethical understanding* dimension of their subject areas within the *Australian Curriculum*. The extent to which classroom practitioners deem this to be desirable in the first instance, and achievable in practice is a central concern of this Australian study. This map of current thinking about and practice in moral education, has revealed some openings to which the concerns of this thesis can contribute.

## **Values Education**

The opening statement of the literature review conducted for the Australian Government's *Values Education Study: Final Report* (2003) is not immediately promising, 'Values education could be described as a subject about which much has been written but little is known' (p. 169). Brian Hill (1991) calls values education 'a vague and woolly notion' (p. 3). David Carr (1997) considers the phrase to be essentially an empty tautology and many educators in the field would agree that we are well past the times when it was argued by some that schools, the curriculum, indeed the whole 'box and dice' of education could be values-neutral.

Dalene Swanson (2010) puts this neatly, 'It is similar to saying Sahara Desert, when Sahara...means desert in Arabic' (p. 137).

Writing from a British perspective, Taylor (2000) highlights further concerns about this entity called 'values education'. She observes that, 'Despite much public debate about values and educational concern about the state and status of values education in schools', there is, she continues, very little detail 'about how schools approach values education, how their provision supports their stated values, why and how they choose certain curricular approaches and teaching strategies, and what professional support is needed' (p. 155). The fact that the literature in relation to values education in schools is diffuse and rambling is in part a reflection of definitional issues, but also reflects the complexity of the field of moral philosophy upon which it touches. It is also a consequence of the fact that in the United Kingdom and Australia in particular, no single approach has gained sufficient traction to become a mandated part of both curriculum frameworks and assessment and reporting regimens.

A further challenge encountered in the use of the term 'Values Education' is the notion embedded within it - that this is, in fact, an area of endeavour that is discrete, possessing epistemological boundaries like any other subject in the curriculum. If one were to follow the seminal thinking of American philosopher, John Dewey (1916), in this field, moral education cannot be separated out from the 'regular' subjects in the curriculum. According to Dewey, it is to be an integral part of *every* learning experience of the child, 'Moral education in school is practically hopeless', he suggests, 'when we set up the development of character as a supreme end, and at the same time treat the acquiring of knowledge and the development of understanding, which of necessity occupy the chief part of school time, as having nothing to do with character' (p. 338). This Deweyan vision has been taken up and developed in the literature of educational philosophy focusing in particular around holistic education, for example in the work of John P. Miller and Ron Miller. However, in the research literature about moral education, 'Values Education' continues to be most typically referenced as a separate, rather than integrated, educational offering.

Two philosophical paradigms from the field of Ethics have given rise to differing approaches to values education (see Narvaez, 2007, p.127ff). One paradigm focuses on defining what constitutes a 'good' life and what attributes might be needed to live it, as being the primary task of individuals. As individuals, we are responsible for discovering the virtues within ourselves and cultivating them with the assistance of our community or communities. This approach to values education draws on virtue ethics, which emphasises moral character over duty or consequences of actions, as outlined in works such as Alisdair McIntyre's 'After Virtue' (1984). Character education, as considered in its various guises in the section above, also originates from this paradigm.

The other paradigm, 'rule ethics', focuses on what is the right thing to do in a given situation. What are considered to be universal notions of justice and reason form the basis for discerning right action. Such a perspective draws upon ideas promoted in works like John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1971). Kohlberg (1976) follows in this tradition in his formulation of rational moral education. Kohlberg postulated six stages of moral development through which children and adults progressed. These stages are sequential and all individuals move through them in the same order, though at varying speeds. The task of the teacher is to stimulate students to develop increasingly complex moral reasoning through each of the stages. The 'moral reasoning' and 'just community' approaches to values education are based on Kohlberg's theory (see Oser, Althof and Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2008).

Criticism of the Kohlbergian moral development approach has focused on the prevalence of movement in human development that is both forwards and backwards. This creates a problematic 'lock-step' approach to development in the terms of the Kohlbergian model (Fisher, 2000). Another problem, it has been argued (see Gilligan, 1993), is that Kohlberg's approach is essentially male in orientation (Kohlberg interviewed males only), and that it offers a narrow definition of morality in terms of justice (Prencipe and Helwig, 2002). The presence of vestiges of Kohlberg's moral development approach is evident in the structuring of the General Capability of *Ethical understanding*. Across eleven years and six levels of schooling, development in the three designated areas of *Ethical understanding* is mapped as what is 'typically' expected to be evident in students.

This scope and sequence contains forty-eight descriptions arranged as a continuum of moral progress in terms of age-based development. The limitations outlined above may come into play when *Ethical understanding* is enacted and present teachers with challenges of implementation.

The most popular and extensively implemented 'exploratory' approach to values education is values clarification. In 1966, Rath, Harmin and Simon published *Values and teaching: working with values in the classroom*. Drawing on humanistic psychology as presented in the theories of Allport, Rogers and Maslow values clarification is a process employing rational thinking and emotional awareness, to enable individuals to clarify and actualise their values. Values clarification was extremely popular in the US and warmly embraced in Australia in the late 1970s and 1980s. Its appeal, resonant with the context of the social revolution of the sixties and seventies in which it evolved, came from its non-prescriptive nature. The teacher was cast in the role of guide and facilitator, and specifically forbidden from promoting his, her or other values. The 'instilling' approach to values education draws on a set of external values. The moral reasoning approach relies on logic and empirical processes. Values clarification, however, relies on internal affective and cognitive approaches. This means its emphasis is individualistic as opposed to the other approaches, which are essentially social constructivist in nature.

The feature that was perhaps values clarification's greatest appeal - its non-prescriptive approach - was ultimately also its weakest point in the critiques launched against it. Howard Kirschenbaum (2000), one of Harmin and Simon's associates in the Values Clarification movement, said of its fall from grace that, 'by the mid-1980s principals would rather have been accused of having asbestos in their ceilings than using values clarification in their classrooms, so passé, controversial, or discredited had values clarification become' (p. 7). Although Kirschenbaum argues that at its heart values clarification was not about moral relativism, in practice this is what the process appeared to endorse. Scathing critiques, such as the following from Boyd and Bogdan (1984) multiplied, 'within the framework of the theory, the clear ideals of a Martin Luther King cannot be

distinguished from the “something” that might be “clarified” and “purposefully and proudly” pursued by the Ku Klux Klan’ (p. 292).

Kirschenbaum also identifies changes in the social, political and economic climate of the 1980s, along with inconsistent implementation and a lack of rigorous ongoing research, as significant factors in the decline of values clarification as a movement. However, he identifies a fatal theoretical flaw at the heart of values clarification theory:

What a shame that we had to wait until values clarification was criticised for being devoid of values before we could come to the realisation that values clarification in its own way was inculcating certain fundamental values and that we could admit this openly and even be proud of it. (p. 9)

In this comment Kirschenbaum acknowledges the impossibility of neutrality in the values space - even a focus on process rather than content could achieve this.

Ultimately, Kirschenbaum argues that, ‘values clarification is only part of a much broader process of values education’ (p. 16). Despite the powerful critiques of values clarification cited here, its dispositions of open-ness and non-prescription have continued to be supported in other approaches in the field of moral education, and indeed are in evidence in the documentation of the General Capability of *Ethical understanding*. In practice however, some teachers in the study struggled with enacting this disposition of openness and non-judgmentalism. When they encountered moral views in their students different to their own, they were not at risk of being indifferent! They noticed a strong desire to represent their own views as morally correct. This became an occasion for reflection on the ethical nature of the teaching relationship between themselves and their students.

Most of the values education literature that reviews and discusses approaches and programs situates values education in the personal development, health and citizenship fields of the curriculum or in the extra-curricular area of service learning. There is, however, a modest body of literature that evaluates approaches where values education has been integrated into curriculum discipline areas. In the United Kingdom, Halstead and Taylor (2000, pp. 172-3) list a number of case studies that relate values to the following subject areas: Geography, English, Physical Education, Drama, Science, Technology, the Arts, the Humanities and in

the core subjects of the National Curriculum. More recently, Michael Reiss (2009) has written extensively on Ethics and Science in schools in the United Kingdom. Halstead and Taylor's review outlines ways in which the listed subjects have forged links with different aspects and concerns of moral education. They note however that debate about whether this is a justifiable activity 'rages', 'For some, the school subject is an autonomous domain of study with its own concepts and its own truth criteria' (p. 173). The study that forms the basis for this thesis included this area of debate in one of its research questions: What are teachers' views about the place of *Ethical understanding* in their subject? The findings of this study signal a dissolution of the 'rage' in the debate for its participants. There was a widespread welcoming of the presence of an ethical perspective in their subject areas.

The studies discussed above signal some recognition on behalf of educators that such an approach to values education is both worthy of investigation and capable of implementation, however it has not developed momentum in the same way as other models. Haydon (2006) suggests that in the United Kingdom, this is because, despite values being part of the curriculum framework, 'schools had no legal obligation to teach them' (p. 8). In Australia, the values dimension in state and territory curricula has similarly failed to gain traction as it has not been grafted into assessment or reporting frameworks. The approach adopted in the *Australian Curriculum*, of integrating General Capabilities into subjects and disciplines, envisions what values education might look like when located in the core of the curriculum. It suggests, at the conceptual level at least, that areas such as Moral Education, Values Education, and in the Australian case, *Ethical understanding* have a central rather than tangential place in the main business of curriculum.

In reviewing strategies for moral education in secondary schools between 1995 and 2003, Schuitema, Ten Dam and Veugelers (2008), note that in European contexts the emphasis in this field increasingly has been on citizenship or 'democratic' education, observing that, 'The main focus here is to enhance engagement with democratic society and active participation in that society' (p. 72). This impulse they suggest can be understood in terms of the European Union and its national parliaments seeking to address social tensions that appear to be growing in the wake of the increasing cultural diversity of populations. They argue

however, for a more integrated approach to achieve the purposes of this form of values education, what they term *curriculum-oriented moral education*. This involves locating values discussions within the context of subject specific areas that provide a rich arena for learning to leverage critical thinking capacities. It also requires a focus on knowledge that is connected to students' worlds and fosters their participation in a community of practice. In this approach, 'Education that fosters students' identity-development and teaches them how to participate in society in a moral way, with the help of domain-specific knowledge and skills, is moral education in the true sense of the word' (pp. 84-85). Consonant with this insight, the *Values and Knowledge Education* (VaKE) project was established. VaKE combines knowledge acquisition and moral education in the context of a dilemma discussion approach similar to that adopted by Kohlberg. Teachers undertake moral education in the context of specific subject content lessons, 'without limiting the content of the curriculum. Learners learn...just as much - if not even more - expert knowledge than in a traditional class. Moreover, they develop a better understanding of values, which also positively affects their social environment' ([www.vake.eu](http://www.vake.eu)). The proponents of VaKE contrast its constructivist pedagogical foundation with prescriptive approaches to moral or values education, where, they argue, students lack autonomy in learning.

Even more recently, materials published through the *Ethos* project (which continues in a new guise, *Ethika* - [www.ethics-education.eu/](http://www.ethics-education.eu/) - as part of the European Union's Erasmus+ program) focusing on values education, reinforce this growing perception of integrative learning and knowledge that has been emerging in the field of moral education. These materials are underpinned by the view that ethics is part of every discipline's knowledge picture and that ethics is not a stand-alone pursuit, but one that is highly contextualised but which also bleeds across disciplinary boundaries. The learning continuum of the General Capability of *Ethical understanding* in the *Australian Curriculum*, provides links to specific aspects of the traditional academic subjects. Conceptually this positions this capability within, and drawing upon, the integrative trend evidenced in these European studies and examples above. What this study provides is insight from

practitioners as to the enactment in the classroom of this integrative approach and what the implications might be for all the elements of this integrative alliance.

## **Values education in Australia – a recent history**

In Australia, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, the *Values Education Good Practice Schools Project* (wholly funded by the Australian Government) was the site of documented and researched values education activity. Two reports were published, *Implementing the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools: Report of the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project - Stage 1* (September 2006), and *At the Heart of What We Do: Values Education at the Centre of Schooling - The Final Report of the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project - Stage 2* (August 2008). The *Values Education Good Practice Schools Project* (VEGPSP) involved clusters of schools working together on government selected and approved values education projects in order to establish best practice in the field. Halstead and Taylor (1996) observe that ‘current thinking about values education tends to favour eclecticism’ (p. 10). The projects in both Stages 1 and 2 of the VEGPSP are consistent with, and demonstrate this.

In Stage 1 of the VEGPSP, nineteen out of twenty-six projects focused on an aspect of one of the following three areas: improving student behaviour, interpersonal skills, leadership and stewardship; developing a values-based school ethos; service learning and bridge building between schools and local communities. The academic subjects of the curriculum were not seen to be a ‘natural’ or attractive sphere for this endeavour. Of the seven clusters identified as working to embed values in the school curriculum and grouped under the banner, ‘Something worthwhile to teach’, only one cluster attempted integration of values throughout the subject based curriculum (see Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training, 2006, pp. 104-108). Two small trials of units with an explicit values focus were undertaken in Year Eight Geography and Year Ten History.

The Stage 2 story is remarkably similar (see VEGPSP2 Final Report, 2008). Only three clusters out of twenty-five saw the subject areas of the curriculum as a place



for intensive values education work. In the analysis of the cluster programs however it was noted that, 'The most effective clusters suggest that values education is a central curriculum concept rather than a peripheral curriculum concern. It is the 'glue' for the whole of schooling' (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008, p. 35). Despite this insight, the overwhelming bulk of projects from both stages are located in the personal development and citizenship spheres - part of the curriculum yes, but not the whole curriculum or the central organiser of the curriculum, the disciplines. A similar reality can be seen in a major publication in the field, the *International Research Handbook on Values Education and Student Wellbeing* (2010). This tome is divided into three parts: Part I: Values Education: Wellbeing, Curriculum, and Pedagogy; Part II: Values Education: Wellbeing and Personal Integrity and Part III: Values Education: Wellbeing and Social Engagement. *Curriculum* appears only in Part I, and of twenty chapters, only two directly address the idea of values being an explicit and active subject of study within a discipline area.

In Australia, studies focusing on values education within the academic curriculum have focused around Science, Mathematics and Technology education: see, for example Bishop, Corrigan, Clarke and Gunstone (2005) *Teachers' Preferences and Practices Regarding Values in Teaching Mathematics and Science*; Lewis, Mansfield and Baudains (2008) *Getting down and dirty: Values in education for sustainability*; Pavlova (2002), *"Teaching" Values in Technology Education: A Critical Approach for the Theoretical Framework*, and Corrigan, Dillon and Gunstone (2007) *The Re-Emergence of Values in Science Education*. Corrigan, Dillon and Gunstone (2007) conclude however that, 'Teachers, researchers and teacher educators do little to help students...with such problems of differences in values within science / science education' (p. 144). They further identify that, 'even less [is] done to help students consider values differences within the range of other curriculum areas that are just as prominent as science in the school lives of children' (p. 144). As Corrigan et al's (2007) comment above suggests, there is a dearth of activity in this area. Despite 'values across the curriculum' being an espoused part of curriculum frameworks,

the reality of such in the curriculum in practice remains patchy at best and absent in the vast majority of situations.

However, in the Australian Government's *Values Education Project*, funding was set aside for the development of resources to support the implementation of an holistic approach to values education in schools. In 2007, thirty-two teaching and learning units were published integrating a values perspective in key learning areas across the primary and compulsory years of the secondary curriculum. These were designed to model the integration of values concepts, understandings and practices within the academic curriculum. The units were substantial, some taking a suggested eight to ten weeks to teach. A Science unit explored genetically modified foods, Mathematics skills were used to examine junk food in our diets and responses to difference were considered in English (see Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009). These materials are rare in global terms (even rarer when it is noted that they were published some years ago now), and stand as a substantive attempt to demonstrate how a values approach can be part of core curriculum subjects.

## **Synthesising reflections**

This review of approaches to moral education in schools, in its various guises, has provided a conceptual and historical context for understanding the *Australian Curriculum's* General capability of *Ethical understanding*. I have shown that much of the work in the area of moral education has focused on stand-alone approaches, rather than strategies that integrate values, ethics, morals or whatever label is applied, into academic subjects. One important aspect of this review is that the General Capability of *Ethical understanding*, as it is explicated in the curriculum documentation, appears to be a hybrid entity, drawing upon diverse elements of a range of ways of engaging in moral education. Yet very little is documented on how teachers understand and approach these matters in their discipline-based classrooms and in relation to curriculum activities. It is precisely this gap in the existing literature which this study seeks to address. In other words, how do teachers enact - if at all - the complex conceptualisation of *Ethical understanding*? Are all the threads of *Ethical understanding* as delineated in the official curriculum

taken up in practice? Are there threads of moral education that teachers take up that lie outside the boundaries of this official curriculum? These are matters that this study seeks to investigate. Having surveyed the contemporary field of moral education and its recent history, I now turn to consider the area of capabilities, disciplinarity and knowledge.

## **21<sup>st</sup> Century skills / Capabilities/ Competences**

### **The Australian Curriculum and 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills**

The General Capabilities of the *Australian Curriculum*, (of which *Ethical understanding* is one of seven), by virtue of their name ('General Capabilities'), as well as their structural positioning (although represented with separate curriculum documentation they are distinctly not subject disciplines), could be viewed as a local manifestation and interpretation of the movement that has become known globally as *twenty-first century skills*.

The second goal of the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008) is that, 'All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens' (p.8). Lingard and McGregor (2014) note that this, 'echoes a common educational response to the needs of a globalised economy: developing personal qualities and dispositions best suited to globally oriented twenty-first-century societies' (p. 102). There is little doubt that economic imperatives as perceived by the government of the time and subsequent governments, played a role in the construction of the *Australian Curriculum*. But this is not the only lens for understanding life in twenty-first century societies, as suggested in the warrant provided for the framework adopted. The Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2013), in its brief for designing a new *Australian Curriculum* guided by the broad policy framework of the *Melbourne Declaration*, adopted a multidimensional structure to address contemporary contexts and demands, 'The Australian Curriculum has a three-dimensional design - discipline-based learning areas, general capabilities as essential 21st century skills and contemporary cross-curriculum priorities' (p. 15).

The rationale for this approach is framed in terms of the strengths and limitations of the traditional subject structure of western curricula in the context of a new century:

The learning areas and the disciplines from which they are drawn provide a foundation of learning in schools because they reflect the way in which knowledge has, and will continue to be, developed and codified. However, 21st century learning does not fit neatly into a curriculum solely organised by learning areas or subjects that reflect the disciplines. Increasingly, in a world where knowledge itself is constantly growing and evolving, students need to develop a set of knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions, or general capabilities that apply across subject-based content and equip them to be lifelong learners able to operate with confidence in a complex, information-rich, globalised world (p. 15).

This rationale places the *Australian Curriculum* squarely in the flow of a trend identified by Sinnema and Aitken (2013) as having become prominent in English-speaking countries in the past decade and a half. This trend has been framed as enabling 'learners to transcend the mastery of discrete skills and acquisition of content knowledge that has traditionally been the focus of curricula', and possessing 'transformative potential' (p. 119). It marks a curricular turn towards competencies, capabilities and generic skills which has come to be labelled as '21<sup>st</sup> century skills'. Chris Dede (2010), in examining '21<sup>st</sup> century skills' frameworks, notes the problem of definition inherent in the label and asks, 'Is the term becoming an umbrella phrase under which advocates from various groups can argue for almost any type of knowledge?' (p. 51). Certainly, this curricular turn has been critiqued on a continuum ranging from views extolling it as salvation for the future, to leading us to the abandonment of knowledge and shoring up the hegemony of global corporations.

## **The 'turn' to 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills**

Advocates of this curricular turn argue that rapid advances in technologies in the last part of the twentieth century have heralded a paradigm shift impacting all areas of life, similar in scale and effect to the shift that occurred from agrarian to

industrial societies in western Europe. Griffin, Care and McGaw (2012) describe the impact of this for the role of education, 'The shift changed the way people lived and worked...thought...changed the kinds of tools they used for work...new skills and ways of thinking, living and working...demanded new forms of education systems to provide them' (p. 2). Trilling and Fadel (2009) characterise current structures and practice as historical oddities, out of step with the times, 'It has been observed that today's education systems operate on an agrarian calendar (summers off...to work in the fields), an industrial time clock (...classroom periods marked by bells), and a list of curriculum subjects invented in the Middle Ages' (p. 12). Many have emphasised the substantive differences of the twenty-first century landscape that call forth new responses. Dede (2010) notes that, 'The 21<sup>st</sup> century is quite different than the 20<sup>th</sup> in the capabilities people need for work, citizenship, and self-actualisation' (p. 51). In particular, he argues that this is 'primarily due to the emergence of very sophisticated information and communications technologies' (p. 51). Although continuities are acknowledged (skills and attributes that have been sought and valued across time), the specifics of context point nonetheless to the changing shape of these. Thus, Dede adds, 'even though perennial in nature, collaboration is worthy of inclusion as a 21st century skill because the importance of cooperative interpersonal capabilities is higher and the skills involved are more sophisticated than in the prior industrial era' (p. 52). Kereluik, Mishra, Fahnoe and Terry (2013) speak similarly, referring to a seeming paradox of nothing having changed but everything having changed. They note that, 'Ethical and emotional awareness, while not novel to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, are uniquely important when working with diverse groups of individuals' (p. 132). As I also show in the following chapters, the 'issue of humanistic knowledge becomes even more critical in an increasingly globalised and interconnected world, where different cultures have to meet and interact' (p. 132). So, whilst ethics is part of everyday human life and always has been, the *Australian Curriculum's* capability of *Ethical understanding* represents an intentional response at this time to pressing contextual factors. For those who have produced this curriculum, the hope is clear that this capability, and others, will support students to live well in a twenty-first century landscape. This study explores, in part, through the experiences and reflections of those who enact this dimension of the curriculum, the extent to

which there are indications that *Ethical understanding* might enable this.

In their survey of twenty-first century knowledge frameworks, Kereluik, Mishra et al (2013) note the common warrants provided for these frameworks, arguing that they offer 'two main justifications for the need to rethink the kinds of knowledge required for learning in this century - technological modernisation and globalisation' (p. 129). Much of the literature that supports the presence and substance of twenty-first century skills in the school curriculum has been commissioned by businesses and corporations operating on a global scale and seeking to leverage the affordances of digital technologies (see following paragraph). Their concern has been that school education and the school curriculum in particular, has not responded or adapted to the multiple levels of change in the global environment. In considering the skill-sets and personal attributes their future workforce will require, they have sought to partner with educational researchers to scope these skills and attributes and suggest pathways for subsequent reform.

*P21, The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning* (founded as the 'Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills' in 2002) based in the United States, is a coalition of business leaders, educators and policy makers. This organisation has developed a framework for twenty-first century learning built around: 1. Key Subjects and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Themes; 2. Learning and Innovation Skills (covering the 4 C's – Critical Thinking, Collaboration, Creativity, Communication) 3. Information, Media and Technology Skills, and 4. Life and Career Skills. The *Assessment and Teaching of 21<sup>st</sup> Skills (ATC21S)* project, sponsored by Cisco, Intel and Microsoft and headquartered at The University of Melbourne, was established in 2009 and completed in 2012. Under the directorship of Professors Barry McGaw and Patrick Griffin, its stated mission was, 'to accelerate global education reform by mobilising the international educational, political and business communities to help transform the teaching, learning and measurement of 21st century skills' ([www.atc21s.org/about.html](http://www.atc21s.org/about.html)). *ATC21S* identified four broad skills areas: Ways of thinking, Ways of working, Tools for working and Ways of living in the world. These four areas were brought together in the acronym KSAVE: knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and ethics. The Center for Curriculum Redesign (CCR), led by Charles Fadel, conceptualised a

twenty-first century education as one found in the dynamic interplay of four elements: Knowledge (what we know and understand) which consists of 'traditional' and 'modern' subjects brought together through interdisciplinarity and themes; Skills (how we use what we know); Character (how we behave and engage in the world), and Meta-Learning (how we reflect and adapt). What is pertinent in terms of this study and the capability of *Ethical understanding* at its centre, is that these taxonomies of twenty-first century skills bring together traditional academic knowledge, contemporary and contextually relevant knowledge and personal dispositions. The underlying model of holistic integration aligns these approaches and that embedded in the *Australian Curriculum*.

A paper published by the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority late in 2015 surveys the national and international research and practice in respect of twenty-first century skills, with the goal of developing a framework to underpin the future Queensland senior secondary curriculum. In its review, six common categories are identified across the range of frameworks examined, all occurring with a frequency of >70%. These are Critical thinking, Creative thinking, Collaboration, Personal and social skills and ICT skills. Kereluik, Mishra et al (2013) in a critical review of the literature surrounding educational discourse about 'the 21<sup>st</sup> century', found three broad common categories that emerged and which they identified as Foundational Knowledge (what do students need to know?), Meta Knowledge (how to work with the foundation knowledge), and Humanistic Knowledge ('...a vision of the learner's self and its location in a broader social and global context' p. 131). They note that Foundational Knowledge is not viewed as simply equating with traditional disciplinary knowledge, though this is a significant priority, but is viewed 'in terms of three key subcategories: Core Content Knowledge, Digital Literacy, and Cross-Disciplinary Knowledge' (p. 130). The instances reviewed above point to the strength and momentum of the twenty-first century skills movement. In positioning *Ethical understanding* in this frame, this study seeks to understand the affordances of such an emphasis in the curriculum as it is lived and experienced in the classroom by both teachers and students.

## **21<sup>st</sup> Century skills and disciplinarity**

Criticisms of the '21<sup>st</sup> Century skills' movement, or what I have called the curricular turn to capabilities and competencies, focus on the affordances of disciplinarity as opposed to genericism, and the dominance of instrumentalism and economic reductivism in education. Education philosopher, Gert Biesta (2013), argues that schools need to stand in a critical relationship to the societies of which they are a part, if, following Freire, they are to 'read the world' rather than being mere functionaries of the world. In the push for twenty-first century skills Biesta sees a movement that, 'uncritically embrace[s]...the global networked society and simply see[s] the task of education as preparing students for this reality' (p. 737).

Essentially, he views twenty-first century skills as a servile agent of neoliberalism clothed in the garb of global capitalism. Biesta also identifies a contradiction at the heart of this alliance. He notes that the prominent twenty-first century skill of critical thinking seems absent in evaluating the context within which the movement operates, 'the whole framework seems to rest on an uncritical acceptance of the reality of the global networked economy' (p. 738). Leesa Wheelahan (2010) argues similarly that supporters of the skills, capabilities and competences movement are somewhat naïve. She notes that this movement privileges the contextual and the situated in learning and that whilst presenting as progressive and constructivist in approach, as opposed to traditionalist, it is vulnerable to technical-instrumentalism. This also places context in the foreground, 'because it is concerned primarily with producing knowledge and skills needed in the economy' (p. 6). In such a view, knowledge is displaced by the need to develop a disposition of trainability and receptiveness. Wheelahan argues that 'this turns the focus to generic skills and attributes (a generic receptiveness), rather than specific knowledge' (p. 111). She concludes that, 'the broader purposes of education [become] subordinated to this goal' (p. 6). Tara Ehrcke (2013), writing from a Canadian perspective notes, 'The radical transformation that 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning advocates want is not value neutral...the network is composed of the "knowledge" companies that fund and promote its ideals. It is ultimately their interests that will be served' (p. 79). The charges levelled against '21<sup>st</sup> century skills' are sobering and provide an important frame of consideration in this study



when analysing the ways in which teachers enacted the capability of *Ethical understanding*. Was there an inherent critical reflexivity in evidence?

Biesta and Priestley (2013) note another aspect of concern that has emerged in the curricular turn towards capabilities and competences, 'What is significant here is that... the student shifts from being the *subject* in education - that is the one who is supposed to study, learn, master, acquire, evaluate, judge etcetera - to being the *outcome* of education' (p. 37). Cate Watson (2010) in her critical review of the Scottish 'Curriculum for Excellence' (CfE) and its four overarching capacities, claims that the 'CfE is concerned with setting out not what children are expected to *know*, but how they should *be*' (p. 99). Biesta and Priestley acknowledge that the idea of the student as a learning outcome, or the student who *becomes* through the process of education, rather than being one who simply *knows*, possesses an ancient and respected lineage dating from classical Athens (see 2013, pp. 39-40). In the last twenty-five years they suggest that this wider emphasis has been evident in educational discourse focusing on *competences*, 'what people should be able to do rather than (just)... what they should know or (just)...the skills they should acquire' (p. 40).

*Competence* has been conceived of in complex and expansive terms by researchers like Ruth Deakin-Crick (2008), who characterises 'competence' as being a rich tapestry of diverse aspects of one's personal make up, woven together through particular intersections of place and time. Competence is comprised of, 'knowledge, skills, understanding, values, attitudes and desire[s] which lead to effective, embodied human action in the world, in a particular domain' (p. 313). She further notes that 'competence implies a sense of agency, action and value... Significantly, the site of a competence is at the interface between the person and the demands of the real world' (p. 313). Despite this comprehensive definition, Biesta and Priestley identify a point of contention and concern with this point of intersection between the person and the demands of the 'real world'. Noting that the 'world' is not itself an agent, they warn that 'any demands that frame competence-based education are always the demands of particular individuals or groups based on their views about what a good or successful or desirable way of acting and being is' (p. 41). They quip that the freedom to define what is desirable

for oneself rather than have this dictated by others, is ironically what is seen to be a core element of a liberal-democratic society. Watson (2010), referencing the Scottish example, spells this out in identifying the key players in this drama, 'CfE is aimed at producing the 'good subject', the 'entrepreneurial self', for and within the control society...[it] can therefore be construed as aiming at producing subjectivities for the society of control; subjectivities capable of "self-programmability" within the "new capitalism"' (p. 99).

In the hubbub of the everyday classroom, teachers are unlikely to bring to the surface the presuppositions they hold about their students and the end purposes of their work. These are nonetheless operative despite being unconscious, and frame their pedagogy and dispositions in the classroom. Bringing the capability of *Ethical understanding* into the classroom may possess the potential to activate in teachers a critical reflexivity about the process in which they are engaged. Biesta (2013) argues that this process of 'being subjected' or 'being an outcome' discussed above actually stands in opposition to a vital domain of educational purpose involving the formation of persons which he names *subjectification*. In his definition subjectification involves, 'notions like independence and autonomy – that is, with being the agent of one's own action' (p. 740). In the purposes of education it 'has something to do with strengthening the subject - and, in this sense, with resisting adaptation to what is' (p. 741). Biesta sees the '21<sup>st</sup> century skills' movement as being located within the qualification and socialisation domains of educational purpose and alarmingly absent from the subjectification domain. Acknowledging that a genuine task of 'education' is to assist students to become ready to participate in a global networked society and engage with the realities that brings, Biesta arrives at the nub of his concern, 'what I am denying is the line of argument that says that because they are there they are good and desirable and we should just adapt to them; I am denying...any suggestion that there would not be an alternative' (p. 740). An interest of this study was to discern whether the capability of *Ethical understanding* could cultivate Biesta's notion of subjectification in students and open alternative visions rather than passively fall into line with the 'what is' of our world.

One could argue that an emancipatory and democratic interest, such as that conceived by Jürgen Habermas, is also at the heart of the critique of the '21<sup>st</sup> century skills' movement presented in the commentaries of social realists such as Michael Young, Leesa Wheelahan, David Lambert and others. These theorists express concern about the turn towards generic skills and general competences on a number of levels, one of which is a commitment to equity for all in accessing foundational knowledge. In side-lining disciplinary knowledge in the school curriculum, these writers argue that students are being denied access to 'powerful knowledge'. This term, coined by Michael Young is described by Lambert (2014) as, 'knowledge that is derived in the disciplines. It is thus specialised knowledge and exists beyond the everyday experience of people: it is often abstract, being theoretical or conceptual, and it is enabling' (p. 19). Exactly what it enables and provides access to is elaborated by Young in Young, Lambert and Roberts (2014). Young employs the term *epistemic access* to clarify this, 'does your curriculum help all students to shape and guide their learning in the search for truth whatever course they are on and whatever the subject they are studying, vocational or academic' (p. 26). *Powerful knowledge* takes the student beyond the limitations of their own everyday knowledge and as such works against them being, 'deprived or diminished in certain aspects of their human potential' (Lambert, 2014, p. 19). Wheelahan (2010) further describes this knowledge as the knowledge that provides access to society's conversation about itself participation in which is viewed as a fundamental democratic right of a citizen, 'they need access to 'disciplinarity' or disciplinary styles of reasoning so that they understand how knowledge is used and the broad criteria that need to be applied in evaluating the validity of arguments' (p. 2). In examining the work of teachers in implementing the capability of *Ethical understanding* into their specific subject area, this study investigates the impact of this integration of another entity (*Ethical understanding*) upon what have been noted above as the affordances of disciplinarity. If the frames of the discussion above are to be employed, one might expect to see an edging out and weakening of the 'powerful knowledge' of disciplines when a 'twenty-first century skill' takes its place on the curriculum stage. The experience of teachers in this study runs contrary to this. It suggests that rather than oppositional foes, the capability of *Ethical understanding* and disciplinary knowledge are powerful allies.

Their narratives provide a fulsome response to the third research question of this thesis, What are teachers' views about the place of *Ethical understanding* in their subject?

## **Knowledge for the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Disciplines *and* Skills**

In this section then, I review literature that eschews this binary opposition of 'skills versus disciplines' that has dominated much of the discourse about twenty-first century skills. This body of work provides a finer-grained, focused context in which to locate the curriculum innovation that was the impetus for the study at the centre of this thesis. The *Australian Curriculum's* multidimensional structure and vision for the rich interaction of these dimensions possesses strong resonances with the frames developed in the last decade by Young, Muller and Barnett and which are considered below.

A growing number of scholars are advocating a 'third way' in the 'content versus skills' debate. Patrick Griffin, lead researcher of the *ATC21S* project, has argued that, 'Pitching the curriculum in terms of "traditional content" versus "generic skills" creates a false choice. They are not mutually exclusive' (Griffin, 2013). Similarly, Darling-Hammond (2010) observes and with a degree of weariness, the polarisation in the recurring curriculum wars and of schools that are 'living proof that strong disciplinary (and interdisciplinary) learning is not at odds with the development of so-called 21<sup>st</sup> century skills' (p. 235). Likewise, Rotherham and Willingham (2010), in exploring challenges faced by those who advocate the inclusion of twenty-first century skills in the curriculum note the need for a 'both/and' approach, 'devising a 21<sup>st</sup> century-skills curriculum requires more than paying lip service to content knowledge...We must plan to teach skills in the context of particular content knowledge and to treat both as equally important' (p. 19). Writing for the Center for Public Education in the United States, Craig Jerald (2009) explains the centrality of disciplinary knowledge in the expanding landscape of twenty-first century learning, 'being able to think critically about a topic or solve a problem in a particular domain demands sufficient background knowledge about it. And an important aspect of creativity is making connections across domains of knowledge' (p. 31).

The social realist critique of the '21<sup>st</sup> century skills' movement is also nuanced and complex, unlike the polarising responses of organisations such as *Common Core* in the United States and *Civitas* and *Reform and Politiea* in the United Kingdom. These tend to view the content of the 'traditional' curriculum as sacred and untouchable. Michael Young (2011, 2014), in contrast, argues for a new appreciation of disciplinarity that he suggests transcends the canonical view of content through the disciplines and brings knowledge back into the curriculum which he argues has been emptied out in the new focus on generic skills. In collaboration with Johann Muller, Young (2010) posits a model of understanding knowledge in the curriculum which is conceptualised as three 'futures'. The *Future 1* curriculum, rooted in the nineteenth century, views knowledge as a 'given'. Future 1 knowledge is not acquired by all or made available in ways that enhance that possibility. It remains the pathway into desired university courses and is found enshrined in the curricula of 'academic' schools, many of which sit outside public or government systems of education. Future 1 is all about the transmission of knowledge as content with students passive receivers of such. In its defence, Young (2011) notes that it offers 'a vision of schooling as an intellectual challenge for students and teachers, and as an opportunity for students to engage with the knowledge that has been produced by specialist scholars and researchers' (p. 267). Future 1 however has not responded effectively to the challenges of the rapidly changing world of the later twentieth century. In the face of this crisis Future 2 curricula emerged, 'driven by the goals of expanding 'access' and economic benefits'(Young, 2011, p. 267). *Future 2* views knowledge as being socially constructed and therefore 'responsive to changing social and economic demands' (p. 267). In the view of some proponents of Future 2, Future 1 curricula simply entrenched the dominance of the privileged. In fundamentally rejecting the notion of objectivity of knowledge, Future 2 curricula look to the learner's context and experience as the starting point. Young describes what he considers the impact of this, 'With the differences between knowledge and experience increasingly blurred, learning becomes a kind of generic process leading to outcomes or competences prescribed by the curriculum' (p. 268). Young rues what he sees as the side-lining of intrinsic value ascribed to knowledge and learning in favour of 'education' being the means to an end, which is usually defined in terms of the

labour market and employability.

Young (2014) suggests that both approaches to knowledge and the curriculum are 'partly right but fundamentally mistaken' (p. 65). Knowledge can only emerge from human social and historical contexts, this reality puts the lie to Future 1's assertion of 'given' knowledge, yet this sociality does not deny the possibility of greater reliability or 'better knowledge' as advocates at the extreme of Future 2 may argue. It is in the space between these paradigms that Young (2011) and others argue for what the former calls *Future 3*, 'It is a new balance between the stability of concepts (expressed in subjects), and changes in content (under-emphasised in Future 1) and skills (overemphasised in Future 2) to which Future 3 points' (pp. 269-270). Future 3, whilst locating knowledge in fields in which specialists labour, understands that such knowledge is fallible and open to interrogation and change (unlike the view from Future 1). However, knowledge contends Young (2014), is not arbitrary nor subject to the whims and desires of dominant powers or movements, 'it is bounded by the epistemic rules of the particular specialist communities' (p. 67). In this way a Future 3 curriculum 'rejects the a-social givenness of school subjects associated with Future 1 and the scepticism about subject knowledge associated with Future 2' (p. 67).

Another perspective on what knowledge/s might be apposite in the context of contemporary global realities, is offered by Ronald Barnett. Considering the challenges of learning in our current time and space of the twenty-first century, Barnett (2012) notes that the trope of *our uncertain future* is not new, but that the coalescence of specific factors has created a unique context for learners. In reviewing the ways in which people write about this context he notes, 'What is distinctive about the modern world, from this point of view, is not change per se but its character, its intensity, its felt impact' (p. 66). It is a world marked by *supercomplexity*, 'a world that is radically unknowable: even though we may make modest gains here and there, our ignorance expands in all kinds of directions' (p. 68). Although it would seem that a generic skills approach to knowledge would be apt in such circumstances, Barnett suggests that such a pathway is essentially unproductive, taking us down a cul-de-sac, because the active presupposition underlying 'generic' skills is that such skills are both knowable and applicable to

the unknowable.

Seeking to scope out the knowledge needed in a world of 'supercomplexity', Barnett posits a model of three *modes* of knowledge, which share some similarities with Young's three 'futures' model. *Mode 1* and Future 1 knowledge are described similarly. *Mode 2* knowledge is Mode 1 knowledge applied in ways that are sensitive to, and cognisant of the demands of particular situations. Barnett argues that this too is inadequate for our world of 'supercomplexity'. He suggests we need *Mode 3* knowledge, 'a knowing-in-and-with-uncertainty' (p. 69). Arguing that the task of education is fundamentally ontological rather than epistemological, Barnett suggests Mode 3 knowledge reflects this, 'It is characterised...by certain kinds of disposition. Among such dispositions are carefulness, thoughtfulness, humility, criticality, receptiveness, resilience, courage and stillness' (p. 75). Barnett calls for a paradigm shift in conceptualising curriculum for the twenty-first century, positing a focus on neither skills nor knowledge but 'being', its task 'none other than the eliciting of a mode of being that can not just withstand incessant challenge to one's understandings of the world...[but]...a form of human being that is not paralyzed into inaction but can act purposively and judiciously (p. 76). This call for a curriculum of transformation that embraces a more holistic approach to learning is one that strikes a chord in the hearts of many educators. Wheelahan (2005), for example, endorses many of Barnett's concerns and characterisations, as well as the dispositions he advocates as desirable in the fluidity and change currently present in the multiple dimensions of our lives.

Barnett's notion of Mode 3 knowledge enriches the discourse about twenty-first century skills and disciplinarity, by suggesting a particular dispositional and relational frame with and through which to engage the complexities of our world. It appears to embrace Young's Future 3 knowledge which involves a reimagining of disciplinarity and generic skills into a new, potent union, and adds to this knowledge by drawing upon the affective domain. Dispositions that enable the leveraging of Future 3 knowledge in unstable and unknown futures become central. In incorporating affective knowing, Barnett's Mode 3 knowledge displays synergies with the new Aristotelian approach to character education discussed earlier in this chapter, and points to the potential for a deeper alignment and

integration of moral education with the core academic curriculum.

The vision of the *Australian Curriculum* framework resists the dualism viewed as problematic in the discussion above. Conceptually and structurally, the multidimensional *Australian Curriculum* operates in the *both/and* territory of interconnectedness and complementarity. In this way it possesses a strong resonance with Young's model of a Future 3 curriculum. Young suggests that a Future 3 style curriculum will provide students with essential grounding in disciplinary knowledge *and* the development of skills that cultivate and enable responsiveness to, and flexibility within rapidly changing contexts. In the study that is analysed in the chapters that follow, teachers have enacted this integrated *both/and* approach to the curriculum as it appears in the *Australian Curriculum*. Careful attention is paid to the narratives they present about how subject content is effected as the capability is explicitly incorporated.

What they perceive to be the outcomes of this dance between the capability of *Ethical understanding* and their specialist subject area are examined especially in respect of supporting their students in building capacities to engage positively and fruitfully with a complex world.

### **Habermas and the emancipatory knowledge interest**

I have suggested above that the structure of the *Australian Curriculum* represents a new curriculum paradigm in the way it embeds General Capabilities into core disciplines. In doing this it ascribes value to both twenty-first century skills (represented in its framework as General Capabilities), and the knowledge contained within the traditional disciplinary streams of the school curriculum. One of these capabilities, *Ethical understanding*, which is a focus of this thesis, seeks to equip students to navigate the moral complexities of their contemporary and future worlds. In adopting this position, clear resonances emerge with the *both/and* approach to what is constitutive of knowledge in the school curriculum (as discussed above) and which Michael Young has dubbed a *Future 3* conceptualisation of knowledge. The 'Future 3' approach to knowledge has been offered as a paradigm that is well suited to the challenges, both existing and



emerging, of living in a period of rapid change and turbulence across the globe. To this, I suggest that the theoretical perspective of Jürgen Habermas regarding *knowledge interests* adds a valuable further lens for framing and exploring the potential outcomes of this new 'Future 3' knowledge paradigm. In this study the expression of 'Future 3' knowledge is explored in the experience of teachers explicitly integrating the capability of *Ethical understanding* into the four disciplines of English, History, Mathematics and Science.

As outlined in the first chapter of this thesis, in his early writings Habermas identified three knowledge *interests*: the technical, the hermeneutic and emancipatory. Although Habermas refined this model in later works, Deakin-Crick and Joldersma (2007, p. 85) note that the hermeneutic and emancipatory threads remain dominant. They are crucially present in his theory of communicative action, and thus affirm the ongoing currency of the framework for the current discussion of curriculum and capability. Habermas suggests these interests can be linked to particular fields of inquiry - the natural sciences, the human sciences and the critical sciences respectively, however each 'interest' can be seen as relevant and operative within all subjects or disciplines in the curriculum.

In considering a Habermasian perspective in the context of Values Education, Crotty (2010), explains the connectedness of these knowledge interests in terms of generalised human experience, 'We must, first of all, produce from nature whatever is required for physical life and, in so doing, we must come to predict, control and manipulate the environment' (p.635). This, in Crotty's understanding, constitutes Habermas' technical interest. Yet simply addressing these practical aspects of life alone will not ensure human thriving. To enable human thriving the second knowledge interest, the hermeneutic interest, which takes account of the social and cultural contexts within which humans exist, needs to be activated, 'Humans need also to communicate and they can do so only if there are agreed symbols to guide inter-subjective understanding' (p. 635). But Habermas proposes a third interest, which he calls the 'emancipatory' interest. Crotty (2010) remarks that, 'The emancipatory interest gives rise to a conscious self-reflection which becomes aware of the ideologies that influence humans; it offers freedom that can acknowledge the relations of dependence and allow the person to make choices'

(p. 635). It is this third interest that can enable individuals to achieve a critical distance from their own context and develop perspectives that inform positive change. Such perspectives are desperately needed in the midst of the turbulence of current global landscapes.

Writing in 1991, Lovat and Smith (1991) observed that whilst schools and curriculum properly deal with all three Habermasian knowledge interests, 'currently, they probably tend to emphasise technical knowing...largely because it is the easiest to test by paper-and-pencil type examinations' (p. 77). Deakin-Crick and Joldersma (2007) writing some fifteen years after Lovat and Smith, observed a similar pattern in the dominance of the instrumental interests in curricula, 'Such knowledge is modelled as strategic means-ends thinking and is focused on gaining mastery or control. This model also sheds light on the sort of knowledge that is taught for and assessed by high-stakes testing' (p. 85). These two works link the foregrounding of the technical interest to demands for measurement and accountability that have become prominent in many western countries (for example the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia) as education has been increasingly framed in economic rationalist terms as an instrumental process with persons viewed as units of economic productivity. The emancipatory interest then has not been a widespread hallmark of school curricula. Yates and Collins (2010) also note in their study of Australian state curricula over a thirty-year period from 1975, a shift, 'from an emphasis on knowing things to being able to do things' (p. 89); an emphasis it would seem on the technical knowledge interest. Such observations echo the work of Michael Apple (1979, 2011) in his exploration of the nexus between the selection of knowledge in the curriculum and neoliberal hegemony. Curricula conceived in this paradigm lead, in Habermasian terms, to 'submission and acceptance' (Lovat, 1988, p. 31), and the 'maintenance of the status quo' (Crotty, 2010, p. 635).

Instrumental or technical knowledge remains a dominant aspect of school curricula, harnessed, in part as discussed above, in the service of the preservation of an inequitable status quo. However, despite this reality, governments around the world (including the Australian government) have also recognised the need to reimagine the work of schools in the face of the complexities and tensions of global

existence in the first decades of the twenty-first century as outlined in the first chapter of this thesis. These dual impulses have created inherent contradictions and conflicts that have not always been addressed or creatively resolved in schools. Nonetheless this response to global realities has been evidenced in curriculum frameworks and prescribed curricula in the presence of capabilities, competencies, capacities (discussed earlier under the nomenclature of '21<sup>st</sup> Century skills') as well as subjects that focus on, for example, intercultural understanding, citizenship, religious diversity, critical thinking, creative thinking, and collaborative problem solving. Many of these also seek to bring the affective aspects of persons into sharper focus, providing in some instances a balance to a dominance of cognitive approaches, establishing at an intentional level at least, a more holistic approach. This turn to a 'capabilities' focus, although not without challenges and problems which have been considered earlier in this chapter, certainly contains the potential to mobilise and cultivate the Habermasian emancipatory knowledge interest.

In his two-volume work *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1984) Habermas explores the means of developing the emancipatory interest - what he terms *communicative rationality*. Caspersz and Olaru (2015), following Habermas, argue that, 'it is when we embrace that there are alternative understandings of a current status quo that we recognise the need for social change' (p. 3). Elsewhere Caspersz and Olaru (2013) explicate the process in more detail:

Habermas argued that through communicative rationality or discourse, social actors are able to freely engage in argumentation about intersubjective meanings - and hence the opportunity to re-frame these and readjust our life-world vis-a-vis intersubjective meaning emerges: this is the flashpoint for emancipatory interest (or thought). (p. 228)

Throughout this thesis, I argue that in the *Australian Curriculum* the space opened up in the disciplines by the presence of the General Capability of *Ethical understanding* offers and provides the opportunity for reflective critique of the constituents of the status quo and the subsequent construction of 'new' and potentially socially transformative dispositions and impulses within students. This is, as I show, borne out in the reflective responses and curriculum practices of the

participating teachers.

The discussion in this second section of Chapter Two has reviewed debates concerning what knowledge/s are of greatest necessity and pertinence to the challenges and opportunities of our particular time and place in the story of the world and humanity. It is within the flow of this discourse that the General Capability of *Ethical understanding* in the *Australian Curriculum* is located, and it is through this discourse that an understanding of the intention and potential of this capability can be grasped. I now turn to a consideration of the those who are to carry and enact this capability of *Ethical understanding* to provide a context for understanding the influences that are operative in shaping this enactment.

## **Teachers and curriculum change**

The research questions guiding this thesis focus on the meaning-making of teachers in the context of curriculum innovation - specifically in respect of integrating the General Capability of *Ethical understanding* into their subject area in a chosen year level and unit of work. How this particular capability is given flesh in the classroom and how it takes shape through this process, are central concerns of the study. However, this narrow focus cannot be understood without the presence of a wider lens that brings into view factors that form the dispositions of teachers as they undertake such work. What happens at the micro level of classroom implementation is inextricably connected to the way/s in which that individual teacher has experienced being positioned in relation to 'curriculum' and the experiences entailed in that, in spheres beyond their classrooms.

Schools, and what does and should happen within their walls, are always contested sites in political discourse as they represent, in part, a specific vision of society. The school curriculum is one aspect of schooling that is often subjected to the reforming zeal of politicians. In Australia, where it is becoming commonplace for governments at both state and federal levels to change their political complexion after single terms of three to four years, this has heralded a culture in schools of continual curriculum change. Teachers cannot escape the impact of this. The way/s in which they are positioned in this change dynamic by education authorities and

policy statements profoundly effects what actually happens in the classroom. Gerrard and Farrell (2014) wryly comment, 'Teachers enact, animate, interpret and in some cases ignore, resist and dismiss, the policy directives handed down to them' (p. 639).

According to Lovat and Smith (1991) teachers' agency in the curriculum field can be framed in terms of it being a 'decision-making space'. They note that the size of that space is dependent upon a teacher's perceptions of the number of decisions already made by others, and the number of possibilities available within the decision-making space that remains at their disposal. Five frames (see pp. 119-126) are posited through which this perception is created. In considering the system frame encompassing curriculum documents and policies, Lovat and Smith (1991) remark, 'Generally, teachers perceive these documents and policies as restricting their decision options relating to the organisation and evaluation of curricula' (p. 120).

In examining constructions of teacher professional authority in the documentation of the *Australian Curriculum* and the views of high level policy-makers, Gerrard and Farrell (2014) ask a series of arresting questions, 'When a teacher encounters a mandated curriculum policy, what do they do with it? Do they implement it? Do they enact it, interpret it, resist it, translate it or animate it? They might even make or develop it' (p. 636). All these possibilities locate teachers at the centre of the action in respect of how curriculum makes the transition from a published document to an event experienced by students in a classroom. However, in their textual analysis of the *Australian Curriculum* documentation, Gerrard and Farrell note that, 'The curriculum, rather than teachers, emerges as having the knowledge and discretion capable of engendering student learning' (p. 643). Teacher agency then in this reading is certainly removed from the centre and, as a consequence, diminished.

At best, according to Gerrard and Farrell, the language related to the nexus of teachers and curriculum portrays the former as curriculum *implementers*. Craig (2011) notes that the image of teacher as implementer dominated the literature about curriculum and change until the publication of Clandinin and Connelly's

seminal work, *Teachers as curriculum planners: narratives of experience* (1988). In a later publication (Clandinin and Connelly, 1992) *planners* was replaced with *makers*. Craig (2012) explains that the *teacher as implementer*, 'install[s] curricula according to others' edicts because others, by virtue of their power, position, or formal knowledge base, are presumed to be more knowing of what should be happening in schools (p. 91). In this circumscribing of their agency, teachers are cast in the role of simple technicians and conduits, and as Apple and Jungeek (1992) note, they become 'alienated executors of someone else's plans' (p. 24).

This top-down vision of the work of the teacher was challenged by Clandinin and Connelly's alternative formulation of teachers as *curriculum makers* which Craig (2011) describes as, 'position[ing] teachers as knowers and doers in the educational enterprise' (p. 21). Craig locates Clandinin and Connelly within a tradition honouring the centrality of teachers in the sphere of curriculum, focusing particularly on the ideas of John Dewey and Joseph Schwab. Schwab (1983) especially celebrated the curriculum 'making' role of teachers as an *art*:

Teachers are not...assembly line operators...Teachers practise an art. Moments of choice of what to do, how to do it, with whom and at what pace, arise hundreds of times a school day...No command or instruction can be so formulated as to control that kind of artistic judgment...with its demand for frequent, instant choices of ways to meet an ever-varying situation. (p. 245)

Whilst agency provides one lens through which to view and understand teachers' experience of curriculum innovation or change, issues of identity and self-efficacy are often powerfully present in this context. These dimensions sit behind the components of curriculum change that Fullan (2007) notes teachers may have to engage with - in particular the latter two, 'the possible use of new or revised materials, the possible use of new teaching approaches and the possible alteration of beliefs' (p. 30). The fifth frame of Lovat and Smith's (1991) schema for teacher decision-making space, is the *teacher-self*. This frame comprises both teacher self-concept and self-efficacy, both of which exercise a strong and pervasive influence in the perception of the decision-making space and its breadth or narrowness, and

the role that is taken on as either the passive implementer or the active maker. In examining the experience of teachers engaged in Science curriculum reform, Ryder and Banner (2013) reference Goodson's (2003) work noting three contexts within which this experience takes place, 'an *external* context of mandated, top-down reform. The *internal* contexts of teachers' work...within their specific school and departmental settings. Finally, the *personal* context reflects a teacher's subject knowledge, pedagogical skills and his/her personal mission as a teacher' (p. 492). Goodson argues that it is only when these three contexts are integrated that progress in reform can be achieved. An awareness of the penetrating personal impact of curriculum change was highlighted in Ryder and Banner's study. They noted that for the teachers, responding to the curriculum reforms in Science 'involved much more than acquiring new science knowledge and developing associated pedagogies. For some teachers, it involved changing their identity, or at least constructing new identities as appropriate to the teaching context' (p. 510). Focusing on the personal dimension of teachers bringing a curriculum innovation to life in their classrooms, Mellegard and Petterson (2016) argue that the multiplicity of relationships in teaching add the weight of emotional labour to this process, 'the relationships between teachers and between teachers and students, which affect teachers' role as instructors, their planning and choice of methodology, and their experience of success' (p. 183). Clearly, what a curriculum innovation or change may require from a teacher draws on the complexities inherent in interpersonal and intrapersonal processes, and this in turn significantly shapes the teacher's active or passive positioning in relation to the change, what actually occurs in the classroom for both teacher and students, and the 'success' or otherwise of that change.

Teachers' subject knowledge and pedagogical skills are referred to by Goodson (2003) as forming part of the personal context in which curriculum reform (or innovation/change) takes place. *Pedagogical content knowledge* (PCK) is a term initially conceived by Lee Shulman (1987) which describes the distinctive knowledge field required for teaching, and drawing upon other discrete fields of content knowledge, knowledge about learners and pedagogical knowledge. This concept signalled a movement in teachers' understanding from comprehending

subject content for themselves, to 'becoming able to elucidate subject matter in new ways, reorganise and partition it, clothe it in activities and emotions, in metaphors and exercises, and in examples and demonstrations, so that it [could] be grasped by students' (p. 13).

Based on Shulman's work in the late 1980s, PCK has come to be understood as, 'teachers' understanding and enactment of how to help a group of students understand specific subject matter using multiple instructional strategies...while working within the contextual, cultural, and social limitations in the learning environment' (Park and Oliver, 2008, p. 264). In their reconceptualisation of PCK, Park and Oliver (2008) pointed to the presence of an affective component in PCK - teacher efficacy. In the context of PCK this is seen to be the confidence in one's capacity to identify, select and implement pedagogy appropriate to a given context and specific content. It underscores attributes of flexibility and openness to innovation. The factors that cultivate such qualities are myriad and particularly difficult to identify when considering their dynamic interplay with an individual's particular affective dispositions. Factors such as school culture and role within the institutional structure can certainly be influential. In this study teachers are being asked to incorporate a new content dimension from a field outside their subject, into existing subject content with which they are already familiar. In this process they are placing themselves in unknown territory for the domains of both content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge.

Teachers in this study could also be seen to be teaching *out-of-field*. Although the General Capabilities of the *Australian Curriculum* are considered to be cross-curricular, the capability of *Ethical understanding* draws upon a branch of the disciplinary field of Philosophy. In the International Baccalaureate Organisation's Diploma Programme, Ethics is one of eight designated areas of knowledge, alongside Mathematics and the Natural Sciences for example. It could thus be argued that teachers, in being asked to teach the *Australian Curriculum* (which necessarily involves integrating General Capabilities into their specialist disciplines and subjects), if they have no training or academic background in the areas drawn upon by the General Capabilities, are being asked to teach out-of-field. An accepted definition of out-of-field teaching is, 'Teaching 'out-of-field' refers to



the practice of teaching in a subject, field or level of schooling for which a teacher has neither a major or minor tertiary (university) qualification' (McConney and Price, 2009, p. 86). Du Plessis, Gillies and Carroll (2014) observe in their transnational study that out-of-field teaching can negatively impact teacher self-efficacy and confidence, and that, 'Interview data showed that teachers who are effective in one field might not automatically be as effective in another area for which they are not suitably qualified' (p. 96)

In taking the capability of *Ethical understanding* into their classrooms, the teachers in this study were not simply 'couriers', the means of delivering a pre-packaged, unopened product to their students. As has been evidenced through a consideration of the literature above, the enactment of a new curriculum element in the classroom by a teacher will be profoundly formed by a myriad of influences, for example their past experiences, beliefs about themselves, their subject and their students, and their institutional context. Along with these factors, this study sought to understand what was *particular* to the capability of *Ethical understanding* in shaping this enactment.

## Conclusion

This chapter has developed a critical review of scholarship that directly speaks to the framing and focus of my study. Its aim has been to map existing debates and thematics and to indicate how, where and what type of contribution my thesis aims to make. First, current understandings and practices in the field of Moral education were reviewed. Moral education that is explicitly 'faith'-based and which sits under the umbrella of Religious Education has not been a focus in this review. Rather, approaches that have been adopted across 'faith' and 'secular' settings have been considered. The literature delineates two streams in this respect - character education and values education, neither of which are necessarily discrete and often overlap. McLaughlin and Halstead's (1999) continuum which ranges from 'expansive' to 'non-expansive' which they have used to designate different approaches to character education, is a helpful frame that can be likewise applied to other forms of moral education. 'Non-expansive' approaches have attracted negative criticism for their highly prescriptive content, adoption of

behaviourist paradigms and the way they can and have been used to enlist support for existing hegemonies. Some 'expansive' approaches, such as values clarification for example, are critiqued for their limitations - for some they appear to do little more than assist students to *know about* different perspectives, offer no guidance for building a personal moral compass and dissolve into uncritical relativism. Other approaches are seen to lack balance, addressing only the cognitive domain and either ignoring the affective domain or failing to integrate the two in an holistic approach. These tensions provide both the background and context within which the *Australian Curriculum's* General Capability of *Ethical understanding* has come into existence.

The question of what should fill the curriculum container has been the subject of vigorous and passionate debate, especially since the nineteenth century. The question of 'which knowledge' is the second area of focus in this chapter. The place of generic skills and their relationship to traditional academic knowledge is not a new discourse. However, the discussion about what have become known as '21<sup>st</sup> century skills', has been heightened by the intensity of change we are experiencing globally in multiple areas of life in the later decades of the twentieth and the first decades of the twenty-first centuries. The affordances of both disciplines and capabilities in response to present needs are evidenced in the literature. What the *Australian Curriculum* presents with its General Capabilities, on a conceptual level, is the possibility of bringing disciplines and capabilities into a creative interplay that enhances student development in both cognitive and affective spheres. The experiences of the teachers in my study in working with *Ethical understanding* in their classrooms provides an opportunity to view and examine how this marriage takes shape in practice and evaluate its problems, contributions and possibilities.

Finally, the enterprise of bringing a curriculum innovation to life in a classroom and observing the shape it takes, cannot be considered apart from those who mediate this process - teachers. In this study, the teachers are volunteers - individuals who have chosen, for varying reasons, to participate knowing that this will add to their existing workload. They can be viewed as trailblazers, running ahead of themselves and their colleagues in an undertaking that is likely, in time, to become mandated. For all of them, this new aspect of the *Australian Curriculum*

has piqued an interest. This choosing locates them in a different space in terms of disposition. However, although their choosing to participate in a pre-mandated space affords them a position free from immediate systemic and institutional pressures - something like an 'experimental' space, they are not immune from a range of challenges that typically accompany 'new' endeavours. A range of decisions have to be made: from the use of the published curriculum documentation outlining the scope and sequence of the General Capability of *Ethical understanding*, to the choice of pedagogical approaches in the classroom. Whilst some of the literature examined here draws on studies of teachers' work conducted in mandated contexts - which carries with it a raft of additional factors that must be considered, it nonetheless provides a useful lens for understanding the factors that will potentially influence the lived experience of this study's participants in the space of curriculum innovation.

Different threads of the approaches explored in this chapter, along with their highlighted strengths and weaknesses, challenges and opportunities have been selected and brought together by the curriculum writers of ACARA to weave the fabric of the General Capability of *Ethical understanding*. The General Capability of *Ethical understanding* in its written form is unique in its selection and weaving of these various threads. When teachers enact *Ethical understanding* in their classrooms, yet another process of filtering and selection occurs and a new entity evolves. My study explores this process and the emergent entities of *Ethical understanding* and their synergies with, and differences from, approaches to Moral education evidenced globally at this time. It is hoped that such learning can contribute to the ongoing development of this field.

Integrating the capability of *Ethical understanding* into core academic disciplines represents a new curricular approach in Australia. The capability itself is also a new entity. This research captures how this new approach and new entity appear in the context of classroom practice. In the exploration of these enactments, understandings of the factors that have shaped the implementation of this particular capability emerge. Further, what teachers deem constitutive of this capability when put to work in their classrooms, offers insights into how the capability might be developed into the future.

In the following chapter I give an account of the methodological approach adopted in this study and describe its design and rationale.

## Chapter Three: Methodology

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### Overview

This study is located within the broad field of curriculum development with a particular focus on curriculum implementation by teachers. The specific curriculum being referenced is the *Australian Curriculum* which began its staged implementation across Australian states and territories in 2012. To reiterate, the *Australian Curriculum* is a three-dimensional curriculum comprising disciplines divided into eight learning areas, seven General Capabilities and three cross-curriculum priorities. The focus of this study is the General Capability of *Ethical understanding*. The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What understandings of ethics and ethical understanding do teachers hold?
- What understandings of ethics and ethical understanding emerge when teachers explicitly teach *Ethical understanding* in their discipline areas?
- What are teachers' views about the place of *Ethical understanding* in their discipline / subject?

To address these questions, a group of secondary teachers teaching the following subjects English, Mathematics, Science and History, were brought together. These are the four disciplines that formed the first phase of implementation of the new *Australian Curriculum*. These teachers were asked to implement, in a current unit of work of approximately four to six weeks' in length, the aspects of the General Capability of *Ethical understanding* they deemed relevant to their curriculum area. This integrative approach is recommended for the teaching of the seven General Capabilities in the *Australian Curriculum*, 'In the Australian Curriculum, the General Capabilities are developed and applied, where relevant, through the learning areas' (ACARA, n.d., b).

In this chapter I will first consider the broader methodological and design context within which this study is placed, before turning to a detailed description of its particularities and specific challenges.

## Approach

The *Australian Curriculum*, which was in its early stages of implementation at the outset of this study, is, at the time of the completion of this thesis, still to be fully implemented. Its structure has not, however, been altered. The General Capabilities are to be integrated into the teaching of subjects within discipline areas. This remains a new approach, and *Ethical understanding* is a new entity in this new curriculum framework.

I determined that to gain an understanding of the enactment of *Ethical understanding* and its impact, it was important to pay attention to the experience of teachers who take curriculum into the classroom space with students. Examining this lived experience would shed valuable light on the affordances and challenges of both the structural approach of integration and the particularities of *Ethical understanding*. My research questions were therefore framed to gain insight into the knowledge and experiences of teachers. Consequently, I decided a qualitative approach would potentially yield the richest material. Qualitative research is used to gain insight into people's attitudes, concerns and experiences. Merriam (1988) argues that a qualitative approach is a particularly suitable method for understanding problems of practice and extending the education knowledge base. I wanted to record the experiences of teachers, who are discipline experts, as they sought to foreground relevant aspects of the General Capability of *Ethical understanding* as they taught a chosen unit of work.

### **A qualitative study employing a hermeneutic phenomenological approach**

In considering the range of possible qualitative methodologies, the combination of phenomenology and hermeneutics was chosen as an appropriate frame for this study. Phenomenological research seeks understanding through the description of lived experience (Van Manen, 2007). Hermeneutics concerns the practice of interpretation. Hermeneutic phenomenology moves beyond rich description of life-world (*lebenswelt*) experience to interpreting and understanding this body of experience. Creswell (2007) notes, "The type of problem best suited for this form of

research is one in which it is important to understand several individual's common or shared experiences of a phenomenon... in order to develop practice or policies' (p. 60). Paul Ricoeur (1975) speaks of the complex and almost necessary relationship between phenomenology and hermeneutics, 'On the one hand, hermeneutics is built on the basis of phenomenology...On the other hand, phenomenology is not able to establish itself without a hermeneutical presupposition' (p. 85).

The complexities of phenomenological research in education for novice researchers are explored by Eddles-Hirsch (2015) who points out the distinction, (and outcomes) between a transcendental phenomenological study after Husserl (1859-1938) and a heuristic approach following Heidegger (1889-1976). Eddles-Hirsch suggests that in pursuing a transcendental study the researcher 'is solely interested in the participants' descriptions not their interpretations of the phenomenon being explored' (p. 253). In contrast, the hermeneutic researcher is concerned with these descriptions 'as well as the interpretation or meaning of the experience. The researcher then needs to make an interpretation from the different meanings deduced from the participants "lifeworld" experiences' (p. 253).

This hybrid methodology does not sit comfortably with all researchers. Kakkori (2009) for example, is particularly critical of Van Manen's work, suggesting, '[a] tension between Husserlian phenomenology and Gadamerian hermeneutics...This tension can be explained briefly as follows: phenomenology is concerned with finding the essence of the things, whereas hermeneutics sees that everything has its being in language and interpretation' (p. 20). The detail and complexity of this discourse is not a focus here, but it is noted that Kakkori appears to be working out of a binary framework which regards the identified tension as problematic rather than productive. Despite these concerns, I noted that Van Manen's work, whilst not universally supported, is nonetheless broadly accepted as an approach to data that is fruitful for researchers to employ to increase understanding in educational practice. As teachers' voices are, sadly and ironically, often only paid lip-service to by those who write the formal curriculum, I wanted to ensure my study provided the space for these voices to be heard in the first instance, as well as enabling a

contribution to be made, through their experience, to understanding in this field. I chose a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to the interpretation of data following Van Manen (2007) as it honours both the rich description and the interpretation and understanding of experience.

I am aware however, that my aim of describing and understanding both the phenomenon and participants in the study cannot be realised without the presence and impact of my own views and values and their shaping of my way of being in the world. In this I find myself caught in the classic dilemma of the researcher-as-instrument. Advocates of 'pure' phenomenological research claim the researcher 'brackets' or neutralises personal presuppositions and judgments to privilege the lived experience of the participant. Yet as Denzin and Lincoln (2000) note, 'All research is interpretive; it is guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied' (p. 22). Heidegger, a pupil of Husserl, also challenged the notion of bracketing, 'Understanding is never without presuppositions. We do not, and cannot, understand anything from a purely objective position' (quoted in Johnson, 2000, p. 23). Van Manen (2007) furthers this argument using the context of sound and hearing and referencing Heidegger's 'Poetry, Language and Thought'. He notes that Heidegger emphasises the meaning of the sound we hear, 'When we hear the sound of a car, we hear it in the way in which it breaks in onto our world. To hear "bare" or pure sounds we would have to listen "away from things"' (p. 17). Phenomenology might be purely descriptive in its intent, however as we are embodied beings emerging from our own time place and set of experiences, my understanding is that phenomenology in action will always be, inescapably, interpretive.

These debates informed the conduct of my research practice in that I brought to critical reflexivity as much as possible my own beliefs and dispositions about the research focus. My intention was that such consciousness would act as a moderating influence on all my interactions - written, verbal and face-to-face - with participants, and provide space and freedom for them to act and speak out of their frameworks, not mine. But, of course, this is not straightforward, and one needs to vigilantly guard against self-interested or confirmatory observations and



interpretations. Yet, navigating this is crucial in obtaining rigor in qualitative research.

As noted in the first chapter of this thesis, I have worked extensively in the field of Values Education and written at some length about underpinning concepts such as *worldview*. This prior knowledge consciously informed the framing of my research questions and the development of the interview questions - in this respect my knowledge of the field was a positive asset in scoping the study. My consciousness of my particular way of seeing in this field reminded me however of the need to compose research questions that were as open to the experiences of participants as possible with no overt or built-in agenda operating as a direction-giving undercurrent. Eisner's (1991) comments offer a helpful perspective to a researcher who operates in the space of *researcher-as-instrument*. This is potentially a place of paralysis, as awareness of one's limitations and biases can weigh heavily, 'Related to the impossibility of knowing the world in its pristine state - a kind of immaculate perception - is the framework-dependent character of perception. Perception of the world is influenced by skill, point of view, focus, language and framework' (p. 46).

My background as a secondary teacher also brought particular dispositions to the study. It contributed to my awareness and understanding of the pressures exerted by the school-wide context and its demands upon participants which in turn fostered my appreciation of their willing involvement in the study. This awareness also tempered the frustration I felt at certain points when participants had not taken up the guidance I had offered or failed to follow the road map I had set out for the study. As a curriculum writer I initially found the lack of engagement of participants with the formal *Ethical understanding* documentation unsettling. Knowing something of what would have been involved in the production of the curriculum guidance and its intended use, its apparent side-lining struck me as carelessly nonchalant. However, I was also aware that I needed to let this attitude go and allow participants to bring to the experience that was emerging from themselves and their practice. Heidegger suggested that the researcher was as much a part of the research as the participant. Indeed, he saw that 'fore-structure' (*Vorstruktur*) was necessary for data analysis to take place. According to Kinneavy

(1994) Heidegger, 'contends that all interpretation must begin with the mental structure which the interpreter brings to the object being interpreted. Indeed, the interpreter has no other alternative but to interpret everything with the knowledge that he or she has' (p. 9). Bearing in mind observations such as these that indicate the complex positioning of the researcher in a phenomenological context, I pressed on, trusting that awareness and reflexivity would provide space for participants' voices to be heard, albeit imperfectly.

Phenomenological research also invokes, in contrast to positivistic research, a form of problematising. This involves 'the process of posing questions in order to deconstruct a particular phenomenon so as to understand its construct' (Jurema, Pimental, Cordeiro and Nepomuceno, 2006, p. 2). This approach was particularly relevant during the final interviews of participants. I was conscious of the importance of allowing participants the freedom to represent the complexities of their experiences and ensuring that my questioning was opening up such opportunities and the space of knowing, rather than being driven by a desire to establish exemplars or compose solutions to issues that emerged.

## **Epistemology**

Epistemologically, this study is positioned within the broad stream of a social constructivist approach. The term *constructivism* is variously defined and applied. In this study I follow Stake's (1995) understanding that human knowledge is based in the conception of three realities. Stake argues that research aims to construct a clearer view of the second, 'our experiential reality representing external reality' (p. 100), and a more sophisticated version of the third, 'a universe of integrated interpretations, our rational reality' (p. 100). Stake acknowledges the implied relativism of focusing on the understanding of the individual, yet also notes that, 'much will be held in common. Although the reality we seek is of our own making, it is a collective making' (p. 102). The work of this thesis is a collective making of knowledge about the content of *Ethical understanding* and its embodied practice in the classroom. Henze's (2009) term, 'pedagogical constructivism' is also useful in delineating my methodological approach. Referring to learning, Henze observes that it is, 'clearly not a spectator sport or simply downloaded from one mind to the

next. It becomes an active process of communicating, discovering, organising and conceptualising' (p. 99).

Although speaking about pedagogy above, Henze pinpoints why constructivism is relevant to this study. In teaching their units and making *Ethical understanding* an explicit focus of this endeavour, the participants in this study created knowledge about the capability of *Ethical understanding* and its enactment in their classrooms. My role stood beyond the context where this knowledge creation occurred, but it was not, to use Henze's analogy, a passive role of spectator. In the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology, I have provided rich description of their individual experiences and have then used a variety of frames to weave the individual threads together into shared understandings. These understandings build our knowing about the particular capability and potentially contribute to its evolution.

### **A small scale multi-site multiple case study**

Sharan Merriam (1988) argues that for education research, a qualitative case study is a particularly suitable method for understanding critical problems of practice and extending the education knowledge base. She comments that, 'research focused on discovery, insight and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education' (p. 3). This method aligns well with the broad methodological approach explained above as hermeneutic phenomenology.

The conversation about what actually constitutes a case study is a contested one. Stark and Torrance (2005) argue that the case study should be regarded as an approach rather than a coherent, singularly defined method because it has 'been fed by many different theoretical tributaries' (p. 33). Significant methodological debates continue about the limitations of the case study and issues associated with defining its boundaries (see Hyett, Kenny and Dickson-Swift, 2014, and Miles, 2015). Of course, all research methods have strengths and weaknesses, but case study research seems to have been questioned on a multitude of fronts. The usefulness and validity of case studies is often called into question because they lack generalizability and objectivity. Such criticisms pertain to all qualitative

research. However, the key question for a case study is the definition of what is within and without its boundaries - what it is a case *of* - and whether it is designed to confirm or open up investigations. This is discussed further below.

It is true that a heavy burden lies on the researcher's shoulders to collect and analyse data in an ethical and rigorous manner and not manipulate it to suit some personal 'barrow' or set of presuppositions. Such a challenge may be more acute in working with the significant volume of data a case study can produce, however other qualitative and quantitative approaches are not immune from the question of 'truthful' representation of data. There are a number of ways in which interpretive rigor can be established. Authenticity in the presentation of the findings and interpretations is essential. One way this can be achieved is by presenting participants' findings in their own words; presenting the full range of views; making audio recordings and transcripts available to an independent third party and providing opportunities for participants to review the data and analysis. Coherence between the data and the findings is another key factor along with transparency of the researcher's intentions, values, and relevant experiences (see Fossey, Harvey, McDermott and Davidson, 2002, p. 725).

In relation to case studies, Flyvbjerg (2006) suggests that generalisation has been overvalued as a source of scientific development and that the force of a single example is underestimated. By definition, case studies can make no claims to be *typical*. Case studies can however provide what might be called partial generalisations, or what Payne and Williams (2005) call *moderatum* generalisations in that the scope of what is claimed is moderate. Case studies, 'are not attempts to produce sweeping [statements]...they are moderately held, in the sense of a political or aesthetic view that is open to change' (p. 297). Consequently, findings and insights constitute, 'testable propositions that might be confirmed or refuted through further evidence' (p. 297). Merriam (2009) puts it this way, 'These insights can be construed as tentative hypotheses that help structure future research' (p. 51). In this study for example, the experience of teachers suggest particular pedagogical approaches are as apposite for teaching the capability *Ethical understanding*. Further and wider studies may confirm this experience enabling stronger recommendations for practice to be formulated.

Methodological understandings of the case study approach as developed by Yin (2003), Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) and Stake (1995) over many years and through extensive experience, have shaped the design of this study. A key definitional tenet guiding this study has been Freebody's (2003) proposition that, 'The distinctive feature of a Case Study is...its focus on attempting to document the story of a naturalistic-experiment-in-action' (p. 82).

The case study I designed has the delineated and clear boundaries demanded of case study research. It is primarily presented as a case study in curriculum innovation and implementation, specifically examining the embedding of an extra-disciplinary perspective within a discipline area. It is also, however, a case study of pedagogy, specifically an examination of the impact of a new curriculum demand on a subject area where pedagogical practices are most likely already well established. It could also be considered as a case study of teacher professional identity, specifically exploring the impact on teacher identity when a perspective that may be unfamiliar to them is to be integrated into a teacher's specialist subject area. The dominant focus is on curriculum; however, issues of pedagogy and professional identity were clearly at play and resonant as the teachers went about their work.

## **Types of case study**

This study was an empirical enquiry that sought to investigate a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (see Yin, 2003, p. 13). Yin (2003) identifies three types of case studies: the exploratory, which may function as a pilot to other studies or research questions; the descriptive which provides a narrative account of the data, and the explanatory which examines the data closely to explain the phenomena. The case study in this thesis drew on the functions of all three types. The work of the participants and the accompanying comments by the researcher are essentially exploratory. What took place in the study may well be viewed as a 'pilot' of an aspect of the curriculum innovation contained within the *Australian Curriculum*, and as such may contribute to establishing guidelines and pathways for other teachers to utilise as they make their own journeys into this area. It presents the data descriptively within a narrative framework, honouring

the voices of the participants. And finally, it employs a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to the data in seeking to find both immediate and wider understandings.

With eleven teacher participants drawn from three schools and four subject areas, a multiple case design was employed. On one level the study could be regarded as a multiple case study of eleven participants with the design replicated across the experience of all. In Chapters Four and Five this design provides the structure for the presentation and discussion of data. Chapter Four presents each participant's views as singular cases of views about *Ethical understanding* and ethics. At the conclusion of Chapter Four interpretive commentary groups the individual cases into shared perspectives about ethical understanding and positions these both in relation to the content of the *Australian Curriculum* documentation about *Ethical understanding* and contemporary discourses about ethics in the field of Education. The data presented in Chapter Five is based on the second interviews with, and reflective journals of each participant and examines their experiences and insights after teaching their units of work. In Chapter Six the category of subjects is used to explore the experience of individual participants. As such, a different group of cases is considered. Comparative comments about the experiences of participants teaching in the same subject area are made throughout Chapters Four and Five, however these are not the primary focus of the discussion as is the case in Chapter Six.

A qualitative, inductive multi-case study has the advantage of affording a more compelling interpretation than one based on an individual instance (see Merriam, 1988, p. 154). Establishing comparability of the phenomena under study in the different settings, and gathering comparable types and volume of data using similar techniques were key considerations. For example, the time limit range was strictly observed in the interview schedule. The schedules for data collection, whilst they occurred at different times in the term for each participant, were identical. Such consistency was intended to assist with ensuring the rigor, coherence and validity of the study.

## The Study

With these methodological understandings in place, I proceeded to design the study in the following way.

### Research sites: The schools

In order to contain the variables to be managed in the study and the fact that I was located in Melbourne, it was decided (initially) to limit the chosen school sites to the state of Victoria. In Victoria there are three sectors that administer school education – Government, Catholic and Independent. There is significant variation in many areas between all three, and indeed within each of the sectors.

The advent of the *Australian Curriculum* marked the first occasion when a national secondary curriculum framework was to be mandatory for all secondary schools throughout Australia (in contrast to previous frameworks that have been state and territory based and largely only mandated in state and catholic schools). These two factors informed my desire to have at least one school participating from each of the sectors. Further, it was decided that selecting co-educational schools would also be appropriate given the aims of the study. Co-education is the dominant form of secondary education in two of the three education sectors, Government and Catholic. Also, gender is not an explicit focus of the study, so all sites being co-educational (and not single-sex) minimises a potential variable and provides a measure of comparability. It was also considered desirable to involve large co-educational secondary schools as volunteers would be more likely to come forward from a larger staff and the participants would be able to draw on the views and knowledge of colleagues in larger departments. The design also sought to include a geographical mix of sites to enable some consideration of the potential relevance of the socio-economic status (SES) of student cohorts in relation to this particular curriculum innovation.

As a secondary teacher of twenty-five years' experience, along with several years serving as Vice-President of the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English, and some years of connection with schools through pre-service teacher education, I was confident that recruiting participants with the criteria outlined above, would

be a relatively smooth and straightforward process: I was known in many schools, respected and possessed credibility. However, this confidence turned out to be not well founded. It was extremely difficult to gather participants.

On reflection, the possible reasons for this are not surprising. In the first place, I had assumed that schools would be keen to take up an opportunity to 'trail-blaze' how the General Capabilities in the *Australian Curriculum* might actually 'work' in the core subjects. The implementation of the *Australian Curriculum* was a staged process and the General Capabilities were to be incorporated quite late in this, after all the discipline areas had been set in place. In the year in which field work for this study occurred, schools were coping with the immediate demands of implementation of the phase one core subjects, not attending to future requirements. I was essentially asking them to work ahead of the official implementation schedule which, in the context of an already increased workload for teachers of these phase one subjects - English, Mathematics, Science and History - appeared to many to be unduly burdensome. On the industrial front, many government school teachers were engaged in a dispute with their employer (the Victorian Department of Education) which was manifest in a work-to rule action in schools. Teachers would not take up any additional work. Further, the Catholic schools I approached seemed reluctant to explore the new General Capability of *Ethical understanding* as they already had extensive religious education programs in place which encompassed ethics.

As a result of the difficulty in recruiting participants, I was unable to achieve representation in the ways I had planned for and which I described above. In the final design, only two of the three sectors were represented, only two of the three schools were co-educational, and only two of the three schools were located in Victoria. My experience mirrors the observation about 'sampling' made by Dowling and Brown (2010) who propose that, 'the selection of an empirical setting is very often a matter of seizing an *opportunity*' (p. 27). The study thus proceeded with the schools who had agreed and participants who made themselves available. Consequently, the data and the interpretations that emerge need to be situated in relation to these specific contexts of school type, setting and time.



School A is a government co-educational school in Victoria. It has strong links with the University of Melbourne, being a school which hosts large numbers of pre-service teachers. The Principal was keen to cultivate this ongoing relationship and readily and openly invited members of staff to participate in the study if they wished and if it aligned with their own professional learning goals and priorities for the year. This school has a slightly lower than average Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) (see [www.myschool.edu.au](http://www.myschool.edu.au)). Three members of staff indicated a desire to participate from the subjects of English, Science and History. No Mathematics teachers expressed an interest.

The two other schools in the study were both from the independent sector, one in Victoria, the other in New South Wales. The ICSEA value of both schools is well above the Australian average and both are located in geographical locations well above average SES. The Principal in the Victorian school (School B) supported research partnerships between universities and schools. With a personal background of many years as a director of curriculum and substantial research conducted for her own Master of Education, the Principal was highly engaged with the implementation of the *Australian Curriculum* in her school. However, the two members of staff whom she asked to participate in the study, demonstrated some ambivalence about their involvement and appeared to be the least engaged of the participants. Both held significant leadership positions and felt some obligation (unknown to the researcher at the time) to respond affirmatively to the Principal's request. Whilst the experience of these participants contributed significant insights to the study as will be described and discussed in later chapters, the importance of willing participation in any study is noted. The sense of coercion potentially hinders their approach to the study, with a consequent impact on study findings.

The school in New South Wales, School C, was found with the serendipitous assistance of a 'Google' search. In seeking to find connections between ethics and its teaching in Australian secondary schools, a report from School C appeared in my search results. This report provided details of a project undertaken with funding provided by the *Australian Government Quality Teacher Program* to produce an 'Ethics toolkit'. When contacted, the author of the report, who was the

Director of Curriculum, responded enthusiastically to the prospect of teachers being involved in this study as it would provide an opportunity to re-generate the earlier work in the area which had by then been side-lined due to the pressure of more immediate curriculum issues. Notification of the opportunity to participate in the study was sent to all secondary staff and six teachers expressed interest. Only five continued as one teacher experienced personal issues beyond school that led to her reducing her teaching time fraction and focusing only on junior classes. Unlike the other two schools, this school was a single-sex girls' school. Although in the initial design of the study I had sought to include only co-educational schools, incorporating a single-sex school did not impact on the study as I had anticipated as the primary focus was on teachers' thinking about and classroom enactment of *Ethical understanding*.

The following table provides a range of statistical data publicly available from the *My School* Australian Government website ([www.myschool.edu.au](http://www.myschool.edu.au)). In line with ethics permissions requirements, the schools remain anonymous, but what is provided represents important contextual data.

TABLE 1: SCHOOL CONTEXTUAL DATA

	SCHOOL A	SCHOOL B	SCHOOL C
School sector	Government	Independent	Independent
School type	Secondary	Kindergarten, Primary, Secondary	Kindergarten, Primary, Secondary
Year range	7-12	K-12	K-12
Location	Metropolitan	Metropolitan	Metropolitan

Teaching staff	93	63	215
Non-teaching staff	32	27	101
School ICSEA value	944	1159	1214
Average ICSEA value	1000	1000	1000
Total enrolments	1057	573	2115
Girls	509	210	2115
Boys	548	363	0
Language background other than English	67%	19%	31%
Participants in study	3	2	6

When I began this study, there were a number of factors evident in the contextual summary above which I thought might potentially impact upon the experience of participants in the study. Whilst schools A and B have a roughly one to three ratio of non-teaching staff to teaching staff, school C's ratio is one to two. This could indicate a level of support (of diverse types) for teaching staff that may have enabled them to afford greater time and attention to the teaching of their units of work. The relative school sizes may also have impacted on participants' experience of implementation. School C has almost four times the number of students as

School B, and has over three times the number of teaching staff. School C, the Independent school in New South Wales, has a very rich professional learning program available to teaching staff and the number of participants pointed to opportunities for interaction, collegiality and support. The other noteworthy factor is a high percentage of students with a language background other than English attending School A, the government school in Melbourne. The language demands of mediating complex concepts as encountered in *Ethical understanding* may be a particular challenge in some settings. As the study unfolded, the factors identified above either did not come to the fore or played out in ways contrary to my expectations. For example, the diversity of language backgrounds other than English at School A was never raised as an issue by the teachers involved. The collegiality identified at School C was not activated amongst the participants in the context of the study. Other contextual factors, much more nuanced than what is captured in the table above, were significant and these are discussed later in the thesis.

## **The participants**

Three English, two Mathematics, three Science and three History teachers were recruited for the study. The teachers were drawn from three schools: one Victorian government school, one Victorian independent school and one New South Wales independent school. For the purposes of the study, most teachers taught their units of work with classes at Years Nine or Ten. These year levels were chosen as they are the final two years of the *Ethical understanding* continuum where the full scope of the capability is represented. There were two exceptions to this choice: one teacher from School C suggested working with her 'low achieving' Year Eleven General Mathematics class, and the teacher in his first year of teaching at School A was extremely keen to be involved in the study but was only teaching History at Year Eight level. These 'exceptions' were considered as falling within the scope of the study and thus judged as appropriate to be a part of it. The table below provides key information about each participant:

TABLE 2: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

SCHOOL & TEACHER	GENDER	SUBJECT	YEARS TEACHING
<b>SCHOOL A</b>			
David	Male	English	15+
Dina	Female	Science	5-10
Justin	Male	History	0-2
<b>SCHOOL B</b>			
Harry	Male	Mathematics	15+
Archie	Male	Science	15+
<b>SCHOOL C</b>			
Alice	Female	English	10
Nicky	Female	English	15+
Jillian	Female	History	15+
Fran	Female	History	15+
Natalie	Female	Science	10-15

Lily	Female	Mathematics	15+
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What is particularly noteworthy in this information is the extensive experience of most of the participants. Only one participant had been teaching for fewer than five years, and that individual was actually in his first year of teaching. The extent to, and the ways in which (be they positive, negative or a mix) years of teaching impacted on the participants' experience of implementation is considered at relevant junctures in ensuing chapters.

Participants were asked to be involved in the study in the ways summarised below:

1. Attend a briefing meeting explaining the aims of the project and their role in it. At this meeting published material relevant to the General Capabilities of *Ethical understanding* from the *Australian Curriculum* was distributed and discussed.
2. Teach a current unit of work over a period of three or four to six weeks in their subject area frontloading or making explicit appropriate aspects of the *Australian Curriculum's* General Capability of *Ethical understanding*, where they perceived it to be relevant.
3. Keep a reflective journal of their teaching experience (either hard copy or digital – the researcher provided blank journals for those opting for the former).

Participants were invited to begin entries as soon as possible after the briefing meeting and complete entries one week after the final interview.

4. Participate in two interviews.

## Field work

### Data collection methods

The two major methods of data gathering employed in this study were pre- and post- interviews and participants' reflective journals.

## Interviews

The first interviews occurred just before participants began teaching their units. The focus was the attitudes and beliefs held by each participant about: (a) ethics; (b) the General Capability of *Ethical understanding*, and (c) the integration of *Ethical understanding* into their discipline area. Relevant contextual and base line data was also gathered. Teachers were also given the opportunity to ask any questions or raise any issues that had arisen since the briefing. These interviews were up to forty minutes in length. The second interviews took place when participants had completed teaching their units of work. In these interviews they were asked to reflect upon, in as much detail as possible, the experience of teaching their unit of work with a specific ethics focus. I provided a number of open-ended questions to allow each individual to respond as they deemed appropriate and with as little prompting from me as possible. These interviews were usually up to forty-five minutes in length. All interviews were conducted at the respective participants' schools. In each case participants arranged for their interviews to occur in a quiet location where interruptions were unlikely. Often these occurred in a period when they were not timetabled to teach or at the end of the school day.

In choosing interviews as a key source of data for the proposed study, I was aware of Alvesson's (2011) plea to be 'more careful when working with empirical material than is often the case in the interview society' (p. 40). The use of the term 'interview society' indicates a danger of the form - that interviews, being ubiquitous, can delude the researcher into believing the process is straightforward. Freebody (2003) warns of the naivety of thinking of interviews as the experience of 'authentic(ally) gaz(ing) into the soul of another' (p. 136). The interview is undoubtedly a complex phenomenon involving all the following dimensions: cognitive, ethical, interpersonal, communicative, emotional, social and at times, political. Schostak (2006) sees the challenge of the interview situation more in terms of respecting 'otherness', 'The interview, then, is a particular case of being towards the other, recognising the otherness of the other and in so doing not reducing this otherness to a sense of 'the same' (p. 11).

Acknowledging the constructed nature of an interview situation, and both the dangers and affordances noted above, interviews were nonetheless chosen as the primary instrument through which to gather data for this study. This was because, when conducted with appropriate protocols in place and reflexive awareness at the forefront of the researcher's mind, interviews can provide participants with an expansive opportunity to share and discuss their experience. Many researchers attest to the experience of interviews yielding a rich vein of *thick* data.

In conducting the interviews for this study, I explained clearly, and repeatedly, to participants that what was sought from them was their own thinking and experience. As the study constituted research into an unknown phenomenon, the findings would be emergent - they were not being plotted onto a pre-existing map, or ticking boxes on a pre-determined table. When asked by a participant whether what they had to say was 'right' or what I 'wanted', I would not endorse such categories in my response. Instead, to encourage trust and openness, I would mirror their observations and reflections back to them, inviting further expression of their authentic voice and experience.

Two face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. These were recorded on a digital voice recorder and digital sound files generated and stored securely in a digital repository. A semi-structured interview is a flexible strategy: it enables the research questions to remain at the core of the discussion through the researcher's prepared questions and yet allows for spontaneity and the participant to move in, out and around those core questions. As a means of limiting variability, each participant was asked the same questions - using the same wording, and in the same order.

The questions used for the first interview were:

- What interests you about this project?
- Do you have some experience or background in the field of Ethics? Please describe.
- Have you had experiences in the classroom where the discussion turns to ethics/ethical understanding? Can you recount an example?



- Broadly speaking, what do you understand by the terms ethics and ethical understanding?
- How do you see this area being relevant to your specialist subject?
- Having read the ACARA documentation about the General Capability of ethical understanding, do you have any comments to make or concerns you would like to raise?
- Have you had any prior experience of integrating an area outside of your subject area into your subject? Could you describe this please?
- If you have had this experience, can you recall some of the positives and negatives of it?
- What issues do you think might arise as you undertake the task for this project?
- In the unit you will be teaching, do you have any predictions about where the ethical might emerge?
- Do you have any thoughts at this stage about how you will treat it?
- Are there any questions you would like to ask of me?

The questions used for the second interview were:

- Having completed your teaching for this project, can you recount *where* aspects of the ethical arose in your unit? Can you please describe a specific instance?
- Was this what you expected? How, using a specific example, did you deal with it?
- What responses did your students have to discussions involving the ethical?
- How did you negotiate different understandings of the ethical in your classroom?
- How valuable do you think taking the ethical into account has been for you and your students? Please explain by using specific examples.
- In what ways do you think this approach benefits students particularly?
- What do you now understand by ethics / 'ethical behaviour' in the context of your subject? In what ways has your understanding changed and or developed?
- Has incorporating this General Capability into your teaching altered your understanding of your subject? If so, how? Can you please provide specific examples?

- Has adopting this approach to teaching your subject area created any pedagogical issues for you? Could you please describe these by using a specific example?
- Has adopting this approach to teaching your subject area created any professional issues for you? Could you please describe these by using a specific example?
- What do you think is needed for a teacher to incorporate this General Capability into their teaching and subject area successfully?
- Are there other areas, concerns or comments that you would like to discuss that we haven't covered?

In the initial proposal for the study the possibility of conducting a final group discussion with participants within each school was given consideration. It was believed that this opportunity could yield some interesting data in respect of the responses of teachers from different discipline areas as they conversed with one another. The hesitation in respect of doing this however, was that this would be a further imposition on participants' time. Such a hesitation was well founded as managing individual interviews in each location was in itself a miracle of scheduling - gathering the whole group within each school became an abandoned desire on my behalf. The perspectives and insights that arose from participants in different discipline areas is something that has been taken up in the discussion in various chapters that follow.

## **Reflective Journals**

The aim of the reflective journals was to capture the participants' thinking and experience between the two interviews. This also potentially afforded a greater closeness to, and intimacy with the experiences of participants. It gave participants an opportunity and context for comment and reflection that was not constrained by the dynamics of an interview. Bolger, Davis and Rafaeli (2003) note, 'A fundamental benefit of diary methods is that they permit the examination of reported events and experiences in their natural, spontaneous context, providing information complementary to that obtainable by more traditional designs' (pp. 579-616).

In this study, a particular strength of the use of journals across a period of time and within a defined scope, was a shortening of the length of time between events, reflection on experiences and the written comments. Given that I was not conducting research visits on a daily or weekly basis, it was imagined that the journals would allow for the recording of events in an immediate and vivid manner. Relying on direct visits of the researcher, the time gap can increase the risk of uncertain memory. In addition, it is possible for there to be some reshaping of material in the context of a face-to-face discussion. A journal has the potential to be close to the 'moment' and less influenced by re-interpretation afforded by the backward glance. It also represents the inner thought processes and dialogue within the participant rather than public utterances.

A professional or reflective journal enables us to record snapshots of our working lives. Holly (2002) muses, 'If we could freeze our perceptions *at the time of our action*, we might be able to identify and understand better the underlying problems and contributing factors that are ordinarily only vaguely "felt"' (p. 23). My hope was that the reflective journals would provide access to this critical moment in time.

The use of journals in research does present some challenges however. They require a high level of commitment from participants and the process can be compromised by fatigue, which can lead to cursory entries or dropping out of the process. This risk is magnified when participants are busy secondary teachers. There is little the researcher can do to guarantee that this does not happen. However, there are measures that can be taken to create conditions that will provide the best opportunity for successful outcomes. These were undertaken in this study and included careful briefing of participants as to expectations of their participation and providing flexibility and choice for participants in respect of the preferred method for keeping the journals.

In terms of frequency of entries, from my viewpoint, the ideal would have been for participants to make an entry after each lesson they taught in the unit. Aware that the demands of time for teachers may mean that this would be viewed as a significant burden, I made it clear that dot point notes, partial sentences etc., would

be quite acceptable. Ideally participants would take some time at the conclusion of each week to write further reflections reviewing their week's experience. This process could also be supportive in preparing the following week's materials. Knowing also that it is sometimes difficult to know how to start or what to write, I provided participants with a range of sentence starters, by way of suggestion rather than prescription. These were: 'When I planned this class...My idea was that...I think ethical understanding is seen...I was interested in...The students' response was...What surprised me was...I found it odd that...It was disappointing that...The aspect of the class that was most successful was... The aspect I struggled with was...The work produced was...'.

My preference was for the teachers to use digital technology for the journal keeping aspect of the study. This preference arose from very positive experiences with a free, education-based, closed wiki space that possesses high level data security and functionality. None of the participants wanted to use this mechanism and so the affordances of this software were not available. Three of the eleven participants chose to use the hard copy journal offered, whilst the others preferred to keep a digital journal. Fortunately, no journals were 'lost', however what was submitted varied greatly from participant to participant.

Only one participant failed to submit a journal. This was the same participant referred to above at School B, whose involvement in the study appeared to be less than voluntary. Another participant, one of the Mathematics teachers, provided a table summary of his lessons with very brief dot points that simply described the content of each. Most participants' journals were more extensive than this, however all were largely descriptive accounts of lesson content. Reflective and self-reflexive comments were present, but to a lesser extent than expected. I had hoped the reflective journals would provide more candid comments and penetrating insights from participants. As such, the journals represent a set of data that provides more detail than the second interview about what was taught by teachers in their classrooms and insights into student responses, but some unevenness regarding insights into the actual lesson by lesson reflexive experience of participants. There are however, some penetrating, revealing and surprising comments which are discussed in the chapters that follow. As one reads the

descriptions of classroom tasks across the period of time, the narrative of experience that lies beneath the detail unfolds. Through this material a picture of the teachers' thinking, struggles and dispositions became evident. Receiving what was presented and working with that, rather than fretting over what was seemingly absent, was part of the challenge of working within the chosen methodology and methods that had been selected.

### **Additional data sources**

Participants were asked to complete a basic information form, comprising their name, contact details, year levels and subjects taught, years and places of teaching experience.

They were also invited to share lesson plans, handout sheets, other resources they created or drew upon, and student work samples along with any commentary they wished to provide. Whilst there was not a large volume of this sort of material shared with me, it has been referenced where relevant to the discussion in Chapters Five through Seven.

### **Ethical considerations**

To conduct this field work, Ethics approval was sought and given from the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne, the Victorian Department of Education and the Principals of the two independent schools. Informed consent was sought and given by all participants. The data gathered was held securely and remained anonymous to all but the researcher throughout the whole process. Ethical issues of a wider philosophical and methodological nature were of course present. I was mindful in all interactions with participants of my background in Values Education and ensured as best I could that this was not present as a burden of expectation for them. Ethical issues were minimal largely because our relationships were essentially those of professional peers. The sort of power imbalance that can become a significant factor in research relationships such as where credentialing or reporting to authorities is involved, was happily absent in this study.

## Approach to Analysis

In line with phenomenological approaches, the initial purpose of the analysis of data was to detail an account of the lived experiences and situations of the participants in the study. The first step in achieving this was for all interviews to be listened to and journals read through, without any note-taking, marking up etc. occurring. The purpose of this practice was to allow me as the researcher to be immersed in the experiences of the participants. This was also a timely moment to remember the importance of stepping into what Moustakas (1994) calls, after Husserl, the *epoche* process, 'This way of perceiving life calls for looking, noticing, becoming aware, without imposing our prejudgment on what we see, think, imagine, or feel. It...precedes reflectiveness...We suspend everything that interferes with fresh vision' (p. 86). A disposition of openness and an attempt to bracket my own lifeworld, (which has substantial resonance with the work of participants as it involved extensive writing of curriculum for Values Education projects), was essential to hearing participants' voices rather than my own.

A second listening and reading occurred and during this phase verbatim comments were transcribed according to themes or domains I created from the research questions. The first domain drew material from the first interview and concerned participants' views on the meaning of, or what constituted, ethics and ethical understanding. The second domain was based on the second interview and journals, and again focused on participants' views about ethics and ethical understanding but this time in the light of their experience of having taught a unit of work in which these understandings were made explicit or frontloaded. The third domain drew on both interviews and journals, and was the location for participants' responses about the place of ethics and ethical understanding in their specialist subject areas. The fourth domain emerged not from the research questions but the experiences and reflections of participants. It sits best under the umbrella term of pedagogy. Within this domain participants' comments about the impact of incorporating ethical understanding and ethics upon their own teaching and professional identity are to be found. Comments about what they discovered

about ethical understanding and ethics and the connection to student engagement are also located here.

A third listening and reading took place to capture what had, for whatever reason, not been heard or read before. In this way substantive transcriptions, though not complete word for word versions, were compiled which then became the documents consulted as analysis was further developed.

Bazeley (2009) warns of a particular pitfall for qualitative researchers. She refers to the 'garden path' approach to thematic analysis which, 'can take the reader along a pleasant pathway that leads nowhere: "Here are the roses, there are the jonquils, and aren't the daffodils lovely today"' (p. 9). Acknowledging her caution that, 'participants' words must lie at the basis of the conclusions you reach, but rarely will a participant make the argument for you in a few words' (p. 18), I sought to employ an approach that would honour the individual voices of participants and yet at the same time allow the larger story to emerge.

The analysis of the transcribed materials was thus informed by the method of IPA (*Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*). IPA emerged as a distinctive method in the 1990s in the fields of psychology and the health sciences. Its roots lie in the work of Husserl and Heidegger referenced above, but it has spread beyond its initial fields of application to many areas, including Education. The popularity of this research method is explained by Eatough and Smith (2017) who argue that, 'what appeals to researchers in these diverse fields is IPA's explicit commitment to understanding phenomena of interest from a first-person perspective and its belief in the value of subjective knowledge for psychological understanding' (p. 193). This valuing of the lived experience of participants is heightened in the IPA approach. Alase (2017) describes the way IPA 'amplifies the "lived experience" stories of research participants; however, for those stories to make-sense interpretively...it is important for the researcher to put themselves in the shoes of the participants (p. 12). My own background as a classroom teacher and curriculum writing in this field positioned me well to interact in this way with the lived experience of participants in the study.

The IPA approach gives full attention to the complex dynamic between the role and position of the researcher in relation to study participants and the research process. The inherent tensions of the position are made explicit. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) thus speak of the researcher occupying a dual role in the interpretative process – of *being like* and *being unlike*. The researcher is ‘like’ the participant in that they both share the resources afforded them of being human and are both seeking to create meaning in their world/s. The researcher however has not lived the same experiences as the participant and only has access to these at a remove (i.e. only through for example, what the participant says about these experiences), and indeed they are mediated through their own experiential lens. This underscores the affordances of this methodology which was part of my experience in the study. The aspects I shared with participants, when acknowledged and bracketed as far as humanly possible, created a disposition of understanding and receptivity in me. The distance between us, in the fact that I hadn’t experienced their experience as they had, provided me with the analytic benefits of perspective.

## **Limitations of study approach and design**

Qualitative research has long been a target of criticism. Patton (2002) recounts some of the charges levelled against it, specifically, ‘[the approach] is too subjective, in large part because the researcher is the instrument of both data collection and data interpretation and because a qualitative strategy includes having personal contact with and getting close to the people and situation under study’ (p. 50). Any research (including surveys and experiments) relating to human meaning-making cannot be ‘objective’ in the sense of being untouched by human purposes and tools. The potential for the personal bias of the researcher to be at play in this study, from the formation of the research questions right through to its concluding remarks, has been acknowledged and discussed above. All research is subject to the foibles of its human agents. However, a deliberate awareness that this is an inescapable part of the process, is an important element in building analysis.



Limitations relating to site and participant selection have been noted in an earlier section of this chapter. The limitation that the small-scale nature of the study impacts upon claims to generalizability has also been considered. Whilst the small scale of the study could be viewed as a limitation, this is not in and of itself the case. The small scale allowed for an intensive, close up examination of change in action which would not have been possible with larger numbers of participants. This allowed for the benefits of phenomenological methodology to be amplified. The particular design and size were also well suited to a lone researcher. Whilst participant numbers in this study are small scale, other aspects embrace a wider arc. The study, with the initial briefing marking its beginning and the second interview its conclusion, occurred over four months in each school - a substantial period of time in the cycle of a school year. Despite such concerns raised above, the chosen methods and design of this study are appropriate for and speak to the core research questions.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have positioned this study within the broad field of qualitative research and provided a rationale for my choice of a hermeneutic phenomenological methodological approach. I have delineated my understanding of the ways in which this study can be described as a case study. The sites for research and relevant details of participants are presented. The tools for data gathering have been critically examined and some of the limitations and affordances of the approaches employed have been explored.

In Chapter Four I turn to the description and analysis of the data gathered in response to the first research question, focusing initially in Part One on philosophical frames for conceptualising ethics. In Part Two I then explore participants' reported views of ethics and ethical understanding, showing the diversity of their thinking and perspectives. A brief explanatory note concerning the structure of Chapters Four and Five follows, and precedes Chapter Four.

## Explanatory note: Framing Chapters Four and Five

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Chapter Four takes up material from the first of a pair of interviews that explore teachers' reflections on ethical understanding and their experience of teaching towards this capability in their own curriculum area. Chapter Five examines their views after teaching a unit designed to address ethical understanding, while Chapter Four examines their views and understandings of ethics and what an ethical capability might involve, prior to teaching their unit of work. In this respect, the structure of these chapters, reflecting the design of the study, serves as a before and after narrative. Chapter Four is itself divided into two major parts. The first part considers philosophical debates about ethics and education and represents scholarly perspectives. The second part considers teachers' views on ethics, as recounted in interviews at the start of the project, and represents practitioners' perspectives. The reason for this structure is explained below.

A key dilemma in the framing of this thesis and these two chapters in particular, was how to situate teachers' understandings of ethics in relation to more formal philosophical debates about ethics, its distinctions, nuances and disciplinary lineage. On the one hand, I did not want to simplistically compare teachers' lay or practitioner understanding of ethics with those debated in the formal discipline of Ethics. This was in large part because I did not want to identify problems or deficiencies in teachers' understanding which might arise if philosophical Ethics is held up as the benchmark against which teachers' understandings might be measured and potentially found wanting. On the other hand, discipline-based understandings of ethics are not irrelevant to how ethics and education is itself debated and enters into policy and in this case, curriculum guidelines. It was important, then, to distinguish among the understandings of ethics underpinning the *Australian Curriculum*, the debates about ethics and education in scholarly and applied contexts, and practitioner views.

I thus begin this pair of chapters with a discussion of these matters, insofar as they have bearing on the ethical capability in the *Australian Curriculum* and teachers' working understandings and knowledge of ethics. This is an important context for situating the analysis I develop in which I seek to draw out the contours and

subtleties of teachers' views, not in some checklist of good or poor against philosophical benchmarks and disciplinary norms; but rather by offering insight into the reflective formation and evolving nature of practitioner working knowledge, and how this in turn informed their curriculum making and pedagogical practice.

In drawing upon theoretical resources in my analysis of teachers' reflections and classroom encounters, as well as the aspirations of the *Australian Curriculum*, I notably engaged with select concepts from the work of Emmanuel Levinas. A signature concept associated with Levinas is the focus on *self/other* and relationality. The educational philosopher Sharon Todd is a leading scholar in engaging with Levinas in the field of education, and I have been guided by her arguments as well. This body of work is relevant to my analysis because questions of relationality, of teacher to student, of self to other, surfaced as key themes and dilemmas for teachers in deliberating on the meaning of ethics in the classroom and in reflecting on their teaching of ethics in their curriculum area. In the following chapter, I introduce how I engage with this work, in reference to analysis of teachers' initial thinking about what ethics means in general, and what it means in their classroom and curriculum. In Chapter Five the focus turns to how these understandings were actually put to work in the teachers' classrooms and how this experience shaped those understandings. In doing this, the scholarly perspectives canvassed in Chapter Four become touchstones in the analysis to further illuminate the understandings developed by practitioners.

## Chapter Four: Teachers and *Ethical understanding* (1)

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### Introduction

This chapter comprises two distinct but inextricably related parts. In Part One, I consider the contemporary terrain of philosophical Ethics and how this has been taken up in philosophy of education discourse. This provides a broad frame for understanding and discussing teachers' view of ethics and the capability of *Ethical understanding*. I consider normative approaches to ethics; the development and growing acceptance of the paradigm of the ethics of care; the contribution of Emmanuel Levinas' conceptualisation of ethics as first philosophy, and finally the work of educational philosophers who have followed Levinas' thought. This frame is used in the analysis of material obtained from teachers in the two sets of interviews and their reflective journals. The material from the first set of interviews is examined in the second part of this chapter. Chapter Five focuses on material from the second set of interviews and reflective journals after units of work had been taught.

A key focus in this study is the General Capability of *Ethical understanding* in the *Australian Curriculum*. This capability draws on the knowledge field of Philosophy and a strand within that called Ethics. It is important to understand the ways in which this capability, which is a curriculum expression of a wider policy vision, connects with the philosophical delineations of the concept of ethics. This will assist in situating the analysis of how participants in the study conceptualised and spoke about ethics. Further, this will enable the recognition of diverse uses of the term ethics which, as is elaborated in this and following chapters, range across policy, philosophical and more 'common-sense' 'everyday' contexts. In the *Australian Curriculum*, the General Capabilities:

...encompass knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions that, together with curriculum content in each learning area and the cross-curriculum priorities, assist students to live and work successfully in the twenty-first century. They play a significant role in realising the goals set out in the

Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA) 2008 that all young people in Australia should be supported to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens. (ACARA, n.d., a)

If *Ethical understanding* is to make its contribution to the formation of students ‘to live and work successfully in the twenty-first century’, it is vital that its content and processes scaffold them towards such outcomes. Paying attention to recent turns in the formal disciplinary field of philosophical Ethics and the research that has followed will provide an important and valuable perspective for considering *Ethical understanding* as it is presented in the *Australian Curriculum* documentation. This review of the field, as explained above, will also provide a frame for examining participants’ understandings of ethics expressed both before and after their classroom experiences teaching their units of work.

## **Part One: Approaches to Ethics**

### **How should I live?**

We use the word ethics in diverse ways in the multiple discourse contexts of our lives. In everyday conversations we might speak of the ethical in reference to what we may perceive to be a *common sense* choice in responding to a social need. We may speak of *ethical behaviour* as particular standards being met, or not, in personal or workplace interactions. Ethics may be represented as a branch of the academic discipline of Philosophy. In each of these contexts and more, whilst we may individually ‘take for granted’ what is meant by ethics, it is the case that complex understandings and contested definitions abound.

The Australian-based, The Ethics Centre (a not-for-profit independent organisation and the provider of ethics lessons to children in New South Wales Primary Schools: see [www.ethics.org.au](http://www.ethics.org.au)), suggests a broader, simpler way of thinking about the word, ‘Ethics aims to answer one big question. *How should I live?*’ (Ethics Centre, 2018). This question traces its pedigree to back to ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle. In framing the essence of ethics around this question the whole spectrum of lived human experience, from the narrowest and most intimate

of personal concerns to the broadest social concerns of our species, is addressed. Should I raise something with a friend that I know will be painful for them? Should I buy fair trade goods, even though they are more expensive than other options and my budget is limited? Should I stay in a luxury resort in a country where most of the population lives in impoverished conditions? Should I support legislation to allow the practice of euthanasia under certain conditions? In order to answer any of these and similar questions, we all draw on a web of beliefs, values and dispositions that reside both within and beyond our selves. The Ethics Centre suggests ethics assists us in determining *right* action, but that it goes further than this, 'Yes, we want to know how to act *right now*, but we also want to know how to structure our lives as a whole...Ethics helps us to do the right thing, but it also helps us to live a life worth living' (Ethics Centre, 2018).

## **Normative ethics**

Philosophers generally delineate three areas in the field of Ethics: meta-ethics, normative ethics and applied ethics (Gensler, 2013, p.3). Meta-ethics is theoretical in nature and, 'investigates where our ethical principles come from, and what they mean' (Fieser, 2018). Normative ethics seeks to define and evaluate the frameworks and criteria we use to determine 'right' action. Applied ethics explores how these criteria play out in specific situations and contexts. The delineation between these three areas is not as clear and discrete in philosophical thinking and practice as suggested above. Kagan (1997) contends, 'the distinction between normative ethics and applied ethics does not rest upon any kind of sharp line. Really what we have is something like a continuum' (p. 3). She goes on to note that the distinction (which some philosophers do not even invoke) rests upon the degree of generalizability involved. However, the categorisation is helpful in understanding the conceptual underpinning of *Ethical understanding* as it is presented in the *Australian Curriculum*.

*Ethical understanding* comprises three elements: 'Understanding ethical concepts and issues', 'Reasoning in decision making and actions' and 'Exploring values, rights and responsibilities'. It could be argued that the first element, 'Understanding ethical concepts and issues', has resonance with the concerns of

meta-ethics, whereas the second and third elements, 'Reasoning in decision making and actions' and 'Exploring values, rights and responsibilities', belong in the categories of normative and applied ethics. If this broad (and admittedly somewhat simplified) characterisation is accepted, it is interesting to note that across the six levels of the curriculum which cover eleven years of schooling from Foundation to Year Ten, there are thirty-six descriptors associated with normative and applied ethics and only twelve touching on meta-ethics. Whilst normative and applied or situated ethics appear to form the dominant underpinnings upon which *Ethical understanding* rests, there is another level of difference to consider within normative approaches.

Normative ethical theories are concerned with human action in complex moral situations and the general 'standards' that are desirable and worthy to be drawn upon when making a decision to act in a specific situation. There is not universal agreement amongst philosophers as to how to cut this particular part of the philosophical cake. Philip Cam (2012) follows the traditional line in suggesting three groupings: teleological theories, deontological theories and virtue ethics. Others choose to locate theories in two broad camps: consequentialist and non-consequentialist. For example, Traer (2013), providing an introduction to the field in order to frame a specific focus on Environmental Ethics, uses these two categories. Still others, for example Kagan (1992), offer a critique of the underlying structure of the above commonly accepted representations of normative ethics, calling for a new way of thinking of such perspectives, not in terms of their exclusivity but rather their compatibility.

The subtle nuances of this debate are not a central concern of this study. What is helpful to note is that a broad sweep of the literature confirms the dominance of the three frameworks used by Cam (2012) that are posited as providing sufficient guidance in the undertaking of determining moral action. The first, the teleological, focuses on the *outcomes* of an action - the extent to which it is positive and beneficial. The second, the deontological, focuses on acting in accordance with *rules or principles* that are viewed as universal. The third, the virtue approach, takes as its focus the agent rather than the action - the *character* of the agent forms the basis for the judging of a right or wrong action.

A survey of the *Ethical understanding* content descriptors for the two elements that I have argued draw upon normative ethical approaches ('Reasoning in decision making and actions' and 'Exploring values, rights and responsibilities'), reveals a strong leaning towards the outcomes/consequentialist and rules/principles aspects of normativity. For example, at Level Four students are asked to, 'evaluate the consequences of actions in familiar and hypothetical scenarios' and 'monitor consistency between rights and responsibilities when interacting face-to-face or through social media'. At Level Five they are asked to, 'investigate scenarios that highlight ways that personal dispositions and actions can affect consequences' and 'analyse rights and responsibilities in relation to the duties of a responsible citizen'. At Level Six they are asked to, 'analyse the objectivity or subjectivity behind decision making where there are many possible consequences' and 'evaluate the merits of conflicting rights and responsibilities in global contexts' (ACARA, n.d., e).

Many other descriptors point to the cognitive, critical thinking perspective that is also a feature of the *Australian Curriculum's* framing of *Ethical understanding*, for example, 'articulate a range of ethical responses to situations in various social contexts' and 'use reasoning skills to prioritise the relative merits of points of view about complex ethical dilemmas' (ACARA, n.d., e). Critical thinking could be regarded as a key tool in the first and second types of normative ethics described above. The third type of normative ethics described above - that which focuses on the character of the agent who acts, known in the literature as 'virtue' ethics - is notably absent in the *Australian Curriculum's* conceptualisation of *Ethical understanding*. It is also worth noting that another ethics curriculum that has been introduced into schools in Australia, particularly in New South Wales, has a similar focus to that evidenced in the *Australian Curriculum's Ethical understanding*. It is a program of 'secular' ethics developed as an alternative for students who choose not to participate in 'special religious education' classes. At the core of this curriculum is rational and critical thinking (see <https://primaryethics.com.au>).

Significantly then, the Australian landscape as represented in the *Australian Curriculum* and the *Primary Ethics* program cited immediately above, is not reflective of *turns* in either the subject of Ethics in the field of Philosophy or ethics



as it appears to be evolving in moral education programs in schools in countries similar to Australia, for example the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Whilst acknowledging the likelihood of a multiplicity of factors at play in this situation in Australia, McLeod (2015) suggests, 'Increasing concerns with testing and measurement of effective schools and quality teaching are part of the context in which consideration of care and relational ethics appear to have dropped off the educational agenda' (p. 48). Haydon (2007), reflecting on his involvement across many years in moral education predominantly in the United Kingdom, presents a trajectory across time quite different from the Australian context. He notes, 'Moral philosophy was also then dominated by an analytic approach, focusing on the question 'How can reason show us what we should do?' The answers divided largely into Utilitarian or Kantian strands, seen as the major competing theories' (p. 8). Haydon notes that the inadequacies of these approaches ushered in a new focus – or perhaps the revival of an ancient paradigm - in the turn toward virtues and the place of feeling and motivation, 'While an analytic ethics might incorporate a principle of *beneficence* - doing good to others, whatever your feelings - the virtue of *benevolence* involved much more. The benevolent person is distinguished by certain underlying capacities and dispositions' (p. 8). Justin Oakley (1996) framed the central claim of virtue ethics to be, 'An action is right if and only if it is what an agent with a virtuous character would do in the circumstances' (p. 129).

This turn to virtue ethics may have been quickened by the impact of rapid change in so many areas of life that has been characteristic of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, in addition to the unique combination of social, political and economic factors shaping experience in the United Kingdom. Kotva (1997) suggests the following reasons for this turn, '(1) the widespread perception that our society is in moral crisis, (2) the rise of historical consciousness, and (3) the failure of modern ethical theories to provide a complete picture of human moral experience' (p. 6). In referring to the rise of historical consciousness he locates the difficulties of consequentialist or rule-based ethical approaches in their essentially static nature:

We are historical creatures, situated in specific historical and cultural contexts with particular beliefs, practices, and commitments. All knowledge, including moral knowledge, is historically grounded...The growing realisation of history's relevance is altering ethical theory in at least two general ways: (1) limiting the role and status of rules, and (2) increasing the attention given to one's context. (p. 8)

Virtue ethics has the capacity to be responsive to contextual diversity. The development of the *Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues* based at the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom is a concrete example of this turn toward virtues. It describes itself as, 'a pioneering interdisciplinary research centre focussing on character, virtues and values in the interest of human flourishing. The Centre promotes a moral concept of character in order to explore the importance of virtue for public and professional life' (Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues n.d., a). The field of school education is one of a number of 'sites' of the centre's activity. The centre's website details the extraordinary reach and productivity of its staff and their endeavours in a short five years: for example, over 230 academic publications, articles and books and over 120,000 participants involved in the centre's research (Jubilee Centre, n.d., b).

The discussion above has suggested that the turn to virtue ethics is not reflected in the *Australian Curriculum's Ethical understanding* capability. However, the rationale for this turn and the way it has been taken up in one program in the United Kingdom has been considered in the two preceding paragraphs in order to provide a wider context for examining the views and experiences of participants in this study. The distinctive pathways that have emerged in these two examples, point to the complexity and variation to be found within the field of ethics and education and the shaping impact of contextual factors.

## **The ethics of care**

In recent decades, another *turn* in the ethical landscape has taken place with growing interest in what is known as the *ethics of care* to take its place as one type of normative ethics. It has been most commonly categorised as sitting within the

area of, and as a form of, virtue ethics. However, Nel Noddings (2002), whose body of work has focused significantly on the ethics of care in the field of education and health care, argues against the ethics of care being classified as a form of virtue ethics, 'It is relation-centered rather than agent-centered, and it is more concerned with the caring relation than with caring as a virtue' (p. 2). This representation indeed captures a core difference between the ethics of care and what have been recognised as 'traditional' normative ethical theories. Virginia Held (2006) whilst acknowledging the similarities between them reiterates Noddings' distinction, 'Virtue ethics focuses especially on the states of character of individuals, whereas the ethics of care concerns itself especially with caring relations. Caring relations have primary value' (p. 19).

More broadly, Held (2006) draws the lines of contrast further with other normative ethical theories, noting first that, 'It is characteristic of the ethics of care to view persons as relational and as interdependent' (p. 46). Turning to deontological and consequentialist moral theories and highlighting Kant's thinking and utilitarianism, she suggests such approaches, 'concentrate their attention on the rational decisions of agents assumed to be independent, autonomous individuals' (p. 46). Virtue theory is similarly individually focused, but, Held argues, the quintessential difference with the ethics of care is that it, 'conceptualises persons as deeply affected by, and involved in, relations with others' (p. 46).

Emerging in the late 1970s and early 1980s from the research of Carol Gilligan, who found Kohlberg's theory of moral development to be limited in interpreting the experience of her research subjects, care ethics places relationality at the centre of the moral landscape. Reviewing the history of feminist ethics, Marilyn Friedman marks the early 1980s as a turning point when feminist philosophers shifted their attention from issues pertinent to women that had hitherto been marginalised or ignored, to a critical examination of the traditional tools of ethics they had been utilising in this practice. She suggests that what they uncovered appeared to be:

...male biases in the very concepts and methods of traditional philosophical ethics. Not only had male philosophers neglected women-centred issues;

they had also developed tools...that appeared to reflect their male standpoints, despite a presumption of abstract universality. (p. 206)

Focusing on the developmental directions of the ethics of care, Pettersen (2011) observes that just over two decades ago care reasoning was seen to be limited to the private and personal domains of women. In contrast in the last two decades, 'proponents have demonstrated the ideal of care to be capable of guiding not only private conduct, but human interaction in general' (p. 51). Certainly, early feminists in this field such as Gilligan framed emerging notions of care ethics in gender terms as they believed this was demanded by context, and early theorising did emerge from the realm of what was then deemed to be 'private' experience. However, Gilligan, in 1995 wrote, 'Listening to women's voices clarified the ethic of care, not because care is essentially associated with women or part of women's nature, but because women...voiced relational realities that were otherwise unspoken or dismissed as inconsequential' (p. 123). Here, we witness in Gilligan's own words, a significant broadening of the scope of the ethics of care beyond gender and the confines of private lives. Before this broadening advanced by Gilligan herself, others like Joan Tronto (1987) had been exploring the powerful insights afforded by the ethics of care beyond the initial context from which it had emerged, 'If the ethic of care is separated from a concern with gender, a much broader range of options emerges...that question the place of caring in society and moral life, as well as questioning the adequacy of Kohlberg's cognitive-developmental model' (p. 647). Warin and Gannerud (2014), drawing upon Tong's (2009) analysis of 'care-focused feminism', argue that current feminists in advocating an ethics of care seek, 'to reverse this equation by arguing that 'care is a form of human strength' that we should expect to see performed by men and women alike' (p. 195).

The relatively swift rise in positive regard for the ethics of care is quite remarkable in the history of philosophical theories. Pettersen's (2011) comment noted above about care reasoning distils its development and expansion. She attributes this in part to the wide applicability of its relational ontology. Rather than representing the moral agent in terms of independence and freedom, she argues that the ethics of care conceives of the agent 'as mutually interconnected, vulnerable and

dependent, often in asymmetric ways' (p. 52). She continues, commenting that this model is useful, 'as a wider behavioural metaphor for ethicists [in] its capacity to capture significant features of man's interaction in general, such as reciprocity, dependency, connectedness and asymmetry' (p. 52). Such qualities are present to fluctuating extents in the range of human relationships and interactions not only the personal and private spheres. Pettersen's conclusion then is that, 'The relational model allows also for a wider understanding of who the moral agents are: they are not only individuals but also groups, institutions and nations' (p. 53). This enlarged vision of the ethics of care is strongly supportive of one of the stated aims of the capability of *Ethical understanding*, 'building a strong personal and socially oriented ethical outlook,' (ACARA, n.d., e). Yet, as will be discussed below, the perspectives of care ethics are largely absent in the detailed scope and sequence documentation of *Ethical understanding*, despite the resonance noted here in its broad aims.

Hankivsky (2014), referencing Sevenhuijsen (2003) is of a similar mind in this regard, explaining that what makes care ethics so compelling is its view that, 'all people are vulnerable, dependent and finite...we all have to find ways of dealing with this in our daily existence and in the values which guide our individual and collective behaviour' (p. 253). This universality of 'being', the universality of the human need for care, as opposed to a universality of principles that sits at the core of traditional normative ethical theories, enables the ethics of care to be applied across cultural, political, social and economic boundaries. Hankivsky (2014) makes a note of the following fields where care ethics has been helpfully applied: schooling and education, nursing and other health-related disciplines, politics in domestic and global spheres, social policy, peacekeeping and public administration. Koggel and Orme (2010) also comment on this enlarging of the scope of the ethics of care, and that it now extends from, 'the moral to the political realm, from personal to public relationships, from the local to the global, from feminine to feminist virtues and values, and from issues of gender to issues of power and oppression more generally' (pp. 109-110). Hankivsky (2014) concludes that, 'The impetus for the work is to demonstrate that care is fundamental to the human condition' (pp. 253-254).

In speaking of Joan Tronto's work in the field of care ethics, Zembylas, Bozalek and Shefer (2014) draw attention to Tronto's particular contribution as envisioning the ethics of care as a political framework, and in her later work more particularly a framework for democratic care, 'She sees care as both practice and a disposition – as an activity through which we maintain and repair our world so that we can flourish' (p. 200). This conception has particularly rich implications for how the work of teachers is understood, which I elaborate below. Taking Tronto's political ethics of care in further, Elisabeth Porter (2006) has developed the notion of a *politics of compassion* in seeking to address the unique conditions of global existence in the early twenty-first century. She argues that the 'politics of compassion' extends the political ethics of care to include people we do not personally know in need of care, 'refugees, women raped in war, or civilians killed by the "smart bombs" of the "war on terrorism"' (p. 99). Porter's new conceptualisation connects care ethics to 'situations where there is a lack of previous history and everyday relationship between the parties involved...compassion enlarges and adopts an important feature in the relationship' (p. 99). Importantly, a politics of compassion connects the universal and the particular through the underpinning presupposition of 'a shared humanity of interconnected, vulnerable people [who] require[s] emotions and practical, particular responses to different expressions of vulnerability' (p. 99). Such debates are highly relevant to curriculum development and the work of educators, where questions of practice and relationality surface every day in significant ways.

## **Ethics and the *Australian Curriculum***

The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (2008), the guiding policy framework for the compulsory years of schooling in Australia and the *Australian Curriculum*, comprises two goals. The second of these is that, 'All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens' (p. 8). This is explicated in a series of statements which embrace both cognitive and affective capacities and attributes:

Successful learners... are able to make sense of their world and think about how things have become the way they are; Confident and creative individuals... have a sense of optimism about their lives and the

future...develop personal values and attributes such as honesty, resilience, empathy and respect for others; Active and informed citizens... act with moral and ethical integrity, work for the common good, in particular sustaining and improving natural and social environments, are responsible global and local citizens. (pp. 8-9)

The approaches to the ethics of care surveyed above, appear aligned with the cultivation of many of these aspects of the *Melbourne Declaration's* second goal. In broad terms, there is significant resonance between the relational ontology of care ethics and the realisation of these educational aspirations.

The capacity of care ethics to traverse the breadth of human experience from the intimately personal to the politically global, supports the dynamic evidenced in the second goal that moves outward from the individual to ever widening communities. Held (2006) also notes that the ethics of care, in contrast to the rationalism of traditional normative ethical theories, place a significant value on emotion, 'sympathy, empathy, sensitivity, and responsiveness are seen as the kind of moral emotions that need to be cultivated not only to help in the implementation of the dictates of reason but to better ascertain what morality recommends' (p. 10). Immordino-Yang and Damasio's (2007) work in neuroscience and cognition suggests the long-standing binary of cognition and affect can be shown to be physiologically false, thus providing support for Held's claim that emotion must be given its proper place at the table of normative ethics. They suggest that rationality and logic, 'cannot be recruited appropriately and usefully in the real world without emotion. Emotions help to direct our reasoning into the sector of knowledge that is relevant to the current situation or problem' (pp. 7-8).

Kretz (2014), citing Haidt (2001) in arguing for 'effective' ethical education also notes the role of emotion in this sphere, 'Studies show moral action co-varies with moral emotions more than it does with moral reasoning, thereby providing a challenge to a solely or primarily rationalist approach to morality' (p. 346). The language of emotion, and the complex dynamic that exists between emotion, thought and action noted above by various researchers is clearly present in the *Melbourne Declaration's* second goal. Again, this appears to indicate that progress

towards realising this goal in the lives of students may be enhanced by employing an ethics of care lens when engaging with curriculum content.

I observed above that whilst Virtue ethics is growing in regard as a strand of normative ethics relevant to the field of Education in the broadest sense, there is little evidence to date of Virtue ethics exerting a significant impact upon the *Australian Curriculum's Ethical understanding* continuum. There is certainly a valuing of, and regard for, the formation of the virtuous person in the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (2008). The gap that appears between these documents (i.e. the *Australian Curriculum* and the *Melbourne Declaration*) in this matter of the ethical in students' lives and experiences is both striking and puzzling because the latter represents the core principles upon which the former was developed. Similarly, the language of the ethics of care is absent in the curriculum documentation but potentially present in the broad aspirational policy statement. A text published by the Australian Council for Educational Research to support teachers in teaching ethics, Philip Cam's *Teaching Ethics in Schools: A new approach to moral education* (2012), contains no reference to the ethics of care as a normative ethical theory or otherwise in scoping relevant knowledge for teachers. A possible explanation for this curious situation may reside in the sensitivities of curriculum writers to the prevailing dominance of the politically driven (across the spectrum) demand for measurable outcomes from the economic investment in education. The strong emphasis on rationalism and critical thinking evident in the *Ethical understanding* documentation may also represent a less tangible, but no less potent fear and unease present in the Australian community concerning religious pluralism and the linking of this with recent violent manifestations of religious fundamentalism. Turning to the ethics of care may stir debates regarding the 'others' in our midst, 'others' who are likely to hold some different beliefs about people and the world to the ones 'we' hold. Does living in a pluralistic society then actually mean something more challenging than having an array of cuisines to choose from when we dine out? Xenophobia is a current, I argue, that runs strong just beneath the surface of Australian society and there is a great fear of allowing it to surface and be examined.



The preceding discussion has canvassed emergent emphases in Ethics discourse and posited these as a reference point, along with the Australian social context, as a means of gaining insight into the nature of the capability of *Ethical understanding*. In reflecting on the potency of the fear of the 'other', not only in Australia but presently in many western countries, I was drawn to the philosophical thinking of Emmanuel Levinas. It became apparent to me that his approach and the work of educational philosophers like Sharon Todd, would be helpful and salient in my analysis of teachers' views of ethical understanding. And so, I turn to a consideration of the relevant elements of Levinas' thinking about ethics.

### **Levinas: Ethics as 'First Philosophy' and 'the Other'**

In recent decades in the discipline of Philosophy generally, and the Philosophy of Education specifically, there has been a *turn* to the work of French philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995). Contemporary educational philosophers such as Sharon Todd, Gert Biesta and Carl Säfstrom argue that Levinas' work constitutes a paradigm shift in understanding education and its purposes. Biesta (2003) says, "after" Levinas education can no longer be what it was "before" Levinas' (p.62). Levinas' work is thus considered here as it has profoundly challenged well-established conceptions of the nature of Ethics, and as a consequence the way this sits in the field of education. Bringing the lens of Levinas's ideas, arguments and perceptions into conversation with *Australian Curriculum's* General Capability of *Ethical understanding* provides an opportunity to perhaps see this entity anew and in greater depth. Levinas' work can act as a provocateur, raising hitherto unseen questions, exposing gaps, proffering alternatives and underscoring strengths.

The aspect of Levinas' work that is particularly pertinent to this study has attracted great interest among educators and philosophers because it overturns what has been traditionally accepted as the relationship between ontology and ethics in Philosophy. Something of this inversion was present in the experiences of the teachers in this study as they enacted the ethical capability in their classrooms. Ethics, in philosophical schemas, has conventionally been characterised as secondary, following after ontology; however, Levinas suggests ethics is primary

and precedes ontology. Christie (2005) explains that Levinas, 'challenges the approach which centres ethics on the autonomous sovereign subject who judges what is right and acts accordingly...I cannot know myself and then the other. I am only myself – an "I" – in relation to another, who is not "I"' (p. 40). Taylor (2005) similarly views conventional Ethics as having been shaped by traditional metaphysics with 'inherited notions of the self-assumed...with a subject it presumes to be autonomous and free, independent of others and faced with abstract questions about its own rights, duties, and freedoms' (p. 218). Taylor argues to the contrary that, following Levinas, 'Ethics is the fundamental human experience, and is grounded in relations to other' (p. 218).

According to Levinas, consciousness exists only in the presence of another human being. The primacy of the relational, which Levinas would consider as also being *primordial*, thus locates ethics in the place of *first philosophy*. Goodman and Severson (2016) provide an historical perspective that underscores the momentous nature of the perspective shift initiated by Levinas' thought and what they describe as 'the ethical turn'. They note that across the centuries, 'ethicists have derived the principles of morality from grander principles and universal paradigms. Ethics has been secondary...Propositions, abstractions, conceptualisations, and detached inquiry become foundations for truth and morality...untouched by the ethical imperatives resident in sensate encounter' (p. 2). Chinnery (2003) represents Levinas' work as similarly profound and paradigm-shifting, 'the entire body of Levinas' work can be seen as an attempt to break with Western thought and with the very modes of thinking that have come to characterise ethics as we now know it' (p. 5). Levinas himself, in his seminal work, *Totality and Infinity* (1961), described ethics as the lens through which all else is to be viewed, 'Already *of itself* ethics is an "optics"' (p. 29). Relationality is at the heart of Levinasian ethics, as is the case in the ethics of care discussed above. This focus stands in stark contrast to the representation of the ethical in the *Australian Curriculum's* General Capability of *Ethical understanding* which takes as its starting point the primacy of 'being', of self, and a predominantly rational self at that. One consequence of this is that if this is the only ethical lens we employ, we may see

and act in the world in ways that are limited and distorted thus denying the possibility of a more holistic response.

Standing at the centre of the Levinasian worldview is not the *I* but the *Other*. Zhao (2016) has noted that Levinas' philosophy evolved out of the chaos of World War Two and its aftermath, and the anti-totalitarian thinking which developed amongst continental philosophers, '[They]...all traced the root of totalitarianism to false identity thinking...or in Levinas's words, the logic of the same, that presents a picture of exhaustive identity and presence at the cost of difference and absence' (p. 323). Totalitarianism involves 'reducing the other to the same either by eliminating or by absorbing the other', whereas 'the philosophy of difference attempts to show the very irreducibility of otherness and the very impossibility of total sameness and presence' (p. 323). Levinas' determined assertion of the immeasurable alterity of *other* is thus, as Blades (2006) asserts, a rejection of the western ethical paradigm wherein 'the otherness of the Other...is restricted or lost altogether to the totality of the Same that begins with the ego' (p. 650).

It is perhaps not surprising to witness Levinas' contemporary popularity when reflecting on the experiences that shaped his thought. Levinas' historical context and the experience of human beings in the twenty-first century share significant points of resonance. Late in the second decade of this twenty-first century, human society is fracturing at almost every level - political, social, economic, cultural. This fragility, accompanied by a technological environment that seems to be permanently set to 'fast-forward', certainly opens the possibility of a recurrence of the dominance of totalising forces and their imposition of a stability founded in *sameness*. Levinas' way of seeing provides an alternative response to such uncertainty and is grounded in a disposition of openness as opposed to fear.

Sharon Todd (2001) posits that Levinas' absolute alterity of the Other is what offers human society the possibility of living well together, 'when I think I understand the Other, I am exercising my knowledge over the Other, shrouding the Other in my own totality. The Other becomes an object of my comprehension, my world, my narrative, reducing the Other to me' (p. 73). In contrast, by placing oneself in a position of exposure to the Other, 'I can listen, attend, and be

surprised; the Other can affect me, she “brings me more than I contain.” And insofar as I can be receptive and susceptible I can learn from the Other as one...absolutely different from myself’ (p. 73).

## **Engaging with Levinas in education**

Educational philosophers such as Todd, Biesta and Joldersma ‘think alongside’ Levinas rather than seeking to ‘apply’ his ideas. They do not, for example, offer a course or curriculum package for teachers to use in the classroom. There are no rules or principles to be taught in a Levinasian ethical approach, and this may partially account for the absence of any Levinasian influence in the *Australian Curriculum’s* General Capability of *Ethical understanding*. This is an aspect that Chinnery (2003) remarks upon in seeking to bring Levinas’ thought into dialogue with educators, ‘the discussion inevitably comes round to the question, “So what do we do on Monday morning?” ...one of the biggest stumbling blocks in trying to get to grips with Levinas’ thought is that he offers...no straightforward answers or prescriptions for practice’ (p. 5). Those who advocate for Levinas’ work to be taken up in the field of Education are suggesting that the cultivation of the ethical in persons begins in relationships, not programs. In schools the ethical is embodied first and foremost in the relationship between the teacher and the student, not the content of a component of the curriculum. And although Levinas did not develop a specific philosophy of education or teaching, in *Totality and Infinity* (1961) he does remark, “Teaching is not a species of a genus called domination, a hegemony at work within a totality, but is the presence of infinity breaking the closed circle of totality’ (p. 171). The language used here points to the nature of relationships (e.g. domination) being central to what is the essential characteristic of the dynamic between teacher and student.

It is in teachers taking up a disposition of openness and unknowing of *the-one-who-is-not-I* (as characterised in Todd’s delineation of Levinas’ ‘Other’ above), that students are most likely, according to the Levinasian paradigm, to develop ethical sensibilities through an experience of relationality. Säfstrom (2003) speaks of this positioning as the *I* (the teacher) , acknowledging the value of the *You* (the student). What is key is that, ‘This value [comes]...without any general principle for

determining the meaning of the student. Determining the meaning of the student would slip the teacher out of an ethical relation and into the comfort of having knowledge about the student' (p. 25). Biesta (2008) likewise characterises the position of risky emptiness the teacher must step into in following Levinas, and which runs counter to contemporary emphases on what is central to pedagogy. Valuing the uniqueness of students Biesta suggests, requires teachers to, 'give up, or at least hold back, all the "tricks of the trade," all the wisdom of the world, all national curricula and educational strategies, all recipes for "what works,"' (p. 208). In stepping into this position, casting aside agendas and preconceptions, teachers do two things Biesta argues, 'they allow space to ask students, 'what they are bringing to the world' and they 'take a responsibility for something they cannot know' (p. 208). Biesta calls this 'responsibility without knowledge' and identifies it as that 'which has the potential to bring forth educational relationships' (p. 208, see also Biesta, 2005). Biesta reminds us that pedagogy's essential constituents are people, individuals in relationship, not a collection of strategies in the service of content transmission.

Those with a specific focus on teacher practice seeking to take up Levinas' thought, suggest that the presence of the Levinasian disposition acknowledging the alterity of the 'other' will inevitably reframe the interaction between students and teachers and the curriculum. Blades (2006), writing in response to the STS (Science, Technology and Society) curriculum in Canada, recounts, in horrifying detail, the trauma and scream of one of his students during a frog dissection class as the supposedly neurologically dead frog squirmed its way out of its restraints and dragged itself across the dissection board. Using a Levinasian lens to reflect upon the experience and the implications for his classroom practice, Blades comments:

I entered the community as the author of the lives before me, determined to implement knowledge into the minds of my students. In this possessiveness I prevented any possibility of being receptive to the others that made up the community. Janet's frog ruptured this confidence and woke me from my slumber; her scream was the cry of the Other, forcing me to be receptive and thereby responsible to those present in the community, including the poor frog. (p. 654)

Similarly, Atweh (2007), in discussing the application of Levinas' notion of Ethics as First Philosophy, suggests that Mathematics education needs to be reimagined to support students as 'response-able' members of society. Rather than Mathematics being limited to meeting the needs of the economy, Atweh argues instead for a broader Mathematics that, 'is needed by the majority of students and adults as active citizens of an increasingly mathematised society. School mathematics should support students' response-ability not only to *read* the world but also to *transform* the world' (p. 12). Krall (2014) critiques a current pedagogical trend - the development of empathy in students - from a Levinasian perspective using Todd's (2003) insights. Two examples are cited: one, of students voluntarily refraining from eating food to identify with those in poverty 'third world' countries; the other, interaction with images of holocaust survivors and victims to connect to the latter's emotional struggle.

Krall notes that Todd dubs these examples 'tactics' and comments that in Todd's view, 'tactics cannot elicit a true encounter with the Face. A true encounter with the Face is inter-relational. She writes poignantly, "in short, the demand for empathy belies a larger demand for how we ought to be together"' (p. 7). Several teachers in this thesis' study employed pedagogical strategies that promoted the cultivation of the sort of empathy that is critiqued here (see Chapter Seven). One teacher was able to facilitate an encounter with the 'Face', as advocated by Todd, in inviting a student's grandfather, a holocaust survivor, to visit and speak to the class. In all aspects of life, there is often a gulf between what is desirable and what is possible in a given context. Todd's 'true encounter with the Face' is likely to be circumscribed by the myriad institutional requirements of a school. The steps toward this 'true encounter', (represented in some of the activities undertaken by teachers in this study), might be labelled as 'tactics', yet they can also be seen to be, at least, beginning the journey in the direction of 'true encounter'.

In taking up Levinasian thought, what Biesta and Joldersma call 'education' becomes possible in the context of formal schooling. Both argue that schooling has been so besieged and seduced by the narrative of neoliberalism, that the purpose of education has been reduced to the production of servile cogs in a global economy. Joldersma, (2014), enlisting Biesta's (2010) frame of an age of

measurement notes that schooling experiences difficulty in acknowledging that, 'society is filled with pain, suffering, and woundedness...that the earth currently is precarious in its support of biotic, including human, life...As a uniquely situated social institution, schooling needs to be oriented to the call for justice' (p. 3). Although the *Australian Curriculum's* General Capability of *Ethical understanding* appears to be conceptually 'untouched' by the turn to Levinas in educational philosophy and Ethics, in the study that follows I draw out some of the ways in which participants conceive of and enact *their* ethical understanding in ways that represent greater diversity and fluidity than that captured in the official curriculum documents. Moreover, the concepts and frameworks outlined above, specifically the ethics of care and the philosophical ideas of Levinas offer fruitful ways of seeing and analysing their enactment of the ethical capability.

## **Enacting an education in ethics**

An evaluation of ethics education in Canada's Québec Education Program (QEP), is worth pausing to consider at this point as it provides the case of a school context of enacted ethics education which can be drawn upon as a reference point in the following chapters when considering the experiences of teachers in Australian schools who are at the centre of this study. Although not using Levinas' thought as a frame for review, Bouchard and Morris' (2012) evaluation of ethics education in the Québec Education Program (QEP), strongly emphasises the concept of the 'other'. They turn to Habermas' thought as a frame for evaluating the depth and efficacy of the program. In Chapter Two of this study, Habermas's 'knowledge interests' have been considered as a useful means of thinking about knowledge/s in the school curriculum and how these might enable students to be active, positive participants in globalised societies that offer both great opportunities and great challenges for living peaceful, flourishing lives. Bouchard and Morris draw on Habermas' concept of 'practical reason' noting his distinction between its pragmatic, ethical and moral uses. Aligning these distinctions with Habermas' earlier theory of threefold knowledge interests, they remark, 'An education that examines the question 'What should I do?' from a strictly empirical-technical perspective would seriously limit the education of learners as ethical subjects living in a social world' (p. 172). Here there are clear echoes of the relationality

that is at the heart of a Levinasian way of seeing, though in this case extrapolated from Habermasian theory. Bouchard and Morris go on to argue for the importance of the ethical dimension of practical reason as an essential, though interim, step, 'To achieve self-understanding, one must adopt a critical consciousness of one's own story and the kind of life that that story entails' (p. 172). However, self-understanding in itself is not emancipatory in Habermasian terms, nor in Habermas's discursive ethics is it sufficient. This is where the Levinasian 'Other' provides further leveraging that enables authentic transformation of the individual and society, 'an agent must acquire a moral intelligence that allows for a decentred understanding of his or her own axiological orientation. This is necessary...if one is to take the perspective of all who might possibly be concerned' (pp. 172-173). Ultimately Bouchard and Morris argue for an education in ethics that is delimited from the technical / pragmatic oeuvre and which takes seriously the cultivation of an engagement with ethical-existential questions about the good life *and* at the same time seeks to distance or de-centre one from one's own life-world. They conclude that, 'Engaging learning through this dual process is essential if schooling is to contribute to cultivation of free moral agents and responsible citizens' (p. 184).

Each of the developments discussed above - the renewed focus on virtue ethics, the rise and rise of the ethics of care and the turn to Levinas and his central idea of the alterity of the 'other' - along with the *Australian Curriculum* documentation for *Ethical understanding*, serve as touchstones against which to understand and consider the views participants held and mobilised in the course of the study. In addition to these developments, the examination in Chapter Two of the contemporary landscape of approaches to moral education in schools is pertinent here. That review highlighted the complexity and diversity of the field of moral education and the slippery definitional ground that is one of its consistent characteristics. Elements similar to aspects of the General Capability of *Ethical understanding* in the *Australian Curriculum* can be located in programs and approaches in past curricula in the states and territories of Australia. However, the entity of *Ethical understanding* as a whole, as something applicable across the



breadth of subjects, across the years of compulsory education, as well as its particular designation, *Ethical understanding*, is new.

With these debates as a backdrop, I move in the second part of this chapter to develop a close-up analysis of teachers' initial views of ethics and ethical understanding.

## **Part Two: Teachers' understandings**

In the second part of this chapter, which is framed by the preceding discussion, I turn to an analysis of teachers' views on ethics and ethical understanding prior to their designing and teaching a unit of work in their subject area.

In designing and undertaking this study, I wondered what knowledges and knowledge sources participants would draw upon in approaching and interacting with this new entity of *Ethical understanding*. As a consequence, in my first interview with participants, I asked them to define what they understood the terms ethics and ethical understanding to mean, and if they could identify the sources they were drawing upon in framing this response. My assumption was that these understandings would be foundational to and influential in the ways they approached and developed their work with their classes.

Before the interview, participants were provided with the *Australian Curriculum Ethical understanding* documentation as a shared point of reference. At the time when they were actively involved in this study, a program called *Primary Ethics* developed by The Ethics Centre in Sydney, was receiving consistent media coverage. This program of 'secular' ethics was developed as an alternative to the time set aside for Special Religious Education (SRE) in New South Wales public primary schools. This was a potential influence in the way participants conceived of *Ethical understanding*. Two had been involved in some formal study of Ethics. All participants would have had some level of knowledge of professional ethics related to teaching and this knowledge may well have had a role in shaping their understanding. In the following vignettes I provide an account of each participant's responses, draw out similarities and differences and begin to consider the implications of this for future engagement with this capability. In doing so, I also

return to and engage with the larger themes and philosophical questions raised in Part One of this chapter.

Whilst the vignettes present each individual's experience, they are organised in an order that groups the English, then History, then Mathematics and finally Science teachers. This simply follows an alphabetical ordering of subjects. The teachers' views of ethics and ethical understanding and what has influenced the construction of these, constitute the focus of this section. Elements of their complex biographies and professional identities are considered. The ordering of their perspectives according to subjects however, enables the lens of curriculum, both within and between subjects, to begin to emerge in the thesis. This curriculum perspective is important as it is key to my research questions and pertinent observations are made along the way. A brief commentary about what emerges from the curriculum vantage point in respect of views of ethics and ethical understanding occurs after the vignettes of the English and History teachers. In a later section, after the views of all teachers have been presented, linkages between views of ethics and curriculum areas arise once again in the discussion. This perspective is also an important presence in Chapter Five, however it is substantively foregrounded in Chapter Six.

### **Alice (English)**

Two years prior to this study, Alice had been involved in preparing an 'Ethics Toolkit' for her school (School C) with funding from the *Australian Government Quality Teacher Program*. The toolkit was designed to provide practical help for students to think through dilemmas they encountered in their personal and everyday lives – it was not to be a unit in philosophy. This experience clearly informed her conception of ethics and *Ethical Understanding*:

I was drawing on my understanding of different ethical approaches such as the utilitarian, rights and common good approaches. I had drawn on some research and investigation I did into ethical understandings for a research project a couple of years ago. In particular I found the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics a useful source of information as well as reading I had done,

for example from Hugh Mackay, Ron Ritchhart, Ayers, Gardner. I had also done a course through the Institute for Global Ethics and this was also helpful in providing background to how ethics might be incorporated into the classroom. (Interview, April 4<sup>th</sup>)

Alice was the only participant in the study who had been involved in further education in this field. This enabled her to identify precisely the sources that had informed her stance, which was not always the case for other participants. The Marrkula Center for Applied Ethics ([www.scu.edu/ethics/](http://www.scu.edu/ethics/)) draws on normative ethical approaches (utility, rights, justice, virtue) to develop a process for ethical decision-making. Marrkula has also developed an app to help step users through this process. The Institute for Global Ethics (see [www.globalethics.org](http://www.globalethics.org)) draws on what it identifies as five universally shared human values: compassion, fairness, honesty, respect, and responsibility.

Although possessing an academic understanding of the different philosophical schools of Ethics, Alice did not view her task of bringing ethics into the classroom as primarily one that was *academic* in nature, providing students with knowledge about the field of ethics and considering the decisions of others as interesting but personally removed ‘case studies’. Such an observational perspective appears, however, to be the emphasis of the *Australian Curriculum’s Ethical understanding* capability. Alice, in contrast, as a teacher of secondary school students in the English classroom, saw engagement with ethics and ethical understanding as essentially and necessarily ‘applied’ *and* personal in nature. She considered ethics to be a practical pursuit with relevance and application in our everyday lives and a supportive tool for navigating all the situations we encounter where we are asked to make decisions, ‘for myself I define[d] it as anything where there [isn’t] a clear-cut decision, that...in the end [is] going to have to rely on a person’s values and beliefs, and...either way would potentially be appropriate.’ In Alice’s view, whilst knowledge about different theories of ethics is of value, this knowledge in itself is not the end point of her work with students in this area. The end point for Alice is her students’ capacity to apply such knowledge in the situations of real life we commonly experience, so that our personal wellbeing and the wellbeing of those

around us will be enhanced. It is an experience of interaction between an individual's inner and outer worlds.

Alice's understanding of ethics here is also shaped significantly by her Master of Education in Student Wellbeing which incorporated a specialist focus on values education. The point concerning the wellbeing of those around us is also pertinent as Alice had also established a clear definitional field that located ethics firmly in the interpersonal realm, 'Morals are my personal views, but ethics is beyond my world and my thoughts.' In connecting ethics and the 'other', Alice's thinking resonates with Levinas' perspective outlined earlier in this chapter insofar as it sees *self* and *other* as inextricably and indissolubly linked. Further, Alice's view of ethics goes beyond simple binaries of *right* and *wrong* action. In suggesting decision-making as something complex and involving situations where, 'either way would be potentially appropriate', Alice is speaking of a process that is nuanced, enabling a finely grained type of discernment.

Alice's view of what comprises ethics and ethical understanding is a subtle marriage of different approaches. In referencing her knowledge sources, she places herself in the flow of traditional normative approaches to ethics. However, her strong background and experience in student wellbeing prompts her to remark of the *Australian Curriculum's Ethical understanding* documentation, '[It's] not very useful if it's only an intellectual pursuit.' For Alice, ethics is very clearly something to be put to work in the service of the flourishing of her students' lives and is not to be countenanced without a personal and interpersonal dynamic as its engine room. In turning to consider Peter's views, the contrast is quite marked. His understanding is initially strongly cognitive in approach.

### **Peter (English)**

Peter's main teaching area is Commerce - Economics and Business Management, along with some junior English. The English classes are predominantly what he describes as 'load-fillers' - classes that make up his full teaching load outside his specialist area. He certainly enjoys these groups however he is not an English subject specialist. He has no formal academic background in the field of Ethics,

however he recalled being introduced to situational ethics in Year Twelve, which he found particularly engaging. Peter noted that VCE (Victorian Certificate of Education - the final two years of secondary schooling in Victoria) Business Management has ethical aspects tied in to every part of the course and that this has become much more prominent in the last few years as businesses and corporations have become subject to increased scrutiny.

Peter said he had always immediately thought of ethics in terms of making decisions about the *right* or *wrong* thing to do. In speaking about his deliberate choice to work in government schools situated in 'working class' areas because of his personal commitment to seeking equity, Peter suggested that for him ethical understanding had a strong social justice and activist dimension. In identifying these aspects of his thinking, Peter located his understanding in an ethical space that emphasised the justice and therefore societal aspects of ethics. Ethics and justice have an intimate linkage in the history of western thought, see for example Plato's *The Republic*. Peter is drawing upon this connection in his initial explanation, a connection which falls within the framework of traditional normative ethics.

Yet, as this interview proceeded, Peter began to characterise ethics as something more complex and uncertain. Ethics became something dynamic rather than fixed as Peter's reflection deepened:

The ethical goes *behind* the situations - rather than just saying 'what can be done?', it asks 'why is it like this and should it be like this?' I'm finding myself asking questions about whether right and wrong are absolute or relative. (Interview, July 25<sup>th</sup>)

This comment occurred in the context of Peter's ruminations on a discussion he had experienced a few days earlier with his Year Nine English class, 'What I see as being very wrong, some students don't see as being that bad - e.g. the Arabic boy who thought the Nazi extermination of the Jews was a good thing.' In response, Peter pointed out that this student wouldn't have fared particularly well under that regime given his different ethnicity. Peter was surprised both by the student's view and his own strong response to the student's position.

If Alice's comment regarding morality as pertaining to personal views is invoked, it could be argued that Peter is confusing morality with ethics. However, Alice's distinction is not a universally held position. Indeed, Walker and Lovat (2014) suggest, 'ethics is a more individual assessment of values as relatively good or bad, while morality is a more intersubjective community assessment of what is good, right or just for all' (The Conversation, September 18). This stands in stark opposition to Alice's distinction. This study does not seek to chart the fine variations to be found in defining these concepts, endorsing one or another, but certainly acknowledges the complexity of such a task. What emerges here in Alice's and Peter's comments, is an element relating to questions of teacher professional identity, role and pedagogy that the study has provoked, although this aspect was not an explicit focus of the research questions. This element concerns the positioning of the teacher in relation to their students as they undertake the teaching *Ethical understanding* in their classrooms. Although Peter and Alice both share a belief that relationality is an essential element of the conceptual cluster of ethics, Alice personally seeks to stand at a distance from the ethical positions her students assume. She is concerned more about the process her students travel through in moving towards points of decision and action. Peter however is personally drawn into the views of his students and appears most concerned about the position or end point at which they will arrive. These issues relating to professional identity, role and pedagogy will be explored further in Chapter Seven of the thesis.

## **Nicky (English)**

Nicky is a specialist English teacher with extensive teaching experience, much of it in the United Kingdom. She teaches at the same independent girls' school (School C) as Alice. She has some background in undergraduate philosophy (not Ethics), is well-versed in literary theory and holds a PhD in Literature. Nicky's first comment concerning Ethics was, '[it's] what we engage with every day as English teachers.' This response certainly captures the relative 'comfort' of the English teachers in this study in their undertaking of the requested teaching task. Nicky believes her approach to English teaching, which is centred around using conceptual frames, automatically links to core ideas in ethics and produces ethically-centred

questions. When asked to define ethical understanding she began with, 'helping students to understand what their set of values and attitudes are and how these might be different from others.' In this definition, Nicky is outlining what was identified in Chapter Two as the process of values clarification, which is a means of awareness or consciousness raising. This is not a process that of itself invites personal response and action. Nicky goes on however to explain that this initial process has a personal development/character formation goal, 'and in doing that assist them to develop empathy and understanding for a different set of values and attitudes, as well as perhaps reinforcing their own.'

Ethical understanding in Nicky's developing representation, is both intra-personal and inter-personal, existing at once in a dynamic relationship. In one respect, it is something essentially dispositional in nature, cultivated within and contributing to an individual's self-actualisation. In this way, it draws upon the tradition of Virtue ethics where the development of character has primacy and action is an expression of and 'flowing out' from the character of the person. However, Böckler, Herrmann, Trautwein, Holmes and Singer (2017) in their study of the ability to represent and infer others' mental states suggest, 'the degree of familiarisation with one's own internal dynamics and affective and cognitive patterns is linked to improvements in understanding the mental states of other people' (p. 206). They explain that this linkage between awareness of one's self and one's own perspective and the stepping into the perspectives of others is now demonstrated in the field of contemporary neuropsychology through neuroimaging which displays the activation of different regions of the brain and the neural connections established in these processes. They further suggest that this, 'mimics similar theories in the domain of affective empathic responses...that show a relationship between the degree of understanding ones' own emotions and the degree of empathising with others' affective states' (p. 206). This aligning of physical evidence and theoretical approaches is compelling. Nicky appears to be well aware of this link as her second comment at the end of the paragraph immediately above denotes. The emphasis she places on engagement with ethics and cultivating the emergence of understanding and appreciation of the world of *the other*, also

connects her thinking into Levinas' philosophy of the alterity of the *other* and the relational focus of the ethics of care.

It is interesting to note the distinction between Alice's and Nicky's views of ethics and ethical understanding and Peter's. Peter's approach is strongly cognitive, working from identifiable principles whereas Alice and Nicky see the affective domain as equally significant and therefore speak of a more holistic and encompassing vision for their students' experience in the classroom of engaging with the ethical. Alice and Nicky are specialist English teachers, Peter is a specialist Economics and Commerce teacher. The approach to the study of texts in English classrooms where personal engagement with characters and perspective taking is promoted, is supportive of a much broader and diverse approach to ethics and developing ethical understanding. Although Peter has considerable experience in teaching junior English classes, his main teaching allocation is in senior Economics and Business Studies. The emphasis from this area that is placed upon principles that guide business and corporate ethics and codes of conduct appear to be the paradigm that Peter has initially taken into his English classes and has informed his initial conceptions of ethics in the curriculum.

### **Fran (History)**

Fran is a very experienced teacher who now teaches History exclusively at School C. She explained that although she no longer subscribes to her former religious (Christian) beliefs, her ethical base continues to be informed by the principles and values associated with those beliefs. She understands values and ethics to be at the core of being human, and spoke passionately of paying attention to, and developing this aspect of ourselves, 'To find an ethical framework that helps you negotiate life is one of the most wonderful things anybody can have.'

In defining ethics and ethical understanding Fran spoke of an image she has developed that captures this:

To me I have a picture of it - it's like an internal scaffolding that helps you to maintain your integrity in life...basic beliefs that somehow make up an



internal grid in you and keep you standing as a person of integrity.

(Interview, April 4<sup>th</sup>)

Fran views her work with students in History, and beyond the classroom, as part of the process of their personal moral formation with a particular emphasis on the development of personal integrity. In this respect Fran's representation of ethics locates it as being primarily focused in the intra-personal domain, seeking specifically to cultivate particular virtues within the individual. This understanding exhibits synergies with the expansive approach to character education discussed in Chapter Two, which draws on Aristotelian virtue ethics. This particular approach has been examined in recent research conducted by NatCen Social Research and the National Children's Bureau Research and Policy Team for the Department for Education in the United Kingdom (2017). This comprehensive research, drawing survey material from 880 school sites, found that participants considered one of four key roles for schools in 'character education' was to 'instil pupils with a moral compass' (p. 6), or to use Fran's words an 'internal scaffold'.

Although this aspect is present in the views espoused by English teachers Alice and especially Nicky above, the emphasis in Fran's framing is distinctive. For Fran, the *internal* world of the individual occupies a position of primary importance over and above the demands of the *external* world. In Fran's terms, this appears to be a pre-requisite for students navigating that external world with 'success.' Justin's comments that follow are underpinned by a similar notion of *moral compass*, but the sources that provide the substance for that compass are quite different from what Fran identifies. Nonetheless, the concept of an internal moral compass aligns strongly with the tradition of Virtue ethics, one of the three normative approaches discussed earlier in this chapter.

### **Justin (History)**

In contrast to Fran, Justin is in his first year of teaching and teaches at a co-educational secondary school in the northern suburbs of Melbourne (School A). Teaching is not, however, Justin's first career. Initially, he worked in the corporate world for seven years. He chose to terminate his employment in this sector

because of what he described to be a lack of focus on ethical behaviour. Justin left feeling significant disillusionment. He sought out teaching as a profession wherein he could influence young people as they moved towards being, in his words, the architects of the future. Justin's experience has shaped his view of the nature of ethics - he places a strong emphasis on what he discerns to be 'right' action, 'I think it's about what decisions people make and about making the right decisions, about how we live our lives.'

When asked about how one determines the 'right' decision or action, Justin explained his belief in the overwhelmingly influential power of an individual's familial and social context:

How do you know what's the right thing? That comes back to influences in your life. I'm saying ethics is about environment, what you're exposed to...I feel that ethics generally comes from a strong family base, with important lessons about what is right and wrong being taught and learnt at home.  
(Interview, July 25<sup>th</sup>)

These perspectives lead Justin to a very clear view of the role of the school in developing ethical awareness in its students and to see the presence of ethics in his subject as an opportunity to provide a definite moral compass for students in his classroom, 'I believe that with the upbringing that some of my students may have experienced, this aspect of development may not have been a concentration in their upbringing.' This perspective echoes Cam's (2012) description of moral training (discussed in Chapter Two) with its focus on behaviour and sociality. Justin's 'moral compass' is different from Fran's which appears to evolve from deep within an individual and is drawn forth by the teacher. For Justin, this moral compass, a set of ethical beliefs and action, exist beyond the individual and these are to be inculcated by socialising agents. In Justin's view, this is the task of family and if family has not achieved this, then the school takes on that role.

It is interesting to note the resonances between some of the comments of Peter and those of Justin. Although Peter is in the latter years of his teaching career and Justin just at the beginning, the following synergies exist: they both teach at School A; both personally have an ethnic lineage that is Anglo-Saxon through many

generations - quite distinct from the extremely diverse multicultural student population of the school in which they teach; both occupy a socio-economic status higher than the majority of students in the school, and both were aware that their own ethical positions would potentially clash with views of their students. For Justin, these aspects appeared to embolden him in approaching the task of teaching *Ethical understanding* in History. His confidence about his responsibility to provide a moral compass for his students grew as the interview proceeded. Peter's confidence, in contrast, appeared to dissipate during the interview as his reflection suggested to him the likelihood that he would be moving into a space of conflicting personal views. These are valuable insights to consider when teachers prepare to teach *Ethical understanding*. The personal dispositions, beliefs and experiences of individual teachers will shape the way they take this capability into the classroom to guide and support students. It would seem that encouraging self-reflexive practice is essential to promote awareness of all a teacher carries into this specific context and its potential impact on students.

### **Jillian (History)**

Jillian, an experienced teacher at School C, framed her discussion of ethics as doing the work of 'producing good people.' Having held pastoral coordinating roles in the past, Jillian was, 'frustrated that they [school leadership] would think that in these artificial forty minutes of pastoral care time that we were going to give the students these pearls of wisdom to be good.' Jillian used the word *good* a number of times without any qualification or definition, assuming a shared understanding with me as to what that constituted. For her ethics appeared to be something covered *naturally* through *good* teaching. When asked to define what she understood by the term ethics, Jillian responded with, 'to be honest I'm not interested in curriculum development.' This response certainly indicates a resistance in Jillian to ethics being something codified, organised and explicit. Jillian was one of the participants who, as far as I could ascertain, assigned minimal status and paid scant attention to the *Ethical understanding* curriculum documentation. She went on to explain that she believed, 'it's done well when you're not doing it purposely,' pointing to a strong element of intuition in her approach to this field and a criticism of curriculum codification of principles.

Along with this 'gut' level disposition, Jillian identified the presence of ethics in the classroom as being relational in essence. Initially she spoke of this in terms of the dynamic between herself and her students, 'They need to see the human response. They love hearing you feel passionate, incensed or angered, distressed by things...You show them that you think it is outrageous, and then you get them in.' This is more than a simple case of modelling for students. It is more self-revelatory with the intention of calling forth similar holistic engagement from others. Jillian risks being known outside of her role with her students - the sharing of her affective life with them effectively places her beside them - in a shared position, not as passive recipients in an authoritative power dynamic. Whilst not Levinasian in its complete embrace of the alterity of the *other*, Jillian's way of being with her students captures something of the dynamic of vulnerability which Säfström (2003) calls *teaching otherwise*, 'a process in which an ego is sobering up from its being for itself and awakens to humanity, as a being for the other' (p. 28).

It was in discussing the place of ethical understanding in her subject area of History, that Jillian moved towards a more substantive definition of her understanding of ethics:

In History we talk so much about what is right, what is wrong, what is good, what is bad, what is acceptable behaviour - it just crops up...you're talking about human kind, about how people respond to things. (Interview, April 4<sup>th</sup>)

This response suggests Jillian sees ethics as an endeavour that is primarily social in character - it is located within the web of human relating, and is focused upon evaluating the impacts of human action. In part this is suggestive of an ethics after contemporary philosopher John Rawls, which places justice at the centre of social design and action. Whilst Jillian does not complete the equation herself, the purpose of this 'evaluating' of the impact of human action would seem to be the development of *good people* - that is History provides lessons through which we can improve the life experience of humans in their societies.

Yet the certainties of such binaries dissolved when Jillian spoke of her actual practice. She identified one of her dominant pedagogical strategies - helping students to 'stand in the shoes' of historical others - as being all about the

development of empathy and thus the messiness of multiple perspective-taking. Referring to a film used in a unit examining the experience of young people in Nazi Germany, Jillian noted that this approach had sometimes been viewed by her colleagues and students as risky.

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The views of the three History teachers represent the rich complexity of how ethics and ethical understanding might be conceptualised. The shared perspective of their discipline, History, draws them to place people and their contexts at the centre of their understanding. However, they differ in the emphasis they afford to the shaping of the ethical self from within or without. At one end of this continuum Fran see ethics as an internal frame that supports a person in the world. At the other, Justin sees ethics as being transmitted to an individual by family, school or perhaps another dominant social institution. Jillian stands between these points, but in a place that seems to tip in different directions depending on whether her cognitive or affective self is in the ascendancy.

The English and History teachers constructed their views of ethics and ethical understanding from personal and professional experiences, their beliefs and worldview and the particular perspective/s that their subject lens afforded them. These views speak of both clarity and uncertainty, of seemingly contradictory notions being held simultaneously and of conceptual breadth. This broad tolerance perhaps speaks of a discursive disposition that marks the Humanities field. The Mathematics and Science teachers draw on the same 'resources' in constructing their understanding - personal and professional experiences and the like. It is important to note and delineate the similarities and differences that arise in their perspectives and what the key variables and contexts might be that account for this. Such understanding illuminates the nuances of the implementation of *Ethical understanding* across the four core subjects of the *Australian Curriculum*. It suggests that a singular vision of implementation is inappropriate as it fails to respect and take account of the particular complexion and epistemologies of individual discipline areas. This is further illustrated in the following discussion of the views of the teachers of Mathematics and Science.

## Lily (Mathematics)

Lily is a Mathematics teacher with over twenty-five years' experience in the classroom and works at School C. For Lily, ethics is everywhere in Mathematics. The two are not separate entities. Lily's sense of ethics was of it being a thread in the fabric of Mathematics itself, rather than an add-on entity, 'we don't teach 'integrity' as a topic.' This echoes something of Jillian's comments about not doing ethics purposely - that it is an organic dimension that unfolds as we engage with knowledge. Lily spoke more of what learning with ethics and ethical understanding at play might look like and what its outcomes might be, 'responsible learning and informed decision making about a whole range of topics, life skills...develop[ing] informed citizens who can function and contribute to society well.' Lily held this definition firmly throughout the interview.

She did acknowledge, however, that Mathematics teachers may respond with ambivalence to the integrating of ethics into Mathematics but was confident that, 'When you prompt teachers they do do it (e.g. tax evasion). They just don't know what ethics is.' In citing this example of tax evasion, along with another involving the manipulation of raw data, Lily's conceptualising of ethics suggests it is focused in the social milieu with principles of justice and fairness prevailing. In this it possesses a strong orientation to civic-mindedness and being a good citizen. Again, this conceptual framing is shared with History teacher Jillian, and it is noteworthy that they both work at the same school, although Lily has only been there for a year and Jillian for almost a decade. Lily noted that half of her class relished opportunities to look at Mathematics at work in the world, that they were, 'passionate about these applied issues.' It is at this intersection that Lily finds the ethical arising and where, through this robust interaction, the potential exists to build a better society.

In reading the *Ethical understanding* curriculum framework Lily was able to identify the way that both the topics in Mathematics and her pedagogical approach connected to numerous descriptors. There is no surprise in the synergy here, as both are strongly informed by the approach of normative ethics evident in the emphasis on principles.

## Archie (Mathematics)

The frameworks of normative ethics resonate strongly with a subject area such as Mathematics where precision, clarity and reason are dominant values. The marriage of the two is partially apparent in Lily's views described above. Archie's core understanding is however, markedly different.

Archie has been Head of Mathematics at School B for some time. In our first interview Archie, unlike Lily, said he did not feel that there was a clear link between his subject and ethics, echoing the characterisation about many Mathematics teachers suggested above by Lily. He did, however, see that ethics could be a component of the contexts (drawn as much as possible from 'real' life) used for mathematical problems. But Archie possessed a very clear understanding of the relevance of ethics in the classroom environment. From these beliefs, Archie's emergent definition of ethics took shape:

...[it's] the consideration for people's views to be expressed and respected in the classroom environment. The tone of the classroom interactions between students and students and teacher - not necessarily what you're discussing but *how* you're discussing. (Interview, April 18<sup>th</sup>)

Here Archie is linking ethics and ethical understanding primarily with interpersonal relationships. Ethics is characterised as the mechanism used to establish a classroom climate that promotes the flourishing of positive and respectful relationships. In this way, Archie's approach has some resonance, like Justin's, with Cam's (2012) 'moral training' paradigm. However, the emphasis in Archie's comments about ethics being lived experience in the 'here and now' of the classroom, contrasts strongly with the view that ethics and ethical understanding are about knowledge and dispositions that students acquire to take out into the world beyond the classroom. Archie's comments, like those of Jillian, sit well within a broad Levinasian frame, pointing to the classroom being a place of implied ethics rather than applied ethics as explicated by Todd (2001), 'An implied ethics means that educational practices, technologies, discourses, and relationships always already participate in a field of ethicality, that is to say, a domain or realm in which non-violent relations to the Other are possible' (p. 72).

Lily and Archie represent quite distinctive approaches to ethics and ethical understanding. These understandings also represent different conceptualisations of their expert subject area, Mathematics. The variability in this limited sample of two participants points to the potency of subject specific epistemologies in shaping ethical understanding and the richness and breadth of the latter that will emerge if given space and opportunity, in the views of practitioners. As I turn to a consideration of the views of the Science teachers in the study, I note that these Mathematics and Science are often linked as curriculum areas but perceived opportunities for ethical engagement can be markedly different.

### **Natalie (Science)**

Natalie, a Science teacher at School C, had participated in another research project exploring ethics in Science and from this developed an ongoing interest in this area. Like Lily's view of ethics and Mathematics, Natalie believes unequivocally that Science and Technology cannot be studied without ethics being part of the mix. She understands ethics to be relevant in the areas of Science where the application and uses of scientific knowledge are the focus. Whilst the context of application is different from that identified by Alice, the *applied* nature of ethics is a perspective and emphasis they share. Natalie spoke of ethics as:

... your values which then guide your decision making...your ethics are your values around what is important for us as a society, what's important in terms of human rights, culture, the environment. (Interview, April 3<sup>rd</sup>)

Embedded in Natalie's description is a cluster of concepts and terms often used alongside ethics: values, rights, morality and worldview. In Natalie's view ethics, whilst drawn from an individual's value system, has its focus clearly on the wellbeing of the wider community and that community's relationship with the physical world. This perspective draws on the normative ethical approach of utilitarianism.

The development of ethical understanding in Natalie's perception involves a staged process which appears to be closely aligned to a critical thinking model:



...in teaching ethical understanding you're also helping them develop the skills to be able to explore the issue and to be able to justify their position on a particular stand and critique others and then also ultimately realising that whatever values or position they have, they have the potential to influence others. (Interview, April 3<sup>rd</sup>)

In emphasising the 'potential for influence' Natalie echoes something of Michael Young's (2008) notion of *powerful knowledge*, which refers to 'what the knowledge can do or what intellectual power it gives to those who have access to it. *Powerful knowledge*...can provide learners with a language for engaging in political, moral, and other kinds of debates' (p. 14). In this way of thinking ethics is seen as a means of leveraging 'powerful knowledge' and through this being a voice for positive change.

## **Dina (Science)**

Dina teaches both Science and Physical Education at School C. She noted that discussions about moral questions (she used the word *moral* in place of ethics) have come to the fore frequently in Physical Education, where the emphasis has been on the Health dimension, but not in Science classes. Nonetheless, Dina felt very positive about bringing ethics into Science classes - she was both excited and expectant.

When asked what understanding of ethics would inform the material she was about to develop to take into her classes, her response was very direct and uncluttered, 'I think of what's right or wrong - just morals. They're different for different people.'

The first half of Dina's definition is consistent with traditional normative ethics in its focus on concepts of *right* and *wrong*. Its lack of nuance in acknowledging the inherent problems of terms such as 'right' and 'wrong', aligns it more with an 'everyday' or common place usage. Whilst this first half of Dina's comment alludes to a perception of the task of ethics as being somewhat naïve in its binary construct, the second half of her comment concerning the variety of views amongst people speaks to the challenge and complexity of the field. It is when different

people subscribe to different ideas of what is 'right' and 'wrong' that challenging conversations begin.

As was the case with Natalie in the previous vignette, Dina's narrative about ethics and ethical understanding was focused on individual connection into issues of broader social concern. This stands as a strong contrast to the position of Fran particularly where ethics is in the first place an inner, intra-personal, identity formation process.

## **Harry (Science)**

Harry is Head of Middle Years at School B and an experienced teacher who has taught in quite diverse school contexts. Although still teaching a Science class, Harry's initial responses to the question of what ethics and ethical understanding is about sprang primarily from his pastoral and administrative, rather than curriculum, role. He spoke of his experience in a previous school where many students came from families experiencing acute social and economic difficulties. He felt a responsibility in that context to model a moral compass for his students that was often absent in their lives. This orientation has synergies with that expressed by Justin, but Harry's conception of this was less directive and more personally focused. It seemed that this school and its staff represented consistency and reliability for many of its students. So, for Harry, ethics is what makes up the substance of that moral compass. In fleshing this out, he characterised ethics as being, 'about interacting with others, the way you present yourself, being a positive member of your community.' The interpersonal, relational dimension is strong in this definition, but it is located within the wider context of citizenship. However, this had not taken the shape of a more defined and prescribed moral compass which is perhaps the inclination in Justin's view. Harry commented, 'I would expect different ethical perspectives. We encourage students to maintain their ethical diversity, and to respect others' stances.' Respecting the *otherness* of the *other* certainly aligns Harry's view to a Levinasian frame.

## Synthesising reflections

Harry and Archie both teach at School B and both gave voice to the belief that ethics is an embodied practice in the current moment of the classroom rather than a set of hypothetical future practices. This emphasis is likely to have been developed, or at least reinforced, in their consciousness through the ethos of this school community. This points to school context as playing a dynamic role in shaping teachers' thinking as they come to foreground the ethical and ethical understanding in their subject classrooms.

It is not insignificant to note that in the presentation of these vignettes conveying teachers' perceptions of ethics and ethical understanding, two thirds of the discursive space is taken by the English and History teachers. It is important not to get trapped in what might be familiar disciplinary stereotypes in pondering this. Is it simply the case that ethical understanding has little relevance in the fields of Mathematics for instance? That ethics is really only a Humanities 'thing'? The answer from the participants is clearly 'no' and further will be heard from them in Chapter Six, where they specifically explore the place of ethics and ethical understanding in their subject area. Is it the case that Mathematics and Science teachers, because of their subject content, are more precise and less verbose? After all, they don't spend lots of time discussing everything, do they? Not necessarily, the interviews with all participants ran close for each to the allotted time. Loquaciousness, or the lack of it, may be a function of several factors - personality and anxiety to mention two.

The answer lies perhaps more in the realm of the participants' dispositions towards knowledge which have been shaped by the epistemological assumptions embedded in their disciplines. The Mathematics and Science teachers, in this initial exploration, were clear and certain in outlining their understandings of ethics, whereas the English and History teachers (though not all) spoke in a more exploratory manner couching their remarks in the language of possibility and approximation - for example Fran's phrase, 'I have a picture of it...it's like...'

In the teachers' descriptions of their understandings of ethics and ethical understanding, a range of conceptions emerge which are often held concurrently rather than exclusively. In no particular hierarchical order ethics is conceived of as:

- right and wrong action
- just action
- informed decision making
- critical thinking
- what guides interpersonal relationships
- developing virtue in an individual
- character formation
- caring for the other
- citizenship

A particularly noteworthy aspect of the participants' responses is the strong presence of ideas about ethics framed according to relational (intra- and inter-personal) paradigms in contrast to action-focused, decision-making paradigms. Yet, somewhat remarkably, in the *Australian Curriculum's Ethical understanding* documentation, this personalised, relational aspect of ethics is barely present. Even a somewhat crude and simple vocabulary frequency profile of the terminology in the *Ethical understanding* learning continuum across its six levels, supports this observation - see table below:

TABLE 3: KEY VOCABULARY FREQUENCY

Number of occurrences	Word
12	concepts
11	actions, people
10	responsibilities, rights, exploring
9	values, identify, consequences, social
8	contexts, discussing, examining

7	describe, analyse, situations, view, decisions
6	scenarios, reasons
5	explain, behaviours, dilemmas

Words like ‘responsibilities’, ‘rights’, ‘social’, ‘actions’, ‘values’, ‘behaviours’, might be used in a personalised manner to emphasise their affective dimensions.

However, in the *Ethical understanding* learning continuum they are invariably situated within and alongside descriptors that frame a cognitive approach, for example, ‘analyse behaviours’ and ‘investigate scenarios that highlight ways that personal dispositions and actions can affect consequences.’ This may, in part, account for participants’ side-lining of the documentation in favour of their personal knowledge and intuitive sense that ethics, whilst expressed and enacted beyond our ‘selves’, is at centre a personal matter. Given their roles as responsible educators who make complex decisions every day, the majority of participants obviously felt their personal knowledge of ethics, an understanding developed from everyday lived experience rather than academic study, was adequate for the teaching task ahead of them.

Alice, one of the English teachers, provided a more detailed critique of this dimension:

The ACARA documentation doesn’t seem to have a personal application - [it’s about] understanding the ethical aspect in theory - abstract and intellectual, not personal. [It won’t be] very useful if it’s only an intellectual pursuit. It seems to be in tension with the fact that they are quoting from the Melbourne Declaration with its emphasis on empathy and respect for others and the need to be self-reflexive. (Interview, April 4<sup>th</sup>)

Other comments from participants capture a level of discomfort with, and ambivalence toward, the formal curriculum documentation. One participant consulted the framework, but found it ‘disappointing’ and dismissed it. Another participant said he was ‘concern(ed) that the ACARA material won’t be relevant’, and another said she wasn’t ‘that formulaic’.

Such comments signal a set of curious and distinctive responses to this curriculum innovation. The advent of outcomes-based curriculum frameworks, and the alignment of reporting and external testing to these, has resulted generally in teachers in Years Seven to Ten being more attentive to specific requirements in their subject areas. Those who teach senior secondary courses have always followed subject guides carefully, even forensically, as final results are usually linked to tertiary entrance opportunities for students. New subject-specific curriculum is thus anticipated by teachers, sometimes with eagerness and excitement, sometimes with apprehension and loathing. It is usually pored over - again, with mixed responses, sometimes great affirmation, sometimes dismay. Pronouncements are made, perhaps strong disagreement expressed. There may be a degree of panic about topics included that are unfamiliar, there will be a scurry to gather resources, but in the end teachers will shape their knowledge and practice to meet the external requirement, as their students' progress will in some measure rely on their capacity to do this.

Bearing these matters in mind, the ambivalence toward the *Ethical understanding* documentation noted above appears to be at odds with teachers' typical practice in their specialist subject areas. There are a number of possible assumptions underlying this ambivalence: perhaps this sort of knowledge is not considered to be as valuable as subject content knowledge - perhaps it falls into a different category as it is knowledge that is drawn from life experience, not an expert academic field. Perhaps because this sort of knowledge is personal in nature, fixed content is neither possible or relevant. Perhaps the difficulty of assessment in relation to this sort of knowledge means there is an assumption being made by participants that it is unlikely to become part of regular assessment regimes and therefore doesn't require the same sort of attention as other knowledge.

Whatever it is that sits behind the ambivalence, such an attitude points to a challenge that ACARA (or any curriculum authority working with a similar structural innovation for that matter), may encounter should it take forward into practice the clear view written into the *Australian Curriculum*: that the General Capabilities are to be regarded as being of equivalent significance to the study of traditional academic disciplines. Clearly, in the case of this study, this was not the

view of participants as they saw no immediate need to go beyond their own personal knowledge base in respect of ethics and ethical understanding to provide a response to the initial questions of understanding and definition posed to them.

In her initial interview, Alice made the following observation about the Ethical understanding documentation's strongly cognitive emphasis, 'It seems to be in tension with the fact that they are quoting from the Melbourne Declaration with its emphasis on empathy and respect for others and the need to be self-reflexive.' This critical perspective points to an affordance of this study that emerges from the fact that it took place during an early stage of phased implementation of the *Australian Curriculum*. The General Capabilities were to be implemented at a later stage. In most cases of curriculum change, it would be an unusual occurrence to hear a subject teacher evaluating new curriculum in their subject in terms of how it shapes up in relation to the broad principles of general curriculum policy. In most circumstances, teachers are juggling their full-time teaching and wider school commitments at the same time as they are familiarising themselves with new curriculum requirements and working out the minutiae of implementation. However, Alice is able to adopt this wide, broadly conceptual perspective, measuring the *Ethical understanding* 'curriculum' against the *Melbourne Declaration*. The absence of any external imperatives and mandates relating to this curriculum innovation at the time of the study, appears to have provided a freedom in which a genuine critical disposition was possible. This potentially opens a productive and dynamic dialogue between those beyond the school context who produce curriculum frameworks and those fully immersed in the school context who 'make' or bring the curriculum to life. It is in this space that we see teachers more than able to make extraordinarily valuable contributions to the process of curriculum evolution.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have sought to delineate scholarly and practitioner (from the participants in this study) views of ethics. In Part One I considered the field of philosophical Ethics, noting, through scholarly debate, recent turns and developments. In this a focus on relationality emerged in the work of proponents

of the ethics of care and the thought of Emmanuel Levinas. In Part Two I presented and analysed the views of ethics and ethical understanding held by the teachers in this study prior to teaching a unit of work integrating the General Capability of *Ethical understanding*. The scholarly perspectives of Part One have provided frames to support the analysis of these practitioners' views.

Having brought their understandings of ethics and ethical understanding to a particular level of consciousness in the process of the first interview, participants proceeded to plan and teach their units of work in the weeks and months that followed. Chapter Five explores what happened in their classrooms and how this lived experience interacted with, shaped and re-shaped the conceptions of ethics and ethical understanding which they initially carried with them.



## Chapter Five: Teachers and *Ethical understanding*

### (2)

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In Chapter Four participants' understandings and definitions relating to ethics and ethical understanding have been explored. In this chapter, the focus shifts to an analysis of how these more abstract understandings were given 'flesh' in the practical context of specific curriculum and the classroom. What did these abstractions and initial views look like in real lessons? Did they change in any fundamental way? Were there surprising additions or transformation? Were they irrelevant or even ignored and replaced with something completely different? Such an examination is vital as the enacted curriculum can be substantially different to the formal curriculum housed in official written documents. As noted in Chapter Two, this thesis begins from the premise that teachers are curriculum makers, and as this study has shown, what they create 'on the ground' with students in classrooms is shaped by a myriad of factors, some stable, some shifting. This complex and dynamic process needs to be understood if the learning gained through experience is to be made available for those who take this endeavour into the classroom in the future.

The data discussed in this section is drawn from participant reflective journals and a second interview with each, which was conducted when all had finished teaching their units. Each participant's experience is recounted and discussed, and prefaced with a quote of their own words which captures what was essential to their understanding of ethics and ethical understanding as communicated in their first interview. This serves as a touchstone in considering what has emerged as new, or what has been confirmed or discarded through the experience of actually taking their understandings into the classroom and interacting with students. The vignettes follow the ordering used in Chapter Four, which allows for the continued unfolding of how ethical understanding is or is not shaped by the subject in which it is contextualised. This aspect is taken up substantively in Chapter Six.

## Alice (English)

*...a practical pursuit with relevance and application in our everyday lives, a supportive tool for navigating all the situations we encounter where we are asked to make decisions...*

Alice's approach to this unit was, like her colleague, Nicky's, conceptually framed. She was working with a Year Nine class at School C, studying the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* and exploring the idea of integrity. Alice used different *Ethical understanding* learning continuum descriptors as a focus for each of her lessons. As she prepared for her classroom work, Alice recorded in her journal that, 'it took quite a lot of rereading the outcomes to get a sense of what they meant and how they might be applied.' This observation is particularly significant given that Alice was the only teacher in the study with background experience in working with ethics in the classroom. Whilst it underscores issues of linguistic clarity in the descriptors, it more importantly points to another vision of the purpose of ethical inquiry held by Alice which differs from that underpinning the *Ethical understanding* documentation. In Alice's interviews and written reflections, the word 'applied' in respect of ethics, appears frequently. In the *Ethical understanding* documentation, the word 'applied' is used only once and not in the context of referring to the meaning or character of ethics. Alice's focus on applying knowledge reveals a *thick* rather than *thin* appreciation of the word *understanding*. A 'thick' understanding, I suggest, involves knowledge that is processed cognitively and that then results in considered personal action. It is knowledge that does not remain an academic proposition (what I would suggest is 'thin' knowledge) but that is personally transformative and ultimately expressed in action.

Alice began by inviting students to consider why we might want to make ethical decisions and how we could know if they were indeed ethical. Acknowledging that this is difficult territory for us all, Alice provided students with three paradigms or principles they could potentially use in making ethical decisions. She presented them as: 'Utilitarianism (do whatever produces the greatest good for the greatest number of people); Rule-based thinking (follow the principle that you want everyone to follow), and Care-based thinking (test your actions by putting yourself

in another's shoes).’ It is noteworthy at this early stage of Alice’s work with her students that she is incorporating an ethics of care as one of three paradigms for ethical thinking. In the circumscribed view of ethics underpinning the *Ethical understanding* continuum, ‘care ethics’ is not represented.

Alice provided a number of well-known ethical dilemmas for students to practise the application of these different frames. Students responded with keen interest, asking if they could consider more dilemmas. Alice noted several positive outcomes of this activity:

It enabled students to record and realise that ethical decisions did not necessarily have one clear answer; it highlighted the multiple perspectives and made explicit the nature of why ethical decisions are so difficult; students feel this form of thinking has relevance and interest to them, and [it is] an engaging teaching strategy and means of fulfilling subject specific outcomes as well. (Interview, July 29<sup>th</sup>)

Having become familiar with this process, students were directed to consider the decision made by Atticus (a main character in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*) to defend Tom Robinson, a black man. Using the different ethical principles, students were asked to determine whether Atticus made the appropriate ethical decision in taking on this case. Alice identified two *Ethical understanding* descriptors being addressed in the activities of these lessons, ‘Analyse the objectivity or subjectivity behind decision making where there are many possible consequences, and Use reasoning skills to prioritise the relative merits of points of view about complex ethical dilemmas.’ In the three weeks that followed these initial lessons, Alice took relevant descriptors from the *Ethical understanding* learning continuum at Level Six, and shaped her classroom study of the text around them. In Alice’s journal she notes a particular growth trajectory in her students. They move from beginning to internalise their discussions about ethics, to being able to apply ethical thinking in new scenarios, to using the language of ethics more readily in their discussion. They name specific values, beliefs and behaviours connected to integrity and discuss concepts like ‘moral compass’ and ‘morals’. At the end of the unit Alice observed that the language of ethical thinking was regular and recurrent in both students’ writing and discussion.

This movement from providing some background knowledge about the field of Ethics, to the subject content focus and then on to the integration of the two, echoes the approach of *Values and Knowledge Education* (VaKE) which has been developed and researched in a number of European countries in the last decade. VaKE posits that students require instruction in both elements for the enrichment of their dynamic interaction to occur (see discussion of VaKE in Chapter Two). In this experience of teaching *Ethical understanding* in her English class, Alice was positive about the synergies between the subject content and *Ethical understanding*, 'Having experimented with integrating these ethical understandings into the English program I do feel more confident that they can be easily aligned with the thinking we encourage in English and do not require a great deal of additional content or programming.'

Alice was not, however, entirely comfortable with what she called the 'objective' emphasis in the descriptors:

The outcomes appear to be more objective and don't actually specify students should work towards internalising or clarifying values. They emphasise processes and thinking steps. Many outcomes encourage students to look outward to national and international contexts, but not to the application of these ethical thinking skills to their own immediate and personal worlds. In my practice, it was the application to their own worlds that was what caught the student's interest most. (Interview, July 29<sup>th</sup>)

Alice once again uses key words that define her understanding of the core business of engaging in ethical discussion in the school context – it is all about *application*, and the contextual focus is *personal worlds*.

Her comment concerning the distancing effect she perceived in the descriptors that constantly point students 'outward to national and international contexts' rather than to 'their own immediate and personal worlds', is somewhat at odds with understandings she expressed during her first interview. At that point, Alice was wanting to characterise ethics as having reach, 'beyond my world and my thoughts.' Here, following the teaching experience, however, she is more concerned about an over-emphasis on the *beyond* and a lack of connection with students' personal worlds. It is perhaps this notion of connection between the

world within and the world beyond that, alongside *application*, is central to Alice's bringing of ethics and ethical understanding into the classroom.

## Peter (English)

*[Peter]... said he had actually always thought of ethics immediately in terms of making decisions about the 'right' or 'wrong' thing to do. [he]... located his understanding in an ethical space that emphasises the 'justice' and 'social' aspects of ethical thinking and behaviour.*

Peter's participation in this project aligned with his Year Nine English class at School A studying the film *Rabbit Proof Fence*. Immediately, Peter recognised that definitions needed to be established as base line understandings with which his students could work. Consistent with the views he expressed at the beginning of the project, he wrote:

I [have] settled on an approach of identifying ethical issues relevant to my class and have them indicate how they would respond and how they should respond. This will lead to the concepts of right and wrong and create a basis for discussion about ethics and where we get our ethics from. (Interview, November 13<sup>th</sup>)

Two noteworthy points emerge from this comment. Firstly, Peter's thinking about ethics and ethical understanding falls into a binary framework of *right* and *wrong* where there is an assumption that shared agreement of what constitutes each of those positions will exist. Secondly, Peter himself has clear notions of *should* responses (which he suggests or perhaps expects may be different to students' immediate personal responses) to the ethical issues he had prepared for his class to examine.

In his second interview, Peter was asked if he had consulted any resources for the teaching of his unit of work. He indicated that the *Ethical understanding* documentation was the main source. In his journal however, there is no reference to this material. Peter did however seek and use guidance from his own web-based research where he found some relevant work done by the Marrkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University in the United States. The introductory

material that comprised the first three lessons of his sequence was adapted from Marrkula resources. It appears that Peter used the *Ethical understanding* documentation as an orientating and broad directional frame, which is consonant, in part, with its purpose. However, as a classroom teacher implementing new curriculum, Peter recognised he needed more specific practical support and thus sought out resources which contained substantive content rather than broad outcome descriptors as is contained in the *Ethical understanding* learning continuum.

In the initial lesson, Peter presented students with a range of dilemma situations (for example: You are in a shop and give the salesperson \$10 to pay for a drink that cost \$3.50. The salesperson gives you \$16.50 change.) and simply asked them, 'What do you do?' This opened out into a discussion of why individual members of the class had chosen certain courses of action. Peter noted positive levels of student engagement in this type of discussion, but found their views surprising:

I was taken aback at the responses regarding situations where their friends do the wrong thing. For most of the students the value placed on friendship outweighed the value of honesty and truthfulness.

The disjuncture between Peter's own ethical stance ('the wrong thing') and that of his students (a different hierarchy of values), which he had assumed would be a shared one, remained a troubling matter for him, and is referenced a number of times both in his journal and the second interview. In the latter he remarked, 'How do I handle that as a teacher? I said I thought the right thing was very clear.' This matter was not something however that Peter pursued at length or in depth. In part, this was because curriculum scheduling required all classes to have completed their study of the text by a certain date so that a common assessment task could be undertaken.

This situation does however raise questions about the dynamic in the *Australian Curriculum* that exists between core subject content and whatever General Capability is at play, in this case, *Ethical understanding*. This school's rather rigid scheduling of assessment tasks across a year level is not an exceptional scenario. Many schools adopt processes like this in the hope of achieving greater consistency and rigor in assessment of student work. The challenge for teachers in classroom

practice appears to be finding the point of balance in allotted time between coverage of required subject content and sufficient exploration of ethical aspects for students to reach a meaningful level of reflective depth.

Peter's discomfort and surprise at his students' perspectives, was amplified in a later comment he made about his role in one of the discussions related to the earlier text studied (*The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*), 'I found myself challenging students who took an ethical view different to my own.' Peter's experience here resonates with the discussion in Chapter Two on the different purposes that underpin various enactments of moral education, that is whether it involves a more prescriptive form such as moral 'training', a less prescriptive values clarification approach or something else completely. In the first interview Peter explained how the confidence of his essentially moral realist position had been disrupted by students expressing unexpectedly divergent views about an issue. Peter commented, 'I'm finding myself asking questions about whether right and wrong are absolute or relative.' This personal philosophical uncertainty was not, however, manifest in the way Peter went about teaching his unit and the classroom interactions with his students. Rather, and especially at the latter of those two points, he encountered an even stronger personal desire to impart what he perceived to be 'right' ethical responses to the various situations and topics discussed.

Peter's experience here is more closely aligned with Phillip Cam's description of 'moral training' and of the more prescriptive approach of some character and values education programs. I suspect Peter would be disturbed to think of himself as being located within such approaches; and he would likely view his disposition as one of being student-centred and open-minded. He is a most able and highly regarded teacher of over thirty-five years' experience in the classroom and yet in this context he was prompted to ask, 'How do I handle that as a teacher?'

What is highlighted in Peter's story is the need for support of teachers in this curriculum innovation. Certainly - though not primarily as one might expect - in providing resources for implementation, but especially in negotiating questions of identity and professional role in these new contexts where personal values and

worldviews can become more intensely engaged. Such pressures can see a teacher taking a non-preferred pedagogical path as a response to the experience of personal disequilibrium.

Aware of time constraints, Peter moved on to providing students with ethical tools:

They were provided with a handout offering a way to identify ethical issues and to make ethical decisions. We read through the handout and students were challenged to consider the case of the 'Commandant' of Auschwitz [from an earlier text, *The Boy in Striped Pyjamas*] and to ascertain if the decision to punish or not punish him was an ethical decision. Students were asked to apply the steps in the handout to the issue and to provide a written response to each step related to the issue. They found this a very difficult task – they said it was challenging because they had to really think about it and the answers were not easy...The students reflected on what they had learnt by doing this activity – most identified the challenge of dealing with ethical issues. They struggled with the 'greyiness' of issues. (Journal entry)

It is interesting to note that even with a very defined step by step framework to guide them, students found 'greyiness' or uncertainty problematic and destabilising.

This response highlights two important considerations for teachers seeking to incorporate *Ethical understanding* into their subjects. Discomfort with uncertainty suggests a particular disposition to knowledge that has likely been imparted through prior pedagogical practice and modelled through the teacher's own disposition toward knowledge. From the perspective of my own teaching experience in the field, engaging with *Ethical understanding* is likely to open up shifting ground and students will navigate this more productively if they have already developed a tolerance for, and even better, an appreciation of, the multiplicity of all that is around us. Engaging in discussion and debate about ethics and ethical understanding can be personally challenging, as Peter's experience reveals. Teachers need to have their pastoral awareness activated in such contexts and be prepared to support students as they negotiate the possible disruption of their frame for viewing and understanding the world that surrounds them.



As Peter proceeded with an exploration of the film, *Rabbit Proof Fence*, he set a task requiring students to complete a poster in pairs that would identify ethical issues their assigned character had to deal with. He noted, 'I was pleasantly surprised at how well students responded to this task...Valuable class discussion...reflected student appreciation of the 'greyness' of many ethical issues.' This final comment is testimony to the way that Peter was able to hold students in that place of disequilibrium noted above. Although feeling personally challenged by the conversations opened up by a focus on ethics himself, Peter's years of classroom experience and deep 'knowing' of young people nonetheless enabled engagement and a positive outcome for his students.

## **Nicky (English)**

*Nicky's conception of Ethics and ethical endeavour is framed strongly within intra-personal and inter-personal frames...[with] particular emphasis on understanding and appreciating the world of 'the other'...*

Nicky chose to explore Kate Grenville's novel, *The Secret River*, with her Year Ten English class at School C for this study. Consistent with her determination to use conceptual frames as the key organiser of curriculum, the sequence of classes that were part of this study focused on the question: What is Justice? Nicky marshalled a range of additional texts that served as point and counterpoint to the central text and also as provocations in discussion. She began with an historic image of five Aboriginal men, standing, chained together, staring blankly at the camera. She noted that the horror expressed by the students came as much from the realisation that whoever took the image thought it was appropriate to do so, as much as from the confronting content. Nicky asked, 'Does that mean that photojournalists taking images of Syria today think it is OK? How might people have responded at the time when this photo was taken?' It can be seen from the nature of Nicky's questioning that she is keen to disrupt the students' initial moral equilibrium and promote the uncertainty that comes with increased complexity. At this point Nicky introduced the idea of historical empathy and how this can support ethical thinking. She talked with students about withholding judgement and developing deep

understanding of the context of a particular period, of not necessarily using the values of the present to judge the actions of those in the past.

Developing this idea, Nicky examined the opening section of the novel, 'Strangers', which recounts Thornhill's (the main character) first encounter with an Aboriginal person in the dead of night. Using director Neil Armitage's comment in his introduction to Bovell's stage play of *The Secret River*, 'It takes us back to a moment in our country's narrative when a different outcome, a different history, was possible', students were encouraged to stand in Thornhill's place of vulnerability, 'skinless as a maggot' (Grenville, 2005, p.5), and engage their historical empathy to appreciate the complex responses and ambivalence of Thornhill. In introducing the 'London' section of the novel which examines Thornhill's early life, social context, trial and sentencing, Nicky explained that the institutions of Church and Court established the moral boundaries for English society in that period. Seeking to activate affective responses and build an empathy informed by a complex understanding of context, she then set Thornhill's individual experience of poverty alongside this societal moral landscape. Nicky noted that the class structure of Thornhill's world meant that his survival, at some points, could only be achieved by stealing - that is, by transgressing the established moral code. Students expressed feelings of helplessness and anger at Thornhill's plight. They considered how ethical 'justice' is when wielded exclusively by those who possess wealth and power, and how the weight of the law is not equally distributed. William Blake's poem 'London' extended the discussion into the nature of restriction and freedom and what it might mean to be free.

As the novel's focus shifted to New South Wales with Thornhill's transportation, Nicky raised issues surrounding colonisation with the class, as a context within which to approach the narrative of Thornhill's arrival in Sydney. She used John Marsden and Shaun Tan's (1998) picture book, *The Rabbits* to open the discussion about ownership and rights. Focusing on the abruptness and almost comical and simplistic act of hoisting the Union Jack and it 'leaning crookedly upright' (Grenville, 2005, p. 75), Nicky introduced the concept of *terra nullius*, (a Latin term meaning land belonging to no one), her exploration following Grenville's text in considering this through Thornhill's perceptions of this new place:

He had laboured like a mole, head down, in the darkness and dirt of London, and all the time this tree shifting its leathery leaves above him had been quietly breathing, quietly growing...This place had been here long before him. It would go on breathing and sighing and being itself after he had gone, the land lapping on and on, watching, waiting, getting on with its own life. (Grenville, p. 106)

Class discussion in response noted Thornhill's extraordinary perception here as standing in stark contrast to his later actions. An understanding emerged of the negative influence exerted by the idea of ownership in Thornhill's ethical psyche. Thornhill himself speaks of the impulse towards ownership like this, 'A chaos opened up inside him, a confusion of wanting. No one had ever spoken to him of how a man might fall in love with a piece of ground' (Grenville p.106). Nicky noted in her journal reflection 'that all the problems in the novel happen because of desire.' This concept subsequently became the frame she used for examining the ethical movements in the characters as the novel progressed, 'I wanted to follow a line from desire to perception and then to the through-line of justice.'

'This is a very engaged and focused class of exceptional ability. They like to be challenged and they like to think, which is an absolute gift,' was Nicky's concluding comment in her journal. Certainly, the conceptual depth of the work in her unit suggests such a group of students. Recognising the capacities of her students, Nicky felt it important to provide them with some knowledge of political and moral philosophical frameworks. In doing this she drew extensively up a Harvard online course in moral and political philosophy called 'Justice'. This approach certainly scaffolded the *Australian Curriculum's Ethical understanding* learning continuum descriptors for the top level, Level Six. Nicky however, did not view this largely cognitive learning as an end, but rather a means to support students in developing empathy and increasingly complex insights into the attitudes and actions of the characters in the text. The appreciation of the complexities of the characters in the text, and the ways in which the author had constructed these were not an end in Nicky's classes either. For Nicky, excavating the text with a focus on the ethical provided opportunities for her students to develop empathy and self-reflexivity,

that is, an awareness of *self* and how this *self* creates and interacts with their perceptions of others.

The Eddie McGuire/Adam Goodes controversy which re-ignited debates about racism in Australia (and which is detailed in Fran's account which follows), also provided Nicky with the opportunity to connect the world of the text to her students' contemporary experience. The emphases that have emerged in Nicky's teaching of her unit are entirely consistent with what she espoused when first interviewed for this study. Nicky sought to cultivate a growing awareness of 'self' and 'other' and the dynamics of the interaction between the two. She wanted her students to see in the dynamics of this interaction the potential to enhance or diminish human experience. In framing her approach to ethical understanding in this manner, Nicky is drawing upon, albeit unwittingly, the vein of ethics in Education that is evident in the work of contemporary Levinasian scholars like Sharon Todd. Nicky was very certain and committed in her sense of responsibility and mission to achieve this. I remarked to her that her text selection was challenging on a number of levels for her students. Nicky responded, 'These are very complacent middle-class girls, a lot of them, with very conservative parents and where else are they going to be exposed to challenges to orthodox ideas.'

Nicky's vision for ethics and ethical understanding is layered and complex. Whilst it incorporates much that is contained in the *Ethical understanding* learning continuum at the most advanced level, it also extends considerably beyond the largely cognitive / rational focus of the continuum. Nicky's wider approach is moving towards aligning with the *Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues'* revised *Framework for Character Education in Schools* (2017), which utilises a multi-dimensional web of virtues to delineate the field of 'character' education. These virtues are:

- intellectual virtues (e.g. autonomy; critical thinking; curiosity; judgement; reasoning; reflection; resourcefulness)
- moral virtues (e.g. compassion; courage; gratitude; honesty; humility; integrity; justice; respect)
- civic virtues (e.g. citizenship; civility; community awareness; neighbourliness; service; volunteering)

- performance virtues (e.g. confidence; determination; motivation; perseverance; resilience; teamwork) (see Jubilee Centre, p. 5).

This framework for moral education in schools is comprehensive, integrated and holistic. It stands as a substantial contrast to the *Australian Curriculum's* General Capability of *Ethical understanding* and its largely one-dimensional cognitive, analytical approach. Even so, highly able teachers with very capable students do not seem to be restricted by this limited approach. It is clear that the implementation of a curriculum framework is mediated profoundly by teachers' professional experience and personal values. This aspect of the curriculum is enacted not simply applied or transferred.

## **Fran (History)**

*Fran views her work with students in History and beyond as part of the process of their personal moral formation with a particular emphasis on the development of personal integrity. In this respect she is representing ethics as being primarily focused in the intra-personal domain, specifically the cultivation of virtue within the individual.*

Fran's Year Ten History class at School C was examining the rise of Hitler in the context of a unit titled, 'Youth and Resistance in Nazi Germany'. In considering this topic, Fran's concern was that her students found it difficult to see in Hitler anything but the embodiment of evil. They believed that they would be above the base choice that many Germans made when they voted Hitler into power. Fran explained that the foundational support for Hitler came from people like herself and the students' parents - who were seen as fine, upstanding citizens! After some reading and research a mind map was created to outline factors contributing to the rise of Hitler: these were divided into socio political and economic factors on the one hand and the appeal of Hitler on the other. Fran set her students a 'walk in the shoes' writing task at the end of this brainstorming exercise. The audience was to be the editor of a German newspaper and they were tasked with writing an endorsement of Hitler and an explanation of why he was the answer to Germany's woes. They were able to choose from the viewpoint of an unemployed person, a

German army officer, a middle-class business man or a young student forced to leave University.

The second stimulus activity Fran used to assist in fostering an appreciation of Hitler's rise to power was viewing the documentary, *Master Race*. This film focuses on Hitler's capacity to appeal to the idea of the dominance of his super Aryan race and as a consequence the persecution of those who lay outside this type - Jews in particular but also other minority groups of 'undesirables'. To bring this into the students' own experience, Fran asked them to imagine if someone like this could come to power in Australia today, and if so, which groups might become targets? Eventually students identified groups that would be vulnerable. They commented that it was important to be watchful for indicators which could point to such movement. They suggested existing structures in our society which mitigated against this occurring but they were also cognisant of the fact that in periods of instability (like the global financial crisis) this sort of threat becomes more plausible.

In the first exercise, Fran is seeking to develop understanding of, and empathy for, different perspectives in the given historical context. Noting that, 'one of the most difficult things for adolescents is to move them away from black and white thinking', she positions students to consider: whose compass, what compass, how many compasses? This type of reflection and perspective-taking it could be argued is essential to the individual's formation of their personal stance which ultimately contributes to the development of their sense of integrity.

In her initial interview Fran commented that in bringing ethics more explicitly into the subject of History, students could be equipped to become more critical thinkers in their own 'present'. She framed this outcome as a core question that could be applied across topics and levels, 'Based on what you know about the past, how can you be a more critical thinker in the present about what's going on around you?' Fran's second activity sought to assist students to answer this by beginning the conversation within the unit they were studying. She explains that in this second activity there was:

...a discussion where Australia was placed in the 1939 context of Germany – who would be the groups etc? Where did the compass start to go askew? There were a number of occasions on which we could revisit the underlying morality not only of the Nazi regime but the underlying morality and assumptions within Australian society as well...no it wouldn't take too much for us to be propelled along that track. Previously it has been very easy for them to think about the Nazis as an anomaly, they sort of came out of nowhere...putting Australian society alongside, they could target the groups...This is where the deeper thinking was happening. (Interview, July 30<sup>th</sup>)

In asking students to link and align their known world with a particular historical context, Fran was able to deepen their historical understanding and empathy, as well as sharpen their perception of contemporary realities. Her method brought the two contexts into a fruitful dialogue. Also embedded in this conversation was a challenge for them to consider where their own moral compass was pointing and how this positioned them. The impact of this process was evident in one student's comments given in feedback about the unit, 'It made me seriously consider that if I were in Nazi Germany at the time, whether I would have resisted. It has demanded a re-evaluation of my own values and morals in our society and context.'

At this time, the Collingwood Football Club President, Eddie McGuire, (both prominent in Australia), made some disparaging comments regarding an Indigenous player, Adam Goodes which set off a debate about racism in Australia. Fran brought media material about this into the classroom as it linked to two units the class had studied: the Civil Rights movement in the United States and Youth in Nazi Germany. The discussion was animated and the Chinese and Korean students shared personal and intimate experiences of racism. Prior to this, the non-Asian students claimed that there was no racism evident at their school. This discussion caused students to re-evaluate previously held understandings. Fran noted that, 'one student asked what we could do about it.'

In exploring the types of student tasks that supported ethical understanding, Fran noted that the most intensive ethical debate occurred in class discussions. The writing tasks, designed to build empathy, were a 'bit flat' and 'a little artificial' in

her view as they were removed from the passion evident in the immediacy of discussion, 'The real thinking and analysing of one's ethical framework takes place within class discussion.'

One of the dimensions of the experience that Fran had to manage was her own reaction to some of her students' comments and attitudes:

What surprised me were some of the attitudes that I felt were devoid of empathy, in the economic rationalist mode, it came out of what was the most utilitarian approach to take...I let it be...Various individuals in the class jumped on it and argued, and I left the argument amongst them. All the ideas were out there, perhaps some of those kids will go back and reconsider, perhaps they won't. (Interview, July 30<sup>th</sup>)

In this reflection, Fran highlights one of the challenges teachers may encounter when bringing ethics into the classroom explicitly. Fran had described her understanding of ethics as personal moral formation in her initial interview, calling it *internal scaffolding*. Here she grapples with the desire to challenge her students' views, speaking out of her own moral paradigm. She chose to step back from such an intervention, allowing what may well be more productive peer-to-peer discussion. Such an awareness and the capacity to act upon it is impressive. However, Fran's experience does point to the slippery terrain that is being traversed here. If ethics and ethical understanding is to be undertaken as a personally engaging and challenging endeavour and not solely a values clarification exercise of delineating different perspectives in a detached cognitive manner, then, as this vignette shows, teachers will require particular capacities. As in Fran's case, they require skills of self-regulation, a disposition of tolerance for differences that may be personally repugnant and a determination to remain engaged with students in the midst of their own complex affective responses. Otherwise, they may find themselves engaging in character education of the prescriptive, behaviourist, non-expansive paradigm (discussed in Chapter Two) when that is not their intention. Or they will opt for a version of ethical understanding that remains in the cognitive sphere of traditional normative approaches to ethics as elaborated in Part One of Chapter Four.



Fran clearly did not care for either of these approaches, as was evidenced in the language she employed to speak about her understandings in her first interview. She spoke of her desire for students to be active agents in '*find[ing]* an ethical framework.' She spoke of her role as '*help[ing]* kids with this', '*see[ing]* if this has *resonance* for them', and that 'all positions [were] up for criticism.' None of this language as contextualised speaks of a prescribed moral position that students are required to adopt. Fran's years of classroom experience combined with her self-regulation and even-temperedness enabled her to navigate the situation described above in a manner that kept the discussion open rather than it being shut down by teacher intervention.

## **Justin (History)**

*I feel that ethics generally comes from a strong family base, with important lessons about what is right and wrong being taught and learnt at home.*

Justin was keen to be involved in the study, however he did not have a Year Nine or Ten class, which were the levels I had chosen as a focus. He did have a Year Eight History class, and being in his first year of teaching at School A, he was attracted to the opportunity to work alongside more experienced colleagues in the study and benefit from their mentoring and modelling. As no other History teachers volunteered for the study at his school, it seemed appropriate to invite Justin to participate, cognisant that Year Eight level students would possibly respond in both similar and different ways to engaging with ethical perspectives in their subject. Justin's reflections on the way the class interacted with the material suggests some issues connected to the maturity level of students in Year Eight, but equally point to the particular combination of individual personalities within that group:

The maturity of some of the individuals in the class is quite low and they simply cannot cope with discussing things in a forum type environment. There are also some quite bold personalities in the class who tend to dominate these discussions meaning that some of my findings may not be an indication of the class as a whole, rather a smaller group of individuals who dominated and influenced the rest of the class. (Journal entry)

Levels of behavioural, cognitive and emotional maturity are likely to be diverse within class groups across Years Eight to Ten as students are aged between thirteen and sixteen and experiencing intense developmental change and growth. This will inevitably present some challenges in choosing pedagogy which holds both the exploratory and discursive nature of ethically focused discussion as well as the behavioural boundaries that maintain group functionality.

Following his colleagues' lead, Justin spent a couple of lessons introducing the idea of ethics to his students through a dilemma discussion approach. He found the students' responses 'quite an eye opener'. The scenarios involved what to do on finding an unnamed wallet containing \$70 in the school yard, seeing a friend deliberately scratching a teacher's car, being asked to give an account to school authorities about a fight witnessed involving a friend, removing a child from a neglectful home environment. Justin's journal responses indicate his surprise at students' responses, but also his attempt to make sense of the stark contrast with his own values. In respect of the lost wallet, over half the class said they would take the money and run. On reflection Justin remarked:

They knew what was 'legally' the right thing to do however were still OK with doing the thing that was going to help them. This gives an insight into the students' view on the law. This may [also] be a reflection on how their home lives play out. At home their property, money etc. may not be respected and they may have had things stolen from them by family members or other members of the community which therefore gives the students the feeling that it is OK to take something if you're not going to get caught! (Journal entry)

In the other scenarios Justin noted that loyalty to friends was the strongest value that emerged as a determinant of students' chosen actions. In respect of the friend scratching a teacher's car, he said, 'many of the students felt that the loyalty to the friend far outweighed the feeling of responsibility to report this as a crime.' Justin had postulated something quite different about the place of loyalty in the lives of his students, 'I had predicted that some students, due to key people abandoning them, would have a diminished sense of loyalty. This is not so! As I found out later in the lesson it almost enhances this as a value.' He was less surprised to discover

respect for the law was low in this group. These discussions provided Justin with an insight into his students' ethical worlds and new understandings of their internal psychological dynamics. His response was less 'judgmental' in quality than his colleague, Peter's. Justin didn't abandon or side-line his own ethical views on the matters discussed, but stepped empathetically into his students' shoes to see and feel the world as they might. This experience undoubtedly assisted Justin in enhancing the teacher - student relationship in the classroom.

Five minutes before the end of this introductory sequence, a student asked, 'What has this got to do with History?' Justin explained that, 'ethics and ethical reasoning changes over time. Something that seems like the totally wrong thing to do now may have seemed fair back then.' This comment captures perfectly the dynamic of mutual enhancement between the ethical and the subject of History. Further, in his interview Justin said that his focus as a History teacher was the development of historical empathy in his students and that the ethical lens seemed to be a perfect tool to work towards the achievement of this. The History unit covered was about Medieval Europe and the Black Death. Justin set aside three lessons to explore questions to advance ethical exploration: 1. What happens when people get desperate? 2. The Jewish people were blamed at times for the spread of the black death. Why were people looking for someone to blame? 3. Do you think it is OK that families abandoned their children during the time of the plague if they became infected?

In discussing the first question students demonstrated a capacity for some complexity in ethical thinking in that they recognised it would be possible to defend some actions given specifics of context that may not be easily defended in different circumstances. They had obviously listened to Justin's earlier explanation about the importance of contextuality in determining ethical action. The second question emerged because Nazi Germany had been raised in discussing the first question, and scapegoating is a response that arises out of fear and desperation. To explore the third question, Justin gave students a scenario to consider, taking account of a common practice adopted by parents in the period of the Black Death, of abandoning children who displayed symptoms of the illness in order to save the rest of the family, 'There was a family, in medieval times, with six members,

mother, father, four children. They had been hearing about this terrible disease spreading through Europe and now Timmy (the youngest son) was starting to show symptoms of the plague.' Students were asked to write a piece from the point of view of one of the parents of the family. This was a task that Justin believed would indicate his students' capacity to demonstrate historical empathy and the way concepts of ethics and the ethical are shaped by history.

Justin noted with some disappointment:

The responses were varied, however there was seemed to be an inability for the students to relate to the change in ethics over time. Most students wrote that they were not going to turn the child out on the street...I am sure that this is their point of view and not the one they think the parents may have had at the time. (Journal entry)

Despite the roller coaster experience of outcomes, Justin's summation of the experience overall was positive in respect of students' understanding of History and their ethical development:

I felt like it really got the students thinking about why we study History and the fact that we really need to learn from the events of the past if we are ever going to move forward as humans. I also felt that it was a really good way to make history more relevant to the students. It meant that the students had to think from someone else's point of view which is a fantastic skill to ensure that they are compassionate to other people's situations. (Journal entry)

Although Justin spoke in his first interview of ethics as the process of discerning right from wrong action, aligning with a cognitively dominated normative ethics approach, his written reflections and his approach to teaching the historical content with the ethical perspective in mind, suggests a less definite, more complex and nuanced appreciation of ethics. Whilst his students' responses in the initial lesson differed markedly from his own, he took this as an opportunity to reflect empathetically on how their views may have been formed thus modelling an ethical relationship to them reminiscent of Levinas' preference for the *other* over *self*. In fact, empathy is the *through-line* of his work in the study, pointing to an understanding of ethics as principled action tempered by an appreciation of the

impact of powerful factors that shape human experience. Principled action calls to mind a virtue ethics approach, yet the awareness of the 'humanity' of human experience also echoes dispositions of the ethics of care.

## **Jillian (History)**

*In History we talk so much about what is right, what is wrong, what is good, what is bad, what is acceptable behaviour...you're talking about human kind, about how people respond to things.*

Jillian, at School C, was teaching a unit titled 'Youth and Resistance in Nazi Germany'. The film *Before the fall* was a central focus of this unit. It concerns the experiences of a number of boys in one of the National Political Academies under the Nazi regime in the 1940s. Through the perspectives of different characters, the film asks what enables an individual to have the courage to stand up against a regime when they know their protest will be futile. Consistent with Jillian's comments about her organic understanding of and approach to ethics, her classroom practice was similarly fluent, 'Teaching ethics hasn't been an independent lesson as such but integrated throughout the unit and discussed when it felt right and apposite to do so.'

In writing and talking about her teaching within this study, it is clear that one experience in the classroom stands out as profoundly affecting for Jillian, 'We were lucky enough to get Helena's grandad (a Holocaust survivor) to come and talk...in the intimacy of the classroom. He had never spoken in a public forum before...always refused. However, for Helena, his daughter's daughter, he said ok.' This event did not occur because of the focus of this study, it was an exquisite coincidence which was undoubtedly rich and challenging for the students. However, Jillian's own experience of this event is what dominates her written reflection:

He stared right at me for the whole sixty minutes and I gave him my whole attention and was trying desperately with my facial expressions to give him the support and encouragement he needed. The girls were beautifully behaved and reverential, but I don't think they actually comprehended the

enormity - the profundity - of what he was telling us. I don't know if they can - they are too young, too naïve, too innocent - and that in itself is a wonderful thing. Since I have become a mother, my own tolerance and stoicism when listening to such horrors has gone to pot. I just think of the separation of the children from their parents and it just kills me - and Franz was a young boy, twelve, when the Nazis came to power and lost both parents and four siblings. (Journal entry)

Jillian was intensely engaged with this man's story. Her interpretation of her students' responses and their capacity for deep comprehension was shaped by this. Jillian's experience and the strong emotional engagement in this space, spoken of earlier by Peter and Justin, points to the presence or activation of enhanced personal awareness in teachers when engaging in ethics-related discussions and activities in the classroom.

Jillian continued:

I noticed that Franz always called the Germans 'them'. Not once did he call them Germans. At the end of it he implored the girls never to hold hatred to another people, another religion, another colour or creed. It was terribly powerful and the next lesson we had a really frank discussion if this could ever happen in Australia in the twenty-first century. We chucked political correctness out the window and we discussed stereotypes - particularly Asian ones - as we have so many Asian girls and we looked at the currents of racism that exist at our school. It made some of them uncomfortable, but they were honest, and it was great to hear some of the Asian girls in the class be able to say what they think is really going on and what attitudes they believe some of the Anglo girls hold. I loved it - it challenged all of us. (Journal entry)

Jillian is clearly a passionate teacher who engages with her subject area of History in a strongly affective manner. Some may view the step she took in the class discussion recounted above as courageous, others may consider it foolhardy - it was certainly risky on a number of levels. The ensuing discussion with her class which she recounts above may well have occurred apart from her participation in

this study; however, she clearly viewed the event as connected to the ethical as it is highlighted in her written reflection.

Jillian had previously referred to the central task of ethics as the cultivation of *good people*. Here it is evident that whatever is meant by 'good people' and whether indeed the phrase is inherently problematic, she sees this as something that can be enacted by students within their immediate milieu, not something as simply equipping them for adult life. Leveraging the historical empathy evident in her students as they listened to the holocaust survivor (an experience emotionally heightened as this person was the grandfather of one of their classmates), she was able to connect into her students' experience of tensions that were clearly alive and active just beneath the surface of the school's polite daily life. She describes the experience as 'challenging' for all.

Late in her second interview Jillian commented on a growing awareness pertaining to the way in which she had implemented ethics and ethical understanding in her classroom. The two experiences with her students recounted above were without doubt personally affecting for all. However, with the assistance of reflective distance, Jillian remarked that she had in fact been promoting her own ethical perspectives rather than creating critical agency in her students:

The one thing that I worry about is whose morality am I giving them? I'm giving them mine, they're learning me. It's just gut instinct, I should look at what I'm trying to do here.

The experience of bringing ethics and ethical understanding to students precipitated something of an ethical crisis for Jillian, as it did for Peter, though in a slightly different way. Jillian's comment points to issues that always surround the power differential in teacher - student relationships, but which are augmented in this sphere where the shaping of students as moral persons is an explicitly aim. Jillian's discomfort and uncertainty recalls Säfström's (2003) characterisation of *teaching otherwise* which takes Levinas' *alterity of the other* as its departure point (see discussion in Chapter Three), as a risky business. Säfström explains, 'teaching can become otherwise than teaching when it is not repressive and directed to the self-same. Teaching otherwise is an endlessly open exposure, an unfolding of

sincerity in welcoming the other in which no slipping away is possible' (p. 29). Jillian's experience as recounted above suggests that the General Capability of *Ethical understanding* occupies a unique place in this suite of innovations within the *Australian Curriculum*. Teachers themselves are confronted in various ways, leading to their own deeper thinking about the complexity of ethical understanding and being.

## **Lily (Mathematics)**

*...responsible learning and informed decision making...*

Lily's class was a General Mathematics Year Eleven group at School C. They were in the first year of their Higher School Certificate (New South Wales). Although the General Capabilities do not extend in the formal curriculum to the so-called post-compulsory years, Lily had a great deal of flexibility in her curriculum which had been designed for students who struggle with Mathematics. She felt there was plenty of time and space to integrate ethical understanding and that it would potentially enhance student engagement and consequentially advance students' mathematical capacities.

The topic was Statistics, pithily titled 'Converting bits and bytes'. Lily chose to use a range of newspaper articles where statistics were quoted and used to contribute significantly to the point of view of the writer. Her aim was for students to examine the quoted statistics 'forensically', looking at both what was and wasn't there. She described this task as *reliable and responsible* interpretation. The topics of the articles were diverse - one exploring global standards of broad band speeds, another arguing that Sydney is the best place in the world in which to live. She noted the students' responses, '[It] surprised the students that these were published articles - once they analysed how bad the data was!' Whilst students gained these new insights, they were not engaged in the way Lily had hoped. She commented, 'Students found it difficult - used to years of text-book style questions, but this is real life Maths where not all the information is given and you have to go and find it.' Lily was certainly concerned that her students would be able to see that 'numbers have moral values when placed in a context', and that Mathematical



knowledge and skills are a tool for critique and evaluation in diverse life contexts and experiences. Lily's approach, which is largely cognitive and emphasises critical thinking, resonates with strategies for moral education being adopted in Europe through organisations like *Ethika* (see Chapter Two). The emphasis on rationality also aligns strongly with one of the three strands in the General Capability of *Ethical understanding* - 'Reasoning in decision making and actions'.

Whilst Lily's implementation of ethics and ethical understanding in her Mathematics classroom was consonant with the description she gave in the first interview and few surprises were encountered in this respect, there were two areas of concern she raised regarding her practice. Lily found herself wondering about whether her own practice in relation to teaching the curriculum reflected an ethical stance:

At the moment what I include is ad hoc and generated differently every year for different students. One year I may give a statistics assignment which considers ethical issues of developing countries say and another year I may not do it at all. Are issues of equity across classes, years, schools etc. a problem? (Interview, July 30<sup>th</sup>)

Reflecting further about this orientation toward the ethical in her teaching, which has been present for many years, she expressed some doubt and concern about the validity and robustness of her approach:

I have no formal training qualifications to teach ethics. I have not been to any 'pd' [professional development] course which deals with how you teach ethics, teach ethically or lead discussions with students about ethical issues. If anything at times I am imposing my value judgements on students based on my general knowledge which may not always be that deep. (Interview, July 30<sup>th</sup>)

This disarmingly honest reflection points to a reality that actually reflects the position of all the participants in the study, bar Alice and Natalie, that touches upon the matter of 'qualification'. Whilst this comment also raises issues of pedagogy and professional learning, it points to Lily's questioning of what constitutes 'qualification' for the bringing of ethics into the classroom and whether lived experience can be recognised as a valid knowledge source in this field.

Finally, like several other participants in the study, in taking up the challenge to implement this capability into their subject teaching, Lily found her own practice being called into question. The capability of *Ethical understanding* again presents itself as profoundly different to its other six companion capabilities in that it has questions to pose to both learner and teacher.

## **Archie (Mathematics)**

*...not necessarily what you're discussing but how you're discussing.*

Archie taught what he described as a 'low ability, low perseverance, low resilience' Year Ten class in Mathematics at School B. The Mathematics topic for study was 'Simultaneous Linear Functions and Graphs'. In recounting his experience of integrating ethics and ethical understanding into this topic, Archie spoke of two notable occasions during the unit. The first took place when students were learning about simultaneous equations. Providing a real-life context for the application of the mathematical theory, Archie provided students with information about the costs of mobile phone plans. As students discovered the hidden costs of the plans the discussion turned to the lack of transparency in advertising. Archie commented, 'they said, well this is something, that you just don't do Maths in a Maths room all the time.' This new awareness in his students was reinforced when the class considered an arborist's audit of trees on the school site and how this compared to the 'story' of selected trees that trigonometrical calculations told. They were much more alert as to how the differences they identified in the two sources of information could be used in the service of contesting narratives about the future of the trees on the site.

Archie recorded his work with his class in a two-page table consisting of summary data that provided dates, lesson numbers and dot point comments for each. In the comments cells he provided a description of the Mathematics focus of each lesson and for some, not all, a reflective comment. Overall the unit comprised twenty-four lessons. In ten of these Archie noted a link to ethical issues and discussion. Apart from the examples mentioned above, Archie touched on the following topics: wage earnings over time; new taxation laws and their social class implications;

construction of stairs and related legal liability; presenting a range of solutions to a problem rather than just 'the solution'; checking the validity of solutions in 'real' contexts and the bridge engineering disaster at the Maccabiah Games; pollution outputs of cars compared to motorbikes, and selective sampling and distortion of data in the climate change debate.

Archie said that he was 'slightly surprised' that his students 'got the link', that is, the link between Mathematics and ethics, that Mathematics possesses an ethical dimension. This surprise is perhaps understandable given Archie's view of ethics and ethical understanding that he shared during the first interview. He was doubtful as to whether an intersection between Mathematics and ethics in the domain of content existed. Rather, he saw the relevance of ethics to lie in the dynamics of interpersonal relationships in the classroom. In his reflections after teaching his unit, this latter aspect is barely mentioned. What dominates his recount is the way in which the presence of the ethical engaged his students, how it brought Mathematics alive for them. What is striking as an observer of Archie's work and experience is that he worked so very hard to connect the mathematical content to contexts where an ethical dimension would emerge for his students - note the broad list at the end of the preceding paragraph. The more he opened such pathways, the more his students travelled them with enthusiasm. As a consequence, a subject perceived to be largely theoretical and difficult by students was transformed into an integrative experience of learning for them in which they were alerted to ways in which their knowledge could be put to work in the service of justice and active citizenship.

In his choice of real world examples, a pattern emerges that points to a presupposition about the nature of ethics that underpins Archie's thinking. Many of his examples are constructed to use mathematics to expose dishonesty that approaches, or crosses the line into illegality. This suggests a conflation of 'law' and ethics. The Ethics Centre (2018) in Sydney writes of the difficulties of definition in the field of ethics and of the complexity that emerges when attention is paid to this challenge, 'There is a temptation to see the law and ethics as the same - so long as we're fulfilling our legal obligations we can consider ourselves "ethical"'. It is suggested that this is misguided in two ways, 'First, the law outlines a basic

standard of behaviour necessary for our social institutions to keep functioning...Secondly, there may be times when obeying the law would require us to act against our ethics or morality' (Ethics Centre, 2018). The concluding review notes, 'Some philosophers have argued that a person's conscience is more binding on them than any law, which suggests to the letter of the law won't be an adequate substitute for ethical reflection' (Ethics Centre, 2018).

This commentary is not included here as a clumsy hint for Archie that the understanding of ethics that he shared through his Mathematics lessons with his students was somehow faulty or inadequate. Rather it serves as a helpful reminder that multiple lenses can be used in this field, and that each of these can provide a perspective that, when combined and layered with lenses from other subject areas can create richness and depth of vision for students.

## **Natalie (Science)**

*In Natalie's view, ethics, whilst drawn from an individual's value system, has its focus clearly on the wellbeing of the wider community and that community's relationship with the physical world.*

Natalie was clear in her first interview that ethics in her subject area was strongly cognitive and aligned with critical thinking, '[it is]...really about students exploring and researching, rather than anecdotal emotional evidence. They're exploring the facts and making decisions for themselves.' Consistent also with a key focus espoused in her first interview, (the nexus between the wellbeing of human communities and the physical world), the unit of work Natalie chose for her Year Nine class at School C was about Radioisotopes, with a particular focus on nuclear power plants and electricity generation. She wanted her students to consider whether we should have any nuclear power plants in Australia. Natalie, along with several of the participants had only glanced at the *Australian Curriculum* framework for the General Capability of *Ethical understanding* prior to the first interview. Yet, in designing classroom activities for her students she used the three organising elements ('Understanding ethical concepts and issues', 'Reasoning in

decision making and actions’ and ‘Exploring values, rights and responsibilities’) as her guide.

To begin with, the Science content was foregrounded: the science behind nuclear power plants; energy transformation; fuel requirements, and how uranium is mined, transported and used in power plants. The advantages of generating electricity in this way were compared with coal fired power stations and impacts on the environment. The causes and short- and long-term effects of recent accidents at Fukushima and Chernobyl were investigated. The advantages, including economic benefits, of nuclear power for Australia and the possible impacts on the environment were considered. Already it is clear that ethical dimensions were present in Natalie’s framing of the Science content as she moves from providing students with a theoretical understanding of how nuclear power ‘works’ to how it ‘works’ in the world of materiality.

Students were then allocated to groups and asked to make a decision about whether we should have nuclear power plants in Australia. They used a mind map scaffold to list the positives and negatives of having nuclear power plants using the following areas as a framework: the short term; the long term; the Individual; Society, and Alternatives. They were asked to present this material to the class, and then to highlight the factors that most heavily influenced their decision. Natalie reported that 96% of students made their decision based on what would be good for society as a whole in the long term. It is noteworthy that this ‘result’ endorses the position Natalie had articulated about the broad canvas on which she believes ethics needs to be played out.

Following this, students were assigned to designated action groups: the local residents; the nuclear power plant construction company; environmentalists; potential nuclear power plant workers, and local businesses representatives. Each group was asked to present at a mock local council meeting to plead their case for or against a nuclear power plant in their local area. A representative from each group was also allowed to ask questions of the group presenting. To add complexity to this perspective-taking exercise, students were asked to join a group which they thought might hold a position at odds with their personal views.

Natalie explained that this final requirement was engineered to build and promote empathy in students.

In reviewing the unit, Natalie summarised the ethical aspects covered by drawing from both Science and *Ethical understanding* descriptors: 'balancing the freedom of speech with the defamation of others'; 'investigating reasons for clashes of beliefs in issues of personal, social and global importance'; 'analysing the objectivity and subjectivity behind decision making where there are many possible consequences', and 'using reasoning skills to prioritise the relative merits of points of view about complex ethical dilemmas'. Natalie also surveyed her students about their responses to the unit. In the questions that followed, students were given the response options of Strongly Agree, Agree or Disagree:

1. After completing the activities, I now have a deeper understanding of the Science behind how Nuclear Power Plants work.
2. I enjoyed working collaboratively with my peers on these activities.
3. Understanding the Science helped me to make an ethical decision.
4. I used to have an opinion about Nuclear Power Stations in Australia but after completing these activities my opinion has changed.
5. Doing these activities was a waste of time, I just prefer to learn the Scientific facts.
6. After doing these activities I have a greater appreciation for the difficulty people in authority have when making ethical decisions.
7. I would like to do more of these activities in Science in the future.

Natalie's construction of these survey statements and the response options provided, speak of a very specific understanding of the nature of ethical understanding in Science. From the outset, Natalie saw the role of the affective in her subject as minimal. She presented 'research and facts' and 'anecdotal emotional evidence' in a positive/negative binary. Although she was concerned to promote empathy in her students, this was in the service of understanding 'rationales' behind viewpoints in order to evaluate these on a cognitive and rational level. Natalie was thrilled with the positive responses from her students about how her approach to the topic had both engaged them and enhanced their appreciation of the Science content.

Natalie's enacting of ethics and ethical understanding within her Science class draws heavily on a cognitive rationalist approach to the field. The unit of work would fit neatly into the *Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues' Teaching character through subjects' curriculum* (see Jubilee Centre, n.d., c). It would also find a place in the Australian Values Education Project secondary curriculum units, and it also contains elements that resonate with the *Ethika* and *VaKE* approaches from Europe (see Chapter Two). It certainly stands as an example of the type of approach contained in the Australian Curriculum's *Ethical understanding* continuum. Natalie did use the organising elements of that documentation to plan her work but discovered deeper synchronicity when reviewing the unit against the more detailed content descriptors. This alignment is important to note: the nature of the content of Science appears to be well suited to both the broad categories and specific foci of the General Capability of *Ethical understanding*. This is not surprising given that the *Ethical understanding* continuum draws almost exclusively on teleological and deontological paradigms of Ethics as discussed in the preceding chapter. However, this does remind us that ethics as conceptualised in the literature and across the practice-based experiences of participants in this study, is much more expansive and holistic and that the current *Ethical understanding* continuum offers in comparison a somewhat limited conceptual framework.

## **Dina (Science)**

*I think of what's right or wrong – just morals.*

Dina, like her colleague Peter at School A, introduced her Year Nine Science class to some basic material about what constitutes ethics. Using the same material as Peter, she looked at what might be considered common ethical issues and how it is that we form our individual ethical positions. She was particularly interested to hear what her students already thought and knew. Dina noted that their response was initially one of bemusement, “Miss, why are we doing this in Science?” ... There was definitely confusion as to the relevance.’ She explained that ethical issues exist in all subject areas and that they would look at Science-specific issues in future classes but first she wanted to know what they thought ethics was about. Most

understood ethics to be about decision-making in respect of certain life issues. They also believed that ethics was a personal, individual matter. Dina was surprised by the level of interest, insight and complexity displayed by her students in the class discussion:

In a class that is so multicultural it was interesting to see many students agreed that differences in religion, the way we are brought up and the people we keep in our lives can create differences in our ethical understanding. (Journal entry)

The unit they were undertaking was in basic Physics, focusing on sound. Dina chose to investigate the use of a controversial device known as a 'mosquito alarm' (the frequency of the alarm means it can only be heard by people under approximately thirty years of age). This enabled her to address the Physics knowledge component of the unit as well as considering the ethical implications of this knowledge when applied in a 'real life' context in the form of the mosquito alarm. She developed a scenario where shopkeepers had installed mosquito alarms to deter loiterers around their shop entrances and then assigned roles to those who might be stakeholders in this situation (critics of the alarm, shopkeepers, teenagers, twenty to thirty year-olds, parents of teenagers, elderly citizens). Stakeholders were asked to develop their arguments in favour or against the use of the alarm in this way. The classroom subsequently became the venue for a 'town hall' style meeting where students were asked to present their perspectives in role, demonstrating ethical understanding from their given viewpoint. This appeared to involve perspective-taking and empathy. Dina reported that the students took the exercise very seriously and she noted students were 'able to see the different points of view, [and] learned how difficult it is to come to an agreement.'

Following on from this experience, Dina presented students with another 'live' issue to debate: Should deaf or hearing-impaired people be allowed to drive? This time she provided guiding questions for students to answer individually before conducting a whole class discussion. The questions were: 'Could this decision be damaging to someone or people in general? Do you know enough to make this decision? Which option will produce the most good? Which option best respects the rights of all? Which option best serves the community as a whole and not just



some members? What is your personal opinion on the above question?’ Dina was alarmed by the fact that:

...no students thought that the information or statistics regarding accidents and driving of deaf people was particularly important! I was very surprised to see their understanding of this question was quite limited...the “getting the facts” part of making an ethical decision was poorly demonstrated.

(Journal entry)

What is noteworthy in this second case is that Dina did not ‘frontload’ the issue with any Physics-specific information, her questions focused on the ethical dimension, assuming that the relevant subject knowledge information had been automatically brought into play by the students. Students however moved immediately to the later questions that essentially asked them to weigh the ‘rights’ of the parties involved. She felt that these responses were weakened somewhat by the absence of the relevant subject content about sound and perception. These two models used by Dina in her teaching demonstrate a more and less robust approach respectively to the incorporation of ethical dimensions within school subjects. Finding the balance point between subject content and the ethical lens is a delicate matter of fine calibration.

Dina would have been able to ‘tick off’ many of the *Ethical understanding* descriptors for Levels Five and Six in the unit she taught. As noted in the final comments regarding Natalie’s work, which was also with a Year Nine Science class, the cognitive/rational focus of the learning continuum descriptors support the more ‘objective’ and procedural approach of the scientific method. It is interesting to note however that both teachers employed role play as a pedagogical strategy to engage students and promote the capacity to appreciate different perspectives. In employing this pedagogy both are acknowledging the importance of the affective dimension, in this case the disposition of empathy, to enhance student understanding and knowledge. Lovat (2011), reviewing the connection between values education and the cultivation of holistic learning writes of the research conducted by Immordino Yang and Damasio (2007) in the field of neuroscience and education which, ‘re-conceive cognition as entailing affect and social impulses working together to impel action, including moral behaviour’ (p. 149). Lovat

argues that this, 'seems to confirm the need for new pedagogy that engages the whole person in all dimensions of human development, including moral development' (p. 149). This also links to the broader conception of ethics advocated for by care ethicists and those who follow Levinas such as Todd and Biesta discussed in Part One of Chapter Four.

## Harry (Science)

*...about interacting with others, the way you present yourself, being a positive member of your community.*

Like his colleague Archie, when Harry came to work with his Year Nine Science class at School B, the shape ethics and ethical understanding took in the classroom was markedly different to what he spoke about in his first interview. The curriculum focus was the nervous system and homeostasis. As Harry explained how the body reacts to cold by shivering and heat by sweating, he noted that the bulk of our knowledge about hypothermia is based on experiments forcibly conducted by the Nazis on prisoners of war, particularly Jewish people. This, for Harry was where the ethical opened up in his Science class: what should our disposition be towards valid, useful, life-saving data that has been collected in the context of human abuse and the negation of life? Harry reported:

They could see the dilemma and how appalling it must have been for the people who were part of those experiments and many of them who died in those experiments. But it was interesting that at the end there was a general feeling that if it saves lives now we should use it and while they don't feel that the means justifies the ends necessarily there was a feeling that it's happened, we can't do anything about that, but if we can use that information in a positive way to save lives then we should use it. (Interview, August 15<sup>th</sup>)

Harry's framing of the ethical in this class in terms of a dilemma discussion, follows one of Kohlberg's main instruments in approaching moral education. Harry described his students' responses as *pragmatic*, 'yes they thought it was terrible, it shouldn't have happened, they didn't approve of what occurred but what can you

do, it's history.' He observed that, 'We did have an interesting conversation and the students were perplexed', and that 'Yes, some of their views were a little lacking in compassion - they were saying what's the big deal history's happened'. However, Harry chose to keep the discourse at an essentially cognitive level rather than engaging his own and his students' affective responses, which are threaded as an undercurrent through his narrative. Harry chose *not* to pursue connections between the dilemma he had framed with contexts more immediate and familiar to his students which may have furthered and deepened their engagement. He felt under a great deal of pressure to cover set subject content as exams were looming. Recalling this he commented, 'I thought I can't have the rest of the lesson going on this...'

As soon as Harry began his classroom work on his unit, he framed ethics and ethical understanding differently to the way he spoke of what an ethical presence might entail in his first interview. It seems that ethical aspects spilled out of the subject content quite naturally and fulsomely, and that these were taken up by students with an enthusiasm that Harry felt needed to be curtailed. Harry's primary concern was to ensure adequate coverage of Science content knowledge for an upcoming whole year level common test. He felt quite overwhelmed by his students' engagement with the ethical dimension of the topic and there is a hint of concern at the seeming ease with which they took up their 'pragmatic' stance. Like Peter, Fran and Justin, Harry was shaken a little by his students' views and dispositions, but unlike the other participants he did not consciously explore this response. It was rather swallowed up in the tyranny of the agreed teaching schedule and not revisited. These encounters with the *other* have resonance with a Levinasian framing of ethics and the radical challenge that that represents. The experiences of Harry, Peter, Fran and Justin highlight the relational dimension of ethics, not simply in the sense of considering an ethical dilemma from a relational point of view, but in recognising that the teaching relationship in the classroom is ethical at its core. This aspect is given fuller consideration in Chapter Seven.

## Synthesising reflections

This study began with two research questions, the first being, 'What understandings of ethics do teachers construct when they explicitly teach *Ethical understanding* in their discipline areas?' *Ethical understanding* is one of seven General Capabilities in the *Australian Curriculum*. The vignettes developed in this chapter capture the work of teachers as they sought to implement these understandings in their classrooms, and represent the complex ideas and perceptions about the substance and meaning of ethics and ethical understanding that emerged. Whilst commonalities and patterns exist as have been noted along the way, no single 'understanding' dominates.

The *Australian Curriculum* defines 'capability' as, 'encompass[ing] knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions'. (ACARA, n.d., d) 'Knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions' address and draw upon both the cognitive and affective domains of the individual. This holistic understanding of 'capability' is reflected in the *breadth* of the implementation of ethics and ethical understanding in participants' classrooms. It is not however reflected in the documentation of the General Capability of *Ethical understanding*. This capability, as has been noted a number of times in this chapter, focuses on the cognitive/rational dimension of ethics and ethical understanding. This actually fails to honour the *Australian Curriculum's* own definition of *capability* and neglects to recognise the diversity of emphases that are possible across the spectrum of disciplines which will be discussed further below.

In teaching their units, several participants found the personal, inter-personal and affective dimensions of ethics and ethical understanding to be perspectives that came to the fore in their classes. It was not the case that ethics as rational and critical thinking was either deemed unimportant or neglected. Rather it was considered by several participants that the ethical draws upon, and requires us to engage with our whole 'selves', not only single, discrete compartments of our 'selves'. This experience echoes in a small way the now prominent position that the ethics of care with its focus on the caring relation, now occupies in the landscape of contemporary ethical discourse. The idea of a personal moral compass was also

present in some of the participants' experiences examined here. This notion traces its lineage back to Aristotle and the tradition of virtue ethics which has evolved from the ancient Greek philosophers. In the *Ethical understanding* learning continuum there is scant evidence of concepts derived from the ethics of care or virtue ethics underpinning the framing of the descriptors. Further, the presence of both cognitive and affective perspectives in relation to the ethical in participants' experience, also resonates with the work of researchers such as Darcia Narvaez, Mary Immordino-Yang and Antonio Damasio have undertaken over the last decade in the field of neuroscience and moral education. This body of work has utilised findings from neuroscience to argue that the dualistic separation of cognition and emotion is an artifice and that the two are intertwined from the beginning of life (see Narvaez, 'Neuroethics', 2012). Whilst this is a reality that many classroom practitioners are aware of both intuitively and experientially, curriculum policy and school structures are rarely framed around such an integrative understanding.

The experience of the participants in this study draws attention to the way in which the subject context shapes the complexion of ethics and ethical understanding in the classroom. For the Mathematics and Science teachers the ethical arose in the *real world* application of the content knowledge and skills of their subjects. In exploring ethics and ethical understanding in this way, they drew predominantly on critical thinking, grounding their activities and discussions in the normative ethical approaches of deontology and consequentialism. The focus was on *action* and the world external to the individual. In contrast, the English and History teachers found the ethical in *people*, historical and fictional, and their ways of *being* in the world. Whilst the action of individuals and groups in the external world was explored, the inner world of motivation, values and beliefs of these people was scrutinised and used as a provocation to students for personal reflection on their own inner worlds. This lived experience of implementing ethics and ethical understanding points to the need for the *Ethical understanding* learning continuum to be more comprehensive in its framing of what ethics is about and how it might appear in a diversity of subject classrooms.

## Conclusion

Framed as the second of a pair of chapters, this chapter examined the ways in which teachers' enactments of their views about ethics and ethical understanding in their subject classrooms, impacted upon the shape and substance of these. Informed by discussion in Part One of Chapter Four that critically canvassed scholarly views about recent turns in the field of Ethics, the analysis in this chapter has shown that the relational aspect of ethics grew in prominence for most teachers in the context of classroom practice. Further, although they may have held clear views about what constituted ethics and ethical understanding in their first interview before teaching their units, as discussed in Part Two of Chapter Four, taking these views into practice involved for most, some de-construction and re-construction of these.

Having examined the evolution of participants' views of ethics and ethical understanding through their experiences of taking this curriculum innovation into their classrooms, I turn in the following chapter to a consideration of the final research question of the study: What are teachers' views about the place of *Ethical understanding* in their subject area? This question will enable an exploration of the implications of the presence of *Ethical understanding* for student's learning of subject content.

## Chapter Six: Ethical understanding in subject areas

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Chapters Four and Five have explored participants' understandings of ethics and ethical understanding prior to, and after teaching units of work they prepared in which they sought to integrate and highlight the General Capability of *Ethical understanding*. Chapter Four also provided an overview of both the traditional and contemporary terrain of the field of Ethics in order to provide a lens and context for observing and interpreting the views shared by participants. Chapter Five's focus was on how these understandings were put to work in the classroom and how and why through this process these were confirmed, subverted, re-formulated, developed or transformed. In this chapter I turn to a consideration of the third of my research questions, What are teachers' views about the place of *Ethical understanding* in their subject area?

An exploration of participants' responses to this question yields, in the first instance, insights into the experience and impact of integrating a capability into core disciplines - a unique and significant structural feature of the *Australian Curriculum*. Can the integrity of both the capabilities and the disciplines be maintained in this structure?

The General Capabilities, apart from their individual content and focus, are also conceived of functionally as lenses to illuminate the disciplines and deepen disciplinary knowledge. The following discussion examines whether this is part of the participants' experience. That the capabilities are to be woven into the central disciplinary core is also in part a structural solution to the challenge of managing a bulging or crowded curriculum. Listening carefully to the lived experience of participants brought into view places of dissonance and stress that such an integrative approach can generate. Participants' responses further provided knowledge about the affordances of this particular capability's presence within the structure of the *Australian Curriculum*: that is how *Ethical understanding* might support and enhance learning in the core disciplines and more broadly the realisation of the goals of the *Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians* (2008).

The discussion in Chapter Two has already drawn attention to the key role of teachers in curriculum innovation. Teachers are sometimes positioned by policy makers and curriculum writers as mere conduits through which 'the curriculum' moves from its written, prescribed form into knowledge that takes up residence in the minds of students. This diminished, *production line* view of teachers' work is vastly removed from what I observed in this study. When this production-line view is in play, it can provoke in teachers active blocking and/or passive resistance to the sought-after change, despite the fact that the change may indeed be worthwhile. In this study teachers chose to participate in an exploration of a curriculum innovation which at the time, whilst embedded in the formal written curriculum, was not as yet required to be enacted in the implementation process. This unique context enabled the creative power of teachers as curriculum makers to emerge in ways unencumbered by the external pressures that are often present during the implementation phase of curriculum change.

In the first section of this chapter, I detail the *Australian Curriculum's* structural requirement of integrating capabilities into disciplines and how this suggests a view of their inherent centrality in the curriculum rather than their marginality. This case of integration is then placed within the wider educational discourse about this approach to curriculum. In doing, this issues of both epistemology and implementation are raised. I then turn to a description and discussion of the participants' experience of enacting *Ethical understanding* in their subject classrooms. Rather than considering each participant one by one as an individual case as in Chapters Four and Five, in this chapter their experiences are gathered and explored according to their subject areas. This structure assists in addressing one of the central concerns of this chapter - whether or not the capability of *Ethical understanding* is recognised as having a place within the disciplines. In the concluding remarks I argue that, based on the experience of this study's participants, the capability of *Ethical understanding* not only occupies a legitimate place within the four phase one disciplines of the *Australian Curriculum*, it contributes to their robustness and complexity.



## Curriculum integration

The *Australian Curriculum* provides scope and sequence documentation for all its General Capabilities, along with accompanying explicit links into aspects of core discipline content. Teachers are encouraged to seek out further opportunities within their disciplines to incorporate explicit teaching of the various capabilities. Turning to the General Capability of *Ethical understanding*, the assumption underpinning this structural feature is that the ethical is inherent in disciplines rather than something additional to be explored outside traditional school subjects. This, as noted earlier in this thesis, represents a departure from common practices in the field of moral education. In a 2013 study of teacher practice of Values education in Sweden and Turkey, Thornberg and Oğuz noted that participating teachers viewed values education as focusing largely on interpersonal relationships, ‘an everyday practice embedded in the stream of social interactions’ (p. 52). When asked to consider Values education in relation to their school subjects, they described the latter as ‘their ordinary practice’ and the former as something requiring ‘something...in addition to their ordinary practice’. By locating *Ethical understanding* within disciplines, the architects of the *Australian Curriculum* appear to be making a case for a broader application of this capability beyond simply the personal sphere, and for the merging of ‘ordinary’ and ‘in addition to ordinary’ practice.

This stance is consistent with activity in the field of moral education in schools in Australia that preceded the writing of the *Australian Curriculum*. The report of the *Values Education Good Practice Schools Project, At the Heart of What We Do: Values Education at the Centre of Schooling* (DEEWR, 2008), stated:

Good practice in values education requires schools to see values education as a whole of curriculum concept that informs all teaching and learning across the school. Values education is not a discrete program or part of an implicit hidden curriculum; it is a central principle underpinning the school curriculum offerings, the curriculum design, pedagogy, content and assessment. (p. 10)

In the Commonwealth Government's Values Education Program, resources to support the integration of values perspectives into learning areas were produced. These were distributed to all schools in Australia, however funding was not provided for professional learning to support their implementation. As a consequence, they have largely disappeared into dusty storerooms in schools, never to see the light of day. None of the participants in this study were aware of them, nor were they able to locate them to use them as a source of inspiration and modelling.

The notion of bringing the ethical into disciplinary studies can be located within a broader debate concerning curriculum integration. This debate raises two questions related to boundaries: firstly, locus – 'what belongs where?', and secondly, value – 'what must be included and what can be omitted? These questions strike at the heart of the epistemologies on which the curriculum (expressed both in framework documentation and syllabi and what is enacted by teachers in the classroom) is constructed. As Venville, Wallace, Rennie & Malone (2002) remark, 'integration is a stance about curriculum underpinned by certain ideological assumptions...associated with particular value positions about ways of knowing...Most of the arguments for, and against, integration appear to turn on an epistemological axis' (p. 62).

The exploration around twenty-first century skills and disciplinarity noted in Chapter Two is pertinent to this current discussion. In that section, arguments as to the affordances of disciplinarity by Young (2010, 2014), Muller (2010), Wheelahan (2010) and others were considered. In particular, it was argued that it is the disciplines that provide access to *powerful knowledge*. Yates and Millar (2016) delineate 'powerful knowledge' in this way, 'Knowledge is not powerful simply because of who possesses it but because its 'truth-seeking' form allows a progress and perspective that is beyond the immediate human interest or social origins' (p. 300). Similar arguments are marshalled by critics of curriculum integration. Venville (2012) suggests the epistemological critique runs along these lines, 'disciplines create a sense of order about the complex world and provide students with the specialised knowledge that they need to solve complicated,

discipline-based problems or to create rigorous explanations of focused aspects of the world' (p. 738).

In contrast, proponents of an integrated approach note that human experience is holistic in nature rather than discrete and compartmentalised. Fraser (2013) points to the work of Dewey in making the case for a holistic vision of the school curriculum, 'Dewey (1902) stated that within the curriculum, 'facts are torn away from their original place in experience and rearranged with reference to some general principle' (p. 19). Uhrmacher (1997) coins the phrase 'curriculum shadow' to describe the constraints that disciplinary boundaries can throw across initiatives that seek to breach or broaden such boundaries, again eschewing compartmentalised thinking. Additionally, others argue that the template of disciplinarity cannot contain the terrain of human inquiry and questioning. Drawing attention to this aspect of the nature of values and ethics, Webb (2007) comments, 'Subject disciplines are disciplines because they disdain that which is outside their traditional boundaries. Yet values and ethics questions do not necessarily follow the same boundaries' (p. 3).

The discourse concerning integration and disciplinarity in the school curriculum sketched briefly in the paragraphs above is often presented in dualistic terms, as if one approach must be chosen over the other. Philip Cam (2012) argues from a different perspective - that of a moral educator - for an integrative approach to curriculum. His comments have immediate pertinence for the General Capability of *Ethical understanding* in particular. He argues that whilst what he calls 'collaborative moral inquiry' might be afforded a position in the curriculum as a stand-alone subject, this is a perilous choice lacking wisdom. Cam remarks, 'It gives the impression that moral concerns are something apart from the rest of the curriculum, as if such things as history and science are on a permanent moral holiday' (p. 33). Cam's argument is not simply a plea and warrant for the place of moral education in the curriculum. Rather it offers potent support and respect for the riches and depth of disciplines and a means of enhancing these.

Teachers, often concerned with pragmatic issues, may resist curriculum integration as they may still be required to cover the same amount of subject

content but in less time. A concern for covering content may possibly be driven by external testing regimes, with student results underpinning school enrolments, funding and consequentially, program offerings. Student results may also be linked to staff performance review processes. Lingard, Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2013), reviewing the rise of testing regimes globally note the impact of this phenomenon on teachers, 'Comparative performance measures have been constructed as central to a vertical, one-way, top-down, one-dimensional form of accountability with restrictive and reductive effects on the work of principals and teachers' (p. 544). Perhaps also at play in such possible resistance are notions of professional identity and agency that teachers perceive are being ignored. Yates (2017) comments, 'Teachers and lecturers are not just malleable instruments of any new policy; they have previously formed identities and experiences that they bring to the table' (p. 4). These aspects will be taken up at length in Chapter Seven, but are noted here as potentially significant factors in the way that teachers view movements toward curriculum integration.

As an integrative curriculum structure is what was proposed in the *Australian Curriculum*, participants were asked about their views concerning the place of ethics and ethical understanding in their disciplines, both before and after the teaching of their units. The views and experiences of participants are recounted and examined according to their subject areas in this chapter, with a synthesised concluding discussion. This approach has been adopted in order to provide an insight into the particular complexion and complexity of ethics and ethical understanding as embodied in distinctive disciplines.

## **History**

Of the three History teachers in the study, two were women from the same school, an independent girls' school with a strong emphasis on academic achievement, in Sydney, New South Wales. These were teachers of vast experience. The other teacher was in his first year of teaching and located in a co-educational state school in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, Victoria.

Fran, from the independent girls' school in New South Wales, prepared a unit of work for her Year Ten History class focused on the experience of youth in Nazi Germany. In the first interview, she spoke of ethical perspectives being 'part of the fabric' of her subject and of ethics 'being at the core of us as human beings.' She had no concern as to the appropriateness of what she was being asked to do; indeed, she viewed ethics as a perfect tool to support what she conceived of as a core purpose of her subject:

History is like the psychology of a nation – what has shaped us in the past leads to who we are now. With History, there are lots and lots of links. Based on what you know about the past, how can you be a more critical thinker in the present about what's going on? (Interview, April 4)

In the second interview having completed the unit of work with her students, Fran was delighted at the outcomes for them, describing their experience as 'richer'. Students developed an understanding of the social milieu of Germany in 1939 and why it was that people supported Hitler. Whilst there is perhaps no more iconic topic than Nazi Germany for an ethics focus, it is to be noted that this was a happy coalescence of the school's curriculum schedule with the study, and not a deliberate matching exercise. Fran challenged them to consider how this intersected with their own ethical grid. She then directed students to turn their attention to contemporary Australia and identify the groupings (social, ethnic, political, religious etc.) within society that they were aware existed. In deconstructing assumptions held by different groups about other groups in contemporary Australia, Fran was able to develop her students' perception of, and empathy for, the German context of the 1930s. She commented, 'They saw a more direct application.' Fran placed the two societies in parallel and noted their commonalities. In doing so she enabled her students to use historical knowledge and insight to illuminate their awareness and understanding of their immediate context. This began the process of teasing out the implications of this for their own ways of being ethical persons in the present.

Fran commented that the project:

...forced me to be more explicit. I probably wouldn't have given as much consideration to the underlying theme which emerged...as we linked it back

to Australia...I wouldn't have made as many links to their own lives.

(Interview, July 30<sup>th</sup>)

In her view, the conscious and explicit focus on ethics and the planning and pedagogy that made this possible, resulted in enhanced student learning in the field of History and broader reflective thinking:

I don't think that any girls could finish the topic, as we have in past times, thinking that that could never happen to us, which I think is a really good place to be – it's greyer, being grey is a more adult place to be. (Interview, July 30<sup>th</sup>)

Fran's observation aligns with recent research about the role of History as a discipline in the school curriculum by Yates, Woelert, Millar and O'Connor (2017). These authors suggest that across the world nations have been focusing on the role of History in the curriculum as a formator of national identity and a promoter of social integration. They note that in this discourse History is considered, 'in terms of the kinds of people being produced...and in relation to the question of what knowledge (or beliefs) students should acquire about the world, their country and their place in it from education' (p. 96). Fran's experience suggests that the explicit presence of an ethical lens enabled the formative, critical dispositions of History, endorsed by the teachers in Yates et al's study (see p. 98) as core to its purpose, to be developed and deepened in a particularly dynamic way.

Although Fran had felt confident in preparing and developing her unit of work with an ethical emphasis and enthusiastically supported this approach, she did speak of the increased workload this entailed. This provided another strong warrant, in her view, for integrating ethical understanding into disciplines:

I just think that teachers are so busy day to day, that it needs to be in the actual subject documentation, rather than something separate. Like ICT, we need to write *Ethical understanding* into our objectives and programs.

(Interview, July 30<sup>th</sup>)

The documentation consisted of separate documents for each of the disciplines and each of the capabilities. Fran was looking for greater support from the curriculum authority in the process of integrating curriculum elements. This was not because she wanted simply to be a conduit for implementation as discussed in

Chapter Two, but so that her time could be expended on the creative and appropriate shaping of material to the specific needs of her students and her context.

Jillian, teaching at the same school as Fran, was also teaching the same unit of work. In our first interview she explained that she saw ethics as 'fundamental to teaching' and considered *Ethical understanding* a 'beautiful fit for History'. As was the case for Fran, Jillian saw the ethical and the subject of History as integral to each other, 'The whole point of teaching History is the ethical – the history of people and their relationships with one another.' This summation echoes the claim of Stow (2000, p. 67) who, in writing about the curriculum in England and Wales, suggested that one could argue that there is no subject that has stronger links to values education and citizenship than History (*Ethical understanding* arguably being closely allied to these two areas).

Jillian described its role, however, as being of a distinctly different order to the other capabilities. She cited ICT (Information and Communication Technology), as a contrasting example, that is to be integrated into core disciplines, 'ICT integration is where we're going in terms of presenting and delivering. Ethics is not about delivering. Part of it has to come from within, part of it has to be core to who you are.' (Interview, July 29<sup>th</sup>) This comment has resonance with Fran's description of ethics as being part of the 'fabric' - it is not simply a tool for leveraging something else, it is actually part of the 'something else', in this case, the subject, History. Both Jillian's and Fran's comments point to conceptions of ethics and ethical understanding that privilege relational and affective knowing and awareness. Significantly they both see this conception as an inherent dimension of the study and teaching of the subject of History as they understand it.

Justin, a beginning teacher, was committed to the development of ethical thinking, understanding and action in his students. However, he did not find the 'fit' with his unit of work on The Black Death in the medieval period in a Year Eight History class, quite as 'neat' as did Fran and Jillian with their context of Nazi Germany. Justin was strongly committed to the belief that there is 'no such thing as an Ethics teacher - everyone needs to have those conversations with kids.' He did, however,

find the practicalities of establishing the connection between subject content and the ethical dimension, difficult. Following the advice of a more experienced teacher, who was also a participant in the project, Justin began with a general lesson asking students for their views about what to do in four contemporary scenarios. This served as an entry point into considering different perspectives and how these are shaped before tracking this back into his subject-specific unit. A series of lessons covering historical content about the Black Death followed. Justin then took as a focus for three lessons how ethics and ethical reasoning can change over time, linking the Black Death period with students' contemporary context and other historical knowledge they possessed. In the second interview, he confessed he felt like he had, 'forced the ethical in.' Yet, as Justin continued to recount his experience, he noted a central challenge for him in teaching History (or rather how History was required to be taught in his school context), was its relevance for students. The project's focus on the ethical perspective, provided Justin with a means to address this concern, despite the difficulty he initially experienced, '[I] struggled with the relevance of History until I started to approach this in this way.'

Writing in his journal with even more distance after having completed teaching his unit, Justin highlighted positive impacts that the inclusion of the ethical dimension had for the study of History:

I felt like it really got the students thinking about why we study History and the fact that we really need to learn from the events of the past if we are ever going to move forward as humans. I felt that it was a really good way to make History more relevant to the students. It meant that the students had to think from someone else's point of view, which is a fantastic skill to ensure that they are compassionate to other people's situations. (Journal entry)

In making this final comment, Justin underscores the potential for enhancing a key aspect of historical literacy – empathy - through the combination of appropriate pedagogy and an ethical lens.

All three History teachers identified a connection between their understanding/s of ethics, which were strongly relational in nature, and the concept of historical



empathy. Empathy is one of the concepts listed in the *Australian Curriculum's* History framework to assist in the development of 'Historical understanding':

In historical inquiry, the term 'empathy' is used to describe engagement with past thought. The re-enactment of past thought and feeling is a greater challenge than constructing descriptions and explanations of the past. It requires an understanding of the past from the point of view of a particular individual or group, including an appreciation of the circumstances they faced and the motivations, values and attitudes behind their actions.

(ACARA, n.d., f)

Empathy, and what constitutes it, is a concept that has been the subject of some debate in discourses about the teaching of History (see McCully, 2012). Current framings point to its complexity and seek to move beyond limited views that suggest it is solely a cognitive act of perspective-taking, or that it is a boundary-less flight of potential and likely ahistorical fantasy, captured in the seemingly innocent instruction, 'Imagine you are...'. Endacott and Brooks (2013) argue that historical empathy is composed of three interrelated and interdependent endeavours, 'historical contextualisation, perspective taking and affective connection' (p. 43). They note that the presence of the affective dimension in their construction of historical empathy has a holistic contribution to make to a student's growth, 'The development of dual-dimensional historical empathy has the potential to promote both proximate goals (...related to immediate curricular objectives...) and ultimate goals (...those that deal with understandings, skills, and dispositions that an individual might benefit from for a lifetime)' (p. 44). Stéphane Lévesque (2010) also contends for a tripartite model of interrelated concepts to inform the definition of historical empathy, 'historical imagination, historical contextualisation and moral judgement' (p. 142). Lévesque explains, 'historical imagination and contextualisation are not sufficient to generate sophisticated empathy...it is necessary to consider the unfolding of the events, as well as the larger consequences for contemporary relevance and meaning. It might be argued...historical empathy has a moral dimension' (p. 153). Recognising the risky nature of the presence of moral judgement in the study of the past, '...moral judgements in history may (and often do) lead to anachronistic impositions of

present day standards' (p. 167), Lévesque nonetheless concurs with Partington's (1980) view that, 'without some perspective as to *what ought to be valued* in human life and on what grounds there can be little meaning or significance in history for our pupils or for us' (p. 239). The experience of the History teachers in this study echo the ideas of 'challenge' and 'necessity' contained in these remarks.

It was in a conscious decision of these History teachers to activate the perceived ethical aspects of their units that they were able to leverage further students' affective connections to the people and period under consideration and thus strive to enhance the development of empathy. This approach to ethics, where empathy is activated through the affective domain, resonates with both the orientations of care ethics and Levinas' focus on the *other*. As noted earlier in this thesis, these perspectives on ethics are not given a place in the *Australian Curriculum's Ethical understanding* continuum. And yet, the practice of the History teachers in this study, (and the teachers of other disciplines to be discussed in following sections), suggest that these approaches to ethics are a key to powerful student engagement and enrichment in learning.

History it would seem, in its focus on human thinking, being and action, has an almost intrinsic connection to ethics. In contrast, the subject area of Mathematics appears to be a less obvious site for the inclusion of an ethical dimension. The different experiences of the two Mathematics teachers considered in the following section provides a counter narrative to that more traditional view.

## **Mathematics**

Archie, an experienced and long-standing Head of Mathematics in his school, stated the following in his second interview, 'Ethics (is) not necessarily a part of the Maths curriculum. A constant undercurrent would be yet another layer in an already crowded curriculum.' Yet, his recounted experience of teaching his unit was at odds 'in spirit' to this position. Archie had initially been sceptical that it was even possible to connect Mathematics and ethics for his 'low stream, low ability, low perseverance, low resilience' (Archie's description) Year Ten group. In preparing the Mathematics content for the set topic, Archie contextualised it

around a high interest, real life phenomenon for students - the cost of mobile phone plans. This sparked animated discussion around the ethics of advertising and a particularly powerful realisation amongst his students that their mathematical knowledge could be wielded as a defence against exploitation.

Archie was prepared to allow discussion to run its course in this 'lower achieving' class, 'one Maths straight line graph ends up in talking about world war three if you really let it go.' He noted that the higher streams would be unlikely to be afforded the time for such discussion as their program is accelerated and very much shaped by the backward shadow of the extensive content of senior school Mathematics subjects. A welcome outcome of the increased student engagement was that their Mathematics learning was enhanced and, in the end, with negligible loss of any real time Mathematics learning.

In discussing the views of members of his faculty regarding the place of ethical perspectives in Mathematics, Archie positioned himself as more open and progressive in both his philosophy and pedagogy. He described many Mathematics teachers as 'very linear', and whilst he saw the ethical as the 'next step', he was conscious that this is 'where many teachers stop.' He posited the hypothetical situation of giving teachers a Mathematics problem with a context that has an ethical implication that needs to be discussed, and asking them to take the time to discuss it. He predicted responses of, 'Ooh, no I can't deal with that, that's not my area... I can't give a mark to that!...I walk in, I teach the subject, I walk out.' In even more dismissive terms, he characterised likely negative responses from Mathematics teachers with particular backgrounds:

I can see the very heavy duty specialist algebra trained teachers who just, that's all they do all day, is push circular functions around and derive tangent functions...they're probably not that interested in ethical implications within a Maths context. (Interview, August 15<sup>th</sup>)

These comments about the attitudes of Mathematics teachers resonate with findings of studies examining Mathematics teachers' classroom practices. Shulman, in a provocatively titled study, 'Is There Enough Poison Gas to Kill the City?: The Teaching of Ethics in Mathematics Classes' (2002) comments, 'Many mathematicians believe that mathematics is 'pure', 'beyond good and evil', and

‘value-free’. Indeed, some would argue that the complete absence of an ethical component in (pure) mathematics is one of its defining characteristics’ (p. 118). Grootenboer (2013) similarly remarks, ‘Tradition and external testing tends to demand certain mathematical products and the reproduction of set procedures, and these can be in tension with more innovative-type approaches as have been advocated by Boaler and Staples...and through the productive pedagogies’ (p. 24). The formation of these attitudes for many teachers goes back to their pre-service teacher education courses. Garii and Appova (2013), in a study of pre-service Primary teachers, asked participants to integrate a social justice framework into their teaching of Mathematics. Half of the participants, ‘were unable to clearly articulate or describe any role that social justice frameworks could have in the teaching of mathematics nor could anyone provide an example of social justice incorporated in mathematics teaching’ (p. 202).

Paul Ernest (2013) suggests that the view that Mathematics is itself ethics-free is predicated on an absolutist epistemological stance which is actually contestable. An absolutist perspective would argue that mathematical knowledge exists on a decidedly different and separate plane from that where notions of ethics and social responsibility are operable. The claim would be that ethics and human interests are operable only in the sphere of application and that the boundaries between pure Mathematics and applied Mathematics are impermeable, never to be breached. This is the view that underpins the stance of teachers that Archie describes above. However, Ernest argues that, alternatively, a social constructivist approach to Mathematics can be posited that positions the discipline in the thick of the landscape of ethics, as Mathematical knowledge is constructed through language and dialogue and this implies the transmission of values as well. Human culture and endeavour is essentially dialogic. Mathematics with all the other disciplines shares such foundations.

The other Mathematics teacher in the study (from a different school, and located in New South Wales), and the faculty within which she works, held a markedly different viewpoint from the views Archie represented of his colleagues. In New South Wales the General Mathematics course (the most accessible Mathematics subject for the two final senior years of high school) moved to a ‘real world’

contextualising of Mathematics approach in 2013. So, for Lily and her colleagues, it is an 'essential skill to look at ethics in Maths.' Her unit focused on statistics and involved using current news items in the media and, where statistics were being used, asking students to evaluate the reliability and validity of their usage.

Lily did echo some of Archie's observations regarding how much time this approach would be accorded in the range of Mathematics classes. As was the case for Archie, Lily's class was a General Mathematics group, not intending to study higher level Mathematics in the senior years. She suggested, 'a 'top' Maths class wouldn't see this approach as being valid', but quickly added, 'what's solving quadratic equations if you don't know how it relates to the rest of the world? Students want to do the exercises - this makes them feel like a mathematician in their way of thinking.' Despite this, in discussing the place of ethics in Mathematics with her colleagues, she noted that, 'they were of the opinion that you can't teach Maths without referring to ethics', (whether or not they would actually allot a reasonable or sufficient amount of classroom time to this endeavour was not part of the discussion). Lily's critical comments in respect of the *Australian Curriculum's* expectation of integrating ethical understanding into Mathematics, were around communication issues rather than the substance of the expectation:

*The Australian Curriculum* is saying this is what mathematicians do, this is what's important to function in society, but I don't reckon that message is out there to the general population. (Interview, July 30<sup>th</sup>)

Lily and colleagues, in regarding an ethical perspective as essential in Mathematics, appear to stand in the tradition of Critical Mathematics informed by the work of Paolo Freire and framed notably in the United States by Marilyn Frankenstein (1983). Frankenstein argues that, 'The mass media, most academic social scientists, and "common sense" assume that mathematical knowledge consists of neutral facts discovered, not created, by people through their interactions with the world' (p. 324). She suggests that at the other end of the spectrum cynics represent Mathematical knowledge like statistics as subject to manipulation, serving only the interests of those in control of such data. Rather she argues for a Freirean analysis that is, 'different from both of these approaches, [and] directs our reflections to the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity in producing mathematical

knowledge' (p. 324). For Frankenstein (1989) Critical Mathematics enables students to read the world through the lens of Mathematics, 'understand[ing] mathematics in a way that will enable you to use that knowledge to cut through the "taken-for granted"' (p. 2). In Europe, Ole Skovsmose argued that, 'the goal of mathematics education should be to understand the formatting power of mathematics and to empower people to examine this formatting power so they will not be controlled by it' (Tutak, Bondy and Adams. p. 68). Lily's pedagogy that investigated the ways in which Mathematics was being put to work through media reports, exemplifies a critical mathematics approach. And it is important to note it was, in Lily's observation, the conscious implementation of an ethical presence that facilitated this.

The marked difference in views evidenced in the reflections from these two participants and the faculties of which they are a part, only occurred in this discipline, Mathematics. The different approaches to the discipline in Victoria and New South Wales may account for this. The profile of Mathematics in the school context, individual personalities of the teachers and their pedagogical experiences and a host of other variables may have contributed to the different views. What is most significant, however, is that despite Mathematics arguably being, at least on the face of it, the most challenging of the four discipline areas considered in this study in which to integrate ethical understanding, both participants found several points of intersection between the ethical and the mathematical. This of course is not to say that ethics is manifest in the Mathematics classrooms in other ways - for example, in the pedagogical relations between the teacher and members of the class, and between members of the class themselves, which was initially how Archie had conceived of this project in his first interview noted in Chapter Four. Nonetheless, persevering with the bringing together of the content dimension of Mathematics and ethical understanding resulted in an engaging experience for students and supported their academic development in Mathematics. In the experience of the Science teachers in the study examined in the following section, a similar positive narrative about the place of ethics emerges as recounted above with the two Mathematics teachers. However, different points of challenge and connection are evident.

## Science

In the last twenty years and more there has been a lively debate in Science Education research regarding the place of Socio-Scientific Issues (known by shorthand as SSI) in the school curriculum. In large measure this has reflected the development and growing impact of biotechnologies in particular, around the world. The importance of understanding such issues has been reflected in Science curricula in many countries (see Bruguière, Tiberghien and Clément, 2013). The learning area of Science in the *Australian Curriculum* consists of three strands, one of which is 'Science as human endeavour'. This strand focuses on the development of science as 'a unique way of knowing and doing, and the importance of science in contemporary decision-making and problem-solving. It acknowledges that in making decisions about science practices and applications, ethical and social implications must be taken into account' (ACARA, n.d., g). A sub-strand, 'Use and influence of science' explores, 'how science knowledge and applications affect peoples' lives, including their work, and how science is influenced by society and can be used to inform decisions and actions' (ACARA, n.d., g). Jones, McKim and Reiss (2010) observe however, 'such inclusion is usually found principally in the introduction to the curriculum and all too often moves little beyond the rhetoric in the actual learning outcomes or classroom approaches' (p. 1). Sadler, Romine and Topçu (2016) speak similarly, also noting that assessment regimes privilege content knowledge, thus marginalising SSI. They also suggest a further impediment to the dissemination of SSI is 'that SSI-based teaching dilutes student exposure to basic science ideas and principles and may inhibit student learning of the kinds of science knowledge that are most valued in today's educational system. (p. 1623). Saunders and Rennie (2011) instead list the various difficulties and constraints experienced by teachers, 'lack of guidance, lack of pedagogical knowledge, little understanding of ethical frameworks for ethical thinking, a lack of classroom resources and realities of constraints in the classroom' (p. 254). Tytler in his review of Science Education in Australia (2007), confirmed this regressive scenario as being alive and well in Australian classrooms, 'Science education has been trapped in a cycle of practice that relates to its early roots, with its focus on disembedded, abstract knowledge, supported by a largely teacher-centred,

transmissive pedagogy' (p. 57). This view of the task of the Science teacher is aptly described by Reiss (2008), 'The job of a physics teacher is to explain why we get rainbows, neither to pontificate on whether they are beautiful nor to urge us what we should do on seeing one' (p. 118).

This debate has not been without impact upon Science teachers across the world. In a study in the United States, Sadler, Amirshokoohi, Kazempour, and Allspaw (2005) produced a series of profiles to describe the different stances Science teachers adopted in relation to the integration of SSI into their classroom practice. All but one of twenty participants acknowledged the significance of ethics and values in Science. Profile A teachers considered ethics to be a *necessary* aspect of the Science classroom. Profile B teachers supported the SSI approach, however felt external imperatives and institutional constraints compromised their capacity to deliver SSI in their classrooms. Profile C teachers did not see their professional role as involving the exploration of ethics. Only one teacher, Profile D, rejected the notion that Science and Ethics were interrelated. The general stance on Science, values and ethics and the diversity of response (except for Profile D) to implementing SSI that emerged from this study is reflected in the responses of the three Science teachers in the current study.

In her initial consideration of the place of ethical understanding in her Science classroom, Dina confessed it was something she hadn't really thought about - she certainly wasn't opposed to it, as is evidenced by her participation in the project. In teaching the subject 'Health' she had touched on ethics in discussion around abortion and euthanasia, but such 'moments' hadn't occurred for her in Science. Dina, working in a professional learning team with two other colleagues who were participants in the project, also chose to spend a lesson introducing ideas around ethical thinking. She reported that students immediately asked, 'Miss, why are we doing this in Science?' Such a response is a clear indicator that the nexus between Science and ethics was foreign territory for these students. Dina's response, that ethical issues are part of every subject, satisfied their concern, 'There was definitely confusion as to the relevance, but after my explanation they got quite involved in our class discussion.'



The students' responses were unsurprising given that Dina herself had not explicitly brought the ethical into Science classes in the past. Her comment to her students represented something of a shift in her own disposition towards her subject area. On concluding this unit Dina reflected on her own experience of Science and the ethical as a secondary student, some fifteen plus years earlier, and her contemporary experience as a Science teacher in this project:

At school I would have covered this in religion (Catholic school), not Science class. [Now] I wouldn't find it strange at all if it were incorporated into every faculty –[it's] a good idea for it to be occurring more. This experience has led me to this viewpoint. (Interview, November 13)

Dina's unit was designed for a Year Nine Science class. The whole year level was scheduled to study Heat, Light and Sound, so there was very little scope for topic choice. Dina decided to focus explicitly on ethical understanding in the Sound section of the unit by examining the uses and impact of a device known as the 'Mosquito' alarm, an electronic device used to deter young people from loitering. Dina found that the presence of the ethical in her Science unit was beneficial for her students as students of Science, in a number of ways. She noted their increased level of engagement and enjoyment whilst undertaking the activities she had constructed to draw attention to the ethical dimensions of using a mosquito alarm. Grounding the Science content in a context where students could potentially be involved and impacted at their current age - as opposed to when they took on some future adult role - provided immediacy, relevance and heightened engagement. In using a perspective-taking, 'walk in my shoes' approach to bring ethical issues to the surface, Dina offered students a taste of the complexity of embodying scientific knowledge in the world of competing human interests.

Dina's class was ahead of time in the curriculum schedule that all classes followed in this school. This provided her with the luxury of time to explore the ethical perspectives in her unit. Yet, she did not think this was a compromising factor in the applicability and significance of the approach for all:

[There is] a place for this long term in all classes... Yes, they need to know about the processes of heat, light and sound. Then you provide real life examples and that's where the ethics comes in. (Interview, November 13)

Dina also remarked that her colleagues expressed a great deal of interest in the work she was doing and the approach she employed.

In his initial interview, Harry explained that he viewed ethics, as placed within the discipline of Science, to be 'a tangent - not the main focus.' He recalled occasions when an ethical dimension had emerged and been a lively presence in his classes: the topics were Genetics and Nuclear Energy. Nevertheless, he continued to characterise the ethical as, 'usually an aside.' Having to follow an agreed curriculum sequence in Year Nine Science meant that in the project time window for teaching his unit, Harry would be examining the nervous system and homeostasis - not a topic he felt presented an immediately clear ethical dimension. In addition to this timetable, there was an accompanying assessment imperative across the year level that needed to be met as well - a common unit test. These factors explain, in some measure, the ambivalence present in Harry's comments above as well as the fact that he felt the need to, and did, curtail discussion when he raised ethical aspects with his students.

Harry also found it difficult, as he had predicted, to bring the ethical aspect into the unit he was teaching and noted, 'I had to think really hard.' He identified only two occasions, (both concerning the original context in which specific scientific knowledge was produced), when explicit, conscious discussion of ethical issues occurred within the unit. On these occasions he was rather overwhelmed by the interest and engagement of his students in these discussions, and confessed that he had thought, 'I can't have the rest of the lesson going on this.' Ever aware of content that had to be covered to ensure an adequate knowledge base for students so they could undertake the common test, Harry remarked further, 'I could only allow a certain amount of time and to really get into a more fulsome discussion of it was encroaching too much on the curriculum I had to get done.' Despite their engagement, Harry noted however that his students also asked, 'What has this to do with Science?' As was the case with Dina's students, this indicates the fact that this ethical focus was outside their expectations of Science classes, which undoubtedly had been shaped by their previous experience of Science. Harry's students also asked if the ethical material they were discussing would also be included in their upcoming common test.

Despite the pressures of his context considered above, when Harry reflected on his experiences in teaching this unit of work, he commented, 'I found that the ethics complemented what we were talking about.' This echoes the findings of Venville and Dawson's (2010) study. Harry's responses are, however, somewhat mercurial.

He is drawn to the presence of an ethical dimension in his discipline, 'If we can get to the point of saying this is part of what we do in Science, it would be good,' yet it seems the shadow of an assessment imperative operates as a check to what could be described as an emergent reconstruction of what counts as knowledge in Science, and indeed across the curriculum spectrum:

I think it's important that it's done in the subject, in the curriculum than as a stand-alone subject ethics. There needs to be a conscious effort to inject this into the curriculum. We want them thinking ethically, but this is why it needs to be suffused into subjects. (It) has to be systematic and across the board - right through the year levels. (Interview, August 15)

In this respect, it appears that Harry is moving conceptually toward what Young and Muller (2010) postulate as *Future 3* thinking, which I explored in some detail in Chapter Two. Yet, concurrently he is seemingly pulled in a *Future 1* (traditional academic content knowledge) direction, as reflected in his comments about covering Science content knowledge. This points, in part, to the concerns noted by Sadler, Romine and Topçu (2016) earlier regarding the types of knowledges valued by systems through their assessment regimes. Harry's own formation as a teacher of Science and the identity he has developed over many years as a Science teacher are also at play in the complexity of his reflections. Lindahl, Rosenberg and Ekborg (2011) noted in their study that teachers experienced a 'tension between educational arguments for devoting time to developing students' understanding of scientific processes and the classroom reality' (p. 343). Noting also teachers' tendency to work with scientific 'facts' as opposed to provisional or speculative aspects of Science, they suggest that, 'teachers tend to incorporate new policy into a largely unaltered practice due to belief systems that are more important than the new curriculum' (p. 343). Harry's experience in this study embodied the tension raised in the earlier part of this chapter - the tension between 'pure' disciplines and an integrated curriculum, as well as other tensions associated with wider

demands on the curriculum associated with assessment and quantified student outcomes.

Natalie, along with another participant from her school, were the only participants in the project who used the *Australian Curriculum's Ethical understanding* framework as the architecture for the units they constructed. The Science focus for her Year Nine class was how nuclear power plants work in order to generate electricity. As the class considered the experience of nuclear power plants at Chernobyl (1986) and Fukushima, (2011), Natalie explained that Australia's nuclear power stations are not used for the generation of electricity. With debates about a carbon tax and the nation's carbon emissions appearing daily in the news, Natalie posed the question of whether it was time for Australia 'to go nuclear'?

Natalie was already convinced of the place of ethics and ethical understanding in Science. She had previously participated in another doctoral study examining Ethics and Science. She explained, 'Ethics comes up in the applications and uses (of Science). I don't see the ethical as extra - it's more a question of how are we going to do it.' It was unsurprising then to hear of the success of the unit from Natalie's perspective. She was keen to underscore 'that the ethical decision-making activities increased the depth of their understanding of the Science concepts.' Of particular interest were the results, tabulated below, of a post-unit student survey she conducted – a number of questions focused on the link between the Science content of the unit, the ethical dimensions covered and student learning.

TABLE 4: NATALIE'S SCIENCE SURVEY

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE
After completing the activities, I now have a deeper understanding of the Science behind	92%	6%	2%

how nuclear power plants work			
Doing these activities was a waste of time, I just prefer to learn the Scientific facts	2%	2%	96%
After doing these activities I have a greater appreciation for the difficulty people in authority have when making ethical decisions	64%	26%	10%
I would like to do more of these activities in Science in the future	98%	2%	0%

Although there is some mismatch between 0% disagreement about pursuing such activities in the future and 4% agreeing or strongly agreeing that the activities were a waste of time, the overwhelming picture these results paint is that students found the ethical dimension of the unit extremely interesting and helpful in developing their scientific understanding of the topic. This is certainly consonant with Sadler, Romine and Topçu (2016) who review a range of literature from 1999 until the present wherein SSI-based instruction has been seen to enhance

development of student interest and motivation in science, understandings of the nature of science and reasoning skills (see p. 1623).

The experience of the English teachers in the study, considered in the section that follows, confirms the affirmative thread about the presence of ethics already unwound by the History, Mathematics and Science teachers. For the English teachers however, elements of surprise or struggle are largely absent from their recounts.

## English

Nicky, a very experienced English teacher, captured in her initial interview what many English teachers are likely to say about the place of ethical understanding within their subject, 'Ethics is what we engage with every day with English teaching.' For some teachers they may even be interchangeable terms. Leland Ryken (1979) describes the interaction with texts as being at the heart of the English classroom and inextricably connected to one understanding of what ethics entails - evaluating ways of living in the world:

We should consider literary characters as persons who make an experiment in living – who undertake some course of action that exemplifies and tests the kind of life in which they believe. This experiment that is undertaken tests the adequacy of his or her worldview. The additional task of readers, having determined what is affirmed and what is denied by the work of literature, is to evaluate the world view by the standard of what they themselves believe to be the truth about reality. (p. 111)

In his foreword to a new publication, *Ethical English: Teaching and Learning in English as Spiritual, Moral and Religious Education* (Bloomsbury 2015), Thomas Lickona, an international leader in the Character Education movement, suggests that this publication, 'argues persuasively that English is the subject, par excellence, where young people are enabled to reflect on their own character - their virtues and vices, beliefs and values - as they encounter and respond to the characters in great literature, biographies and films' (Pike, xii, 2015).

Leaving aside the contention embedded in the phrase ‘great literature’, Lickona’s understanding of the intersection of ethics and subject English is reinforced in many and varied locations. Patterson (2008) follows Ian Hunter suggesting a tripartite architecture for the construction of subject English - Ethics, Rhetoric and Aesthetics (p. 313). The advice of the New South Wales Education Standards Authority (NESA) advice firmly integrates the two areas, ‘Opportunities arise for students to engage with situations or circumstances from the real or virtual worlds, or the imaginative worlds of texts that involve ethical or moral issues...Ethical issues are integral...in English’ (NESA, n.d.). And, in the rationale provided for the place of subject English within the framework of the *Australian Curriculum*, the relevance and impact of ethics within the subject is directly referenced, ‘It helps them become ethical, thoughtful, informed and active members of society’ (ACARA, n.d., c).

Former editor of the prominent United States publication *English Journal*, Leila Christenbury (2008), captures crisply the intimate alignment of ethics and subject English:

There is virtually nothing in the study of English that is value free, that does not involve choices of right and wrong. In writing we attempt to name with accuracy or persuade with precision; in language we look at the shadings of the meaning of words, at phrases that are direct or indirect, at diction that obfuscates or clarifies. In literature we consider the reliability - in regards to truth- of narrators, the motivation of characters, the worth of theme. (p. 33)

Alice was the only other participant in the study along with Natalie, one of the Science teachers, who chose to utilise parts of the *Australian Curriculum Ethical understanding* framework to shape the substance of her unit. She selected particular outcomes specified for the year level she was teaching and constructed her unit on *To Kill A Mockingbird* around these. For Alice, the explicit incorporation of an ethical emphasis drew together the English-specific elements of the study of the text and the school-wide emphasis on visible thinking. These separate aspects were melded into a cohesive whole, which she described as providing a ‘reinvigorated’ approach to teaching a very familiar novel. As suggested above in

Nicky's comment, Alice found the task of integrating ethics (as explicated in the *Ethical understanding* learning continuum, along with her own construction of ethics) into subject English both intuitive and 'natural'. This alignment is something noted by educator Raymond Misson (2016) who observes, 'there is a kind of congruence, a fit between the processes of English teaching and the ways in which the human self is created' (p. 13). Alice was positive about the synergies that arose in her classroom between the subject content and the General Capability of *Ethical understanding*:

Having experimented with integrating these ethical understandings into the English program I do feel more confident that they can be easily aligned with the thinking we encourage in English and do not require a great deal of additional content or programming. (Interview, July 29<sup>th</sup>)

She was particularly pleased with the affordances of the unit for students and their ongoing understanding of the complexities of the world around them:

The different ethical principles we used has encouraged a culture whereby students are conscious of competing interests and different perspectives that I think has been of value and is something I would like to embed into all my programs having completed this pilot project. (Interview, July 29<sup>th</sup>)

Alice's observation here accords with Misson's (2016) observation that the explicit presence of ethics in the English classroom is an enriching contribution to students' lives. Misson argues that by neglecting to bring what is 'ethically at stake' in both the consumption and production of texts in the classroom, students may be denied the realisation, 'that there may be different ways of thinking ethically than simply going along with the frameworks they have been socialised into...putting some of those frameworks to the test by bringing them up against other frameworks can be valuable' (p. 15).

The way in which Alice progressed her unit, from providing some background knowledge about the field of philosophical Ethics, to the focus on subject content and then on to the integration of the two, echoes the approach of the *Values and Knowledge Education* (VaKE) program. This was explored briefly in Chapter Two and has been developed and researched in a number of European countries in the last decade. VaKE posits that students require instruction in both elements - ethics



and subject content - for the enrichment available through their dynamic interaction to occur. Alice's reflections about this interaction point to the enhancing impact of her attentiveness to the *Ethical understanding* framework upon the discipline content of English:

The Ethical understanding framework drove the thinking and the way we were accessing those skills...[I did] a better job of addressing the concept of integrity by being more explicit with the *Ethical understanding* aspects...This framework made me think more consciously of how we were going to discuss integrity. (Interview, July 29<sup>th</sup>)

Alice's reflection here speaks of a seamless relationship between the two elements and the mutual enhancement of both that successful integration creates. For Alice, another measure of the appropriateness of ethics as a presence in the English curriculum was found in her students' responses. She noted that in their writing they demonstrated 'more specific understanding, more complexity in their understanding of the concept of integrity,' and in their class discussion they 'often came back to the frameworks they had been exposed to.' Alice also noticed that ethics functioned as a bridge between the text and their personal worlds, 'Some students took the next step in connecting the dilemmas in the text with their own lives.' In this way, students' capacities for understanding of themselves, for understanding of others and for taking informed action in the world - what Misson (2016) hopes for students in English classrooms - was being accomplished in Alice's class. It is also interesting to note Misson's emphasis on appreciating the feelings of others (empathy) which was also referenced above by the three History teachers and which appears to sit at the heart of contemporary approaches in the field of Ethics.

Peter, teaching in a below average SES (ICSEA = 944, see table, Chapter Three) co-educational government school in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, is not an English specialist. His field is Economics and Business Studies, but he usually teaches a junior English class as part of his allotment. His background provides a different perspective from the other English participants in the study as they are both subject specialists. Additionally, his school context is markedly different, impacting significantly on what is given emphasis within the curriculum. Peter's

initial comment about the place of ethics in English reflects this, 'The guts of English in the junior school is teaching the skills - the tools (like the texts) may have an ethical dimension.' The school is located in an area serviced by a number of state secondary schools. Competition for enrolments is strong, not only to sustain the viability of each of them, but also to attract increased funding to improve outdated infrastructure. The Year Nine *National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy* (NAPLAN) results at Peter's school in the Literacy areas in the year of the study, showed the school to be at the midpoint amongst its competitors. The leadership team thus sought to improve the school's NAPLAN results. Part of the strategy required English teachers to focus their teaching within the curriculum on the building of literacy skills.

Given the strong focus on skill acquisition in English at Peter's school, it was a matter of particular interest to explore the impact of the focus demanded by the project on English specific skills. Could a focus on the ethical, which may require a substantial investment of class time, justify its presence in a classroom climate where the building of basic literacy skills was an urgent priority? In reflecting on whether 'ground' was lost in covering the text Peter explained, 'Yes, couldn't cover the text as well, because I did the preliminary work on ethics. But I think this was more challenging and worthwhile for them.' Although the vagaries of institutional requirements and day to day 'crises' interfered with assessment work in this unit, Peter felt the approach had nonetheless made a positive contribution to students' English skills as, 'they had to think about how they were structuring their responses' because the complexity of the content demanded something beyond a formulaic essay response. It was, however, in discussion lessons that Peter noticed the impact of being exposed to ethical thinking. In asking students to apply steps in making an ethical decision to characters' actions in the texts, he observed, 'they came up with things I didn't expect for the different characters.' In a journal entry Peter recorded a note about one day's class exploring an aspect of the film, *Rabbit Proof Fence*, 'Valuable class discussion relating to the dilemma faced by Moodoo and the role of Mr. Neville, reflected student appreciation of the 'greyness' of many ethical issues.' These observations echo the experiences of Alice's students in developing critical thinking and expanding their views of the world. Consonant

with Peter's own views about the strongly cognitive nature of ethics, he noted the following impact of the work foregrounding ethics:

[They] might have had the same opinions without the ethics stuff, but they had more of a sense of why they had arrived at their view...The kids had a more rational assessment, rather than just opinion. They could explain why their opinion was as it was. (Interview, November 13<sup>th</sup>)

Finally, the fact that students had in some measure internalised and taken up ownership of the ethical dimension, was evidenced in another of Peter's journal entries, 'I did not intend to directly approach ethics today BUT one of the students pointed out the similarity between 'Father' from *The Boy in Striped Pyjamas* and Mr. Neville in *Rabbit Proof Fence*. The same students began to talk about the ethical dilemmas each faced in pursuing what they thought was 'right'. Clearly Peter's reflections speak to him recognising some value for his students in the ethical dimension being present in his classes, both in terms of the development of thinking skills and their evolving worldviews. However, a likely ongoing challenge will be whether the affordances of ethics in English as identified by Peter are sustainable in the context of this school with its strong imperatives to improve academic performance in external standardised tests and the Year Twelve certificate results.

Nicky represents the English teacher for whom English *is* Ethics, 'As an English teacher I'm in a special position - it's not really asking us to do something completely at odds with what we ordinarily do...You can't teach English and not deal with the big issues!' Working with a high achieving group of girls in a single sex environment in a high SES independent school in New South Wales, School C, she was not required to frame her work around the development of basic literacy skills, as was the case for Peter. Nicky's class was studying Kate Grenville's novel, *The Secret River*. She noted that her English faculty had framed each year level's course around challenging themes: Year Eight - Courage, Year Nine - Integrity, Year Eleven - Conflict and in Year Ten, with this class, Justice, 'all conceptual approaches to texts and understanding - that takes you more towards an ethical understanding than close study of texts'. As a consequence, in her group's study of *The Secret River*, 'all discussions revolved around ethical and moral decisions that characters

made.’ It is interesting to note that in viewing Nicky’s worksheets for her students, a close study of the text was certainly present but always framed within one of the text’s larger conceptual threads which enabled students to develop a richer, more holistic reading of the novel.

Nicky’s journal, which records the detail of her teaching of her unit work, attests to how thoroughly integrated and complementary the study of a literary text, (encompassing all the subject specific elements involved therein), and the development of ethical understanding can be. The worksheets Nicky produced for students demonstrate this. In her journal at one juncture she writes, ‘I had the thought that all the problems that occur in the novel happen because of desire.’ The worksheets move students from an initial broad definition of the concept stimulated by two observations by Federico Garcia Lorca and George Bernard Shaw, to a close reading of a particular section of the text with attention focused forensically on language and the creation of place and character. Nicky explains how this then works itself outward again to connect to students’ lives and their contemporary context:

Ethically I wanted to think about how aware we are of how our desires are shaping us and how they can lead to behaviours that are both immoral and counter to character. I want to follow a line from desire to perception and then to the through-line of justice. (Journal entry)

The three English teachers, although each enacting ethical understanding with distinct emphases as discussed above, nonetheless worked with ethics in ways that suggest it is simply part of the air that is breathed in an English classroom.

## **Conclusion**

Only one of the participants, Archie, a Mathematics teacher, expressed doubt as to the appropriateness of ethical understanding having a place in his subject. His experience in the classroom however, ran counter to that uncertainty, with students being much more engaged in their study and achieving stronger academic results in the end of unit test. Harry, a Science teacher from the same school, considered ethics and ethical understanding tangential rather than central in his

subject area at the outset, however his experience in the project also led him to support its place within the disciplines. All other participants endorsed the presence and the value of an ethical perspective in their discipline, both prior to teaching their units of work as well as after. Broadly, their experience suggests that the infusion of an ethical element into subject content engages students and supports, enhances and in some instances, deepens their disciplinary knowledge. This echoes findings made in studies emerging from the *Values and Knowledge Education* (VaKE) project based in Salzburg, Austria. One of its lead researchers, Jan Luc Patry comments, 'Values and Knowledge Education' (VaKE) combines knowledge acquisition and moral education, both in a constructivist perspective. The dilemma discussion from the moral education concept is used as a motivation and trigger of knowledge acquisition' (Patry, Weyringer and Weinberger, 2007, p. 167).

The concerns participants expressed revolved primarily around issues of time. A number wondered about workload implications as clearly, at the very least, time is required to restructure lessons and design new learning activities. The amount of classroom time required for the sort of exploration demanded by the integration of ethical material and subject content was an issue for some, especially where strong institutional imperatives existed around assessment. Alice also raised a question about the *extent* of this capability within her discipline, citing a 'potential tension between the ethical perspectives and other perspectives we might take into our literary study...it may also possibly inhibit our providing different kinds of units.' This concern is possibly more applicable to the areas of English and History where the distinction or demarcation between subject content knowledge and its application is not as stark as in Mathematics and Science. It also points to the possibility that the curriculum remains essentially overcrowded in the *Australian Curriculum's* three-dimensional structure - the 'crowdedness' perhaps having been hidden by the General Capabilities and Cross-curriculum priorities being presented as sitting 'within' disciplines rather than as additional areas sitting 'alongside and outside' disciplines.

There are certainly differences to be noted in the views and experiences of participants, according not only to their disciplinary area but also their school

cultures and student cohorts. Half of the teachers in the study taught at an independent girls' school in Sydney, New South Wales. In the year prior to the study, this school's ICSEA was calculated at 1214 (the Australian average being 1000), and its NAPLAN results across all areas indicate that 97% of the student cohort at Year Nine were placed at, or above, the national minimum standard. The school also enjoys very high academic results in the Higher School Certificate examinations undertaken at the conclusion of the final year of secondary schooling. In the year preceding the study, 10% of students achieved an ATAR (Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank) of 99+, 33% of students achieved an ATAR of 95+ and 52% of students achieved an ATAR of 90+. This data provides some context for understanding aspects of this school's culture which enabled and facilitated the progress of this study. Unlike Peter's school, the high literacy and numeracy skills of the cohort provided teachers with opportunities to work beyond the basic skills dimension of subject curricula. Teachers at this school are also actively encouraged to adopt progressive pedagogies, with a range of support available to them to undertake further study. Leading educators are invited to conduct in-house, tailored professional learning sessions for staff and the school participates in a number of research projects. The impact of the factors noted above cannot be underestimated in the shaping of teacher dispositions toward curriculum innovation. The teachers at this school approached their teaching task within the study with a confidence in their own capacities, a confidence in their students' capacities and an institutional climate supportive of change and progress. Contrast this with the institutional anxiety concerning student achievement and assessment at the two Victorian schools in the study and how this ran as a background soundtrack in the minds of the teachers in these schools whilst undertaking the study. The spaciousness and openness of the environment in the New South Wales school served as fertile ground for the project whereas the anxiety in respect of external measurements apparent in the two Victorian school contexts, inhibited for some participants the extent to which they felt able to explore ethical understanding.

What remains however, despite these variables of context, is the reality that all participants found their individual implementation of ethical understanding in

their units of work to be supportive and enhancing of their subject content and their students' engagement in it. This clearly endorses, through the practice of teachers, the structural approach embedded in the *Australian Curriculum* and consequently moves towards meeting the aspirations of the *Melbourne Declaration*. In Chapter Seven I turn to consider experiences from the study which teachers highlighted as of vital importance and yet which sat just beyond the confines of the research questions.

## Chapter Seven: Pedagogy, identity and transformational learning

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The research questions on which this study is based were designed to discover the understandings of ethics and ethical understanding that teachers held, and subsequently enacted when they explicitly focused on this in their teaching within their subject classrooms. Teachers were also asked to reflect on the appropriateness and value of a capability with the ethical at its core (in particular *Ethical understanding*), as an active presence within their subjects. Chapters Four, Five and Six detail and discuss the teachers' responses and experiences. However, in the interviews and reflective journals after teachers had taught their classes in which they put their understandings of ethics to work, certain issues about pedagogy, practice and teachers' identity emerged as significant elements of their experience. In this chapter I turn to an analysis of this. Although these elements of pedagogy, practice and identity were not a focus of the initial guiding research questions, the frequency and liveliness with which they were referenced in the second interview discussions particularly, demand critical attention. The teachers speak honestly and reflectively about the impact the activation of a conscious and explicit ethical element in the classroom had on their teaching and their teacher *selves*. They connect the presence of an ethical element with transformations in their own professional identity and practice. This suggests affordances of this capability not only for student development but teacher development as well at both a professional and personal level.

In this chapter I begin by examining the challenges encountered by the teachers in teaching their units of work in relation to their pedagogical practice and sense of efficacy. Whilst the experiences of several teachers are discussed in a series of vignettes, one teacher's experience, Harry's, is presented and analysed at length as it is particularly complex and rich in the many issues it raises. Throughout this study, I have come to see how the presence of an ethical perspective in the classroom has served to recast pedagogical practice in a productively disruptive way. As I proceed, I place and consider the experiences of these teachers into a broader frame of what has emerged regarding pedagogies that most fruitfully



cultivate an expansive approach to moral education. Disruption to one's professional identity and practice, even if it is largely positive, is likely to create a need for support. After presenting a number of stories of changing practice, I explore the professional learning needs that emerged from the teachers' experiences. I suggest some guiding principles to frame approaches to meeting such needs which are specific to this context of curriculum innovation.

A discussion of what emerges from the study regarding productive pedagogies that support the ethical capability follows. This leads to an examination of what teachers identified as important benefits for students afforded by the presence of the ethical dimension in their subject units of work. Most teachers in the study observed that working with an ethical dimension engaged a wider range of students and that this engagement was more thorough and deeper than had previously been the case in their classes to that point in time. Engagement is always high on the agenda of teachers as they seek to enhance the learning of their students. Increased engagement through the presence of the ethical dimension also enabled opportunities for developing empathy in students. The experiences of the teachers point to potent connections between teaching for ethical understanding, increased student engagement and the cultivation of the empathy. These connections appear to create a powerful dynamic in the classroom. It is perhaps in this dynamic that an environment is brought into being in which students might be formed to live positively and productively immersed in the complexities of the twenty-first century, as outlined in the first chapter of this thesis.

Finally, I consider how for some teachers in the study, the task of incorporating ethical understanding moved them beyond the immediate issues of the nexus between their subject content and ethics into an enhanced awareness of the ethical nature of their relationship with their students. When reflecting on these experiences they were not referring to 'professional ethics' as expressed in something like a code of conduct or professional standards. Rather, they were drawing attention to their responsibility to their students as 'others' in the sense used by Levinas and others as discussed in Chapter Four, and which I elaborate below.

## **Ethical understanding and challenges to teachers' practice**

### **Harry's story**

Reflecting on one element that made a strong impression on him while teaching for ethical understanding in his Science classroom, Harry, a Science teacher, commented:

Some teachers are locked in, under pressure people go to their default setting. You need different pedagogy for teaching about ethics - direct instruction will limit the ability of kids to explore ethical issues. (Interview, August 15<sup>th</sup>)

In speaking of being 'locked in' and 'pressure', Harry is perhaps in part referencing the forces within and beyond schools that can take teachers away from what they may believe to be the best pedagogical practice in a specific context, to practices which are more likely to deliver institutional and societal expectations, even if these are perceived by teachers to lack educational integrity and depth (see Foster, 2014). Opportunities to develop expertise in alternative or critical pedagogies can evaporate and pedagogies of control, which are predominantly transmissive in nature and teacher-centred, are more likely to become embedded and established as 'habit'. In using the term 'direct instruction', Harry is not referring to the rigorously delineated pedagogical approach championed by some, an example in Australia being that advocated by Noel Pearson in Cape York, Northern Queensland (see [www.goodtogreatschools.org.au](http://www.goodtogreatschools.org.au)). Rather, Harry is referring to a general model of the teacher as 'the one who knows' - the custodian of knowledge who delivers content to students who are represented as largely passive recipients in a one-way transmission process. This 'default setting' as Harry describes it, is what can be described as teacher-centred pedagogy, which is often didactic in nature.

In remarking that, 'direct instruction will limit the ability of kids to explore ethical issues', Harry is pointing to a belief he has either formed, or had confirmed through his experience in this study. In reviewing his past teaching experience, he

commented on his preferred pedagogy, 'From my point I've focused on the content - my teaching style and approach has been direct instruction...but this presented more challenges for me as I'm not as used to inquiry learning.' His engagement with the ethical dimension of the content with which he was working was quite limited relative to other teachers in the study. Nonetheless, he discerned something of a disconnect between his preferred, established pedagogy and the approach demanded by a focus on ethical aspects, which he labels as 'inquiry learning'. The discomfit he describes might be productively explored within the conceptual frame of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), which was discussed in some detail in Chapter Two.

When exploring the development of knowledge about hypothermia and uncovering its links to Nazi experimentation on prisoners during World War Two, it was not the Science-related content or the ethical issues surrounding it that Harry found challenging. What he found confronting was what he perceived to be a lack in his expertise for navigating the pedagogical waters that would best support the emergent classroom milieu wherein students would be able to develop their understandings and opinions. Park and Oliver's (2008) re-conceptualisation of Shulman's Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) points to teacher efficacy as a significant element of the multifaceted entity that is PCK. Lovat and Smith (1990) also include 'teacher self' as one of five frames operative in a teacher's decision-making space. This dimension of efficacy is what seems to be at play in Harry's experience.

A PCK summit of Science educators (and here there is particular relevance to Harry's case), held in the United States in 2012, refined and expanded Shulman's model of PCK in the light of twenty plus years of research. Gess-Newsome (2015) recounts the thinking of this gathering in seeking to capture the *dynamic* and *personal* nature of PCK. Those gathered were attempting to find ways of designating the way this is expressed in classrooms. They believed this was something different to teacher professional knowledge bases and topic-specific professional knowledge which Gess-Newsome describes as, 'knowledge for practice...a formal body of knowledge determined and codified by researchers or experts' (p. 32). The gathering posited the addition of new descriptive categories,

*personal PCK* and *personal PCK&S* (Pedagogical Content Knowledge and Skill). 'Personal PCK' refers to a teacher's, '*knowledge of, reasoning behind, and planning for teaching*' (p. 36) in all the particularities and intersections of student, context, purpose and topic. It is summarised as, 'Reflection *on* Action, Explicit' (p. 36). In contrast, 'Personal PCK&S' is, 'the *act of teaching* a particular *topic* in a particular *way* for a particular *purpose* to particular *students* for *enhanced student outcomes*' (p. 36). It is carefully distinguished from Personal PCK as being, 'Reflection *in* Action, Tacit or Explicit' (p. 36). 'Personal PCK&S' then, points to highly contextualised enactment which is significantly shaped by an individual teacher's beliefs and dispositions. Although Harry was a teacher of substantial experience and held a significant leadership role in the school, his efficacy regarding the enactment of the pedagogical demands of working with ethical understanding in the Science classroom was quite low. Using the insights of the model discussed above enables a clearer view of the nuances of what may be happening for a teacher like Harry in the given context. This provides valuable guidance for what professional learning support would be both appropriate, and likely, effective.

Accompanying Harry's internal pedagogy-related conflict, was the ongoing restructuring of curriculum that he reported was occurring within his school. This had been instigated in response to findings emerging from research conducted both within and beyond the school. It represented an attempt to re-position the school as more academically competitive than it had been in its more recent past. It had a reputation as providing a place for students who found mainstream independent schools 'difficult', and pastoral care was a particular specialty. Harry's designated head of section role involved extensive responsibility for student management and discipline and the school's revised direction brought new demands and dimensions to this role. These contextual and pedagogical factors provide some insight and understanding as to why Harry experienced ambivalence and disequilibrium in his experience when engaging in the core task of the study.

Although Harry felt uncertain in employing pedagogical strategies to support ethical inquiry as noted above, he nonetheless recognised the need for a different pedagogical approach. He had witnessed increased levels of student engagement when undertaking the unit of work, 'I had planned for ten minutes but I saw that

they were keen to talk about it...The conversation could have gone on for the rest of the lesson'. This was not however a pedagogical milieu in which he felt at 'home'; it was not embedded practice in Harry's Science classroom. His internal conflict grew. Harry found himself in the midst of a situation in which he recognised the interest of his students and their desire to explore the ethical elements of the topic, and the dynamism of this student-centred space. Yet, at the same time he lacked confidence in navigating this place with them. Added to this and pulling strongly in the opposite direction, was the imperative of curriculum delivery, testing regimes and behind this perhaps also parental expectations, all of which combined to lead him to circumscribe the discussion. He reflected:

...but as I said...the pressures of tests, and meeting timelines and delivering curriculum [were very strong]. I found that the ethics complemented what we were talking about but that I could only allow a certain amount of time and to really get into a more fulsome discussion of it was encroaching too much on the curriculum I had to cover. (Interview, August 15<sup>th</sup>)

As a member of the school leadership team, Harry was committed to the goal of improving academic standards and viewed the preparation of his students for the upcoming assessment task as a necessary part of moving towards this goal. This imperative drew him strongly in the direction of familiar, trusted pedagogy. The contemporary educational climate, which I have discussed in previous chapters, tends to be strongly instrumentalist in nature, with an emphasis on testing and outcomes. In a climate where schools are publicly measured against criteria which are starkly formulated, this can create a further disincentive for teachers to step outside of a narrowly defined and implemented curriculum and the traditional pedagogies which service it. Harry's experience in this study portrays the enormous complexity of the landscape within which teachers seek to do their 'work'. This is a landscape of 'pushes' and 'pulls'. Harry recognised a different pedagogy was required for incorporating ethical understanding into his subject. He did not find this a comfortable proposition personally but glimpsed what this might mean for student engagement in particular, but also for students' moral development. Yet, he was unable to explore fully what this might be like for both himself and his students because of the contextual pressures within his school. The

request to incorporate ethical understanding drew Harry towards what might have been creative disruption and transformation had there been a culture that also recognised, encouraged and supported life-long professional learning for staff.

## **Natalie's story**

In contrast to Harry's experience, Natalie (another Science teacher in a different school), spoke of her and her colleagues' willingness to adapt their pedagogical practice in order to incorporate 'ethical thinking' and, in her view, create a more relevant and engaging experience of Science for students:

[We are]...changing our style of teaching - usually [we look at] law first then [follow with] experiment; now [it's] experiment first and [then] deduce the law. [We are] flipping - in doing that we will often bring up an ethical issue to springboard a topic - will increase engagement - Science has to be relevant or you lose them'. (Interview, April 4<sup>th</sup>)

Natalie had participated in a number of projects within her school exploring different pedagogies. These projects provided Natalie with positive experiences of student-centred classroom approaches and enhanced her confidence to work with the Science content to meet a wider goal. Natalie's school achieves consistently high academic results in her state's final Year Twelve Certificate. The school culture is professionally and pedagogically progressive. As a leader of a section of the Science faculty, Natalie is encouraged to innovate in both curriculum and pedagogy and is supported in this through access to extensive in-house and external professional learning.

The contrasting experiences of Harry and Natalie point to a complex web of institutional factors and personal dispositions which interact to either support and progress, or check and hinder the presence of an ethical dimension within subject classrooms. Harry and Natalie's lived experience speaks to the importance of personal PCK&S as detailed in the PCK Summit's expanded model of PCK. Gess-Newsome (2015) speaks of the way that teacher beliefs (shaped by experience) act as filters or amplifiers when presented with the challenge of pedagogical change. In the following case, teacher belief can be seen to act as a filter, 'a teacher who believes that teaching is telling might reject conceptual change learning strategies

that begin with an understanding of what a student knows in order to design instruction to challenge those understandings' (p. 34). In contrast a teacher who possesses a strong commitment to teaching about the nature of Science, 'might actively seek ways to simultaneously design instruction that integrates disciplinary core ideas, science and engineering practices, and cross-cutting concepts' (p. 34). In this situation the teacher's belief acts as an amplifier for pedagogical change. Natalie's experiences, as detailed above, have acted as amplifiers for her in this study, enabling her to step with confidence into new pedagogical territory. Harry's beliefs about what he calls 'direct instruction' coupled with the new direction of his school, have operated as filters in his classroom experiences during this study, checking him from taking up more fully the invitation to pedagogical change afforded by the presence of the ethical lens.

However, literature examining the teaching of ethical understanding in Science courses in particular, suggests that ultimately Harry's experience is perhaps more representative. Hughes (2000) noted that many teachers felt an emphasis on the ethical aspect of Science compromised, even undermined, the acquisition of curriculum content and impacted negatively on classroom control. Ratcliffe and Grace (2003) recounted the discomfit of teachers in moving from known practice in which the Science classroom is dominated by the delivery of content to a discussion-based, egalitarian ethos. Levinson and Turner (2001) spoke of the 'culture shock' experienced by teachers (and students) when addressing controversial science issues wherein assumed certainties have evaporated and the ground is difficult to hold. In light of these studies, the power of the learning culture of teachers at Natalie's school, must be commended for cultivating practitioners who seek to expand their knowledge and experience in pedagogy. Such learning cultures are vital when teachers are being taken beyond their familiar territory, as is the case in integrating *Ethical understanding* into disciplines. Optimising the benefits of such a curriculum innovation for students is, in large part, rooted in institutional dispositions regarding teacher professional learning.

## **Fran's story**

Fran, a History teacher, noted that participating in the study enabled her to be more explicit and intentional in raising the ethical. In terms of what was demanded in her pedagogical practice she commented, 'I think it fits with where we're heading now - [it] forces the emphasis to be more student-centred...to move away from expert lead teaching, puts us on a level playing field.' Fran's evaluation here reflects Michael Fullan's (2013) concept of what he labels the 'new pedagogy', '[the] basic notion is teachers and students as learning partners' (p. 24). Drawing on Hattie's (2012) meta-analysis of over 100 studies, and his own examination of teacher instructional practices, Fullan further remarks that the designation of 'teacher as facilitator' appears to have a statistically significant lesser impact on cultivating student learning than the designation of 'teacher as activator'. Fullan draws from this that, 'the guide on the side is a poor pedagogue...we don't want a 'guide on the side' any more than we need "a sage of the stage". More proactive partnership will be required' (p. 25). Describing this partnership further Richardson (2013) argues that, 'Teachers must be co-learners with kids, expert at asking great, open-ended questions and modelling the learning process required to answer those questions. Teachers should be master learners in the classroom' (p. 13). Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011) also point to the repositioning of teachers in this new pedagogical landscape arguing that, '[to] understand deeply, teachers must learn about, see, and experience successful learning-centered and learner-centered teaching practices' (p. 83). These arguments for a new approach are supported by many observations of teachers in this study and evident in the ways they responded to and navigated the questions asked of their own pedagogical practice by the requirement to incorporate ethical understanding into their subject teaching.

## **Dina's story**

Adopting the types of dispositions mentioned above, Dina, a Science teacher, employed an ethical dilemma approach to the practical application of an aspect of the topic of 'Sound'. She chose the pedagogy of role play to enact this in the classroom. She commented, 'don't often do role play in Science - fun for everyone,



including the teacher.’ Braund (2015) sadly remarks how little recognition role play receives. He notes that at the European Science Education Research Association conference in 2011 two out of 700 papers focused on drama and Science. Dina however instinctively recognised the power of this pedagogy, even though it was not a part of her regular practice, to connect Science content with the focus on ethics.

Researchers such as Dorion (2009) have been connecting these kinds of dots for some time, ‘A recurrent rationale for introducing such a drama strategy to the Science classroom is its potential for conveying affective knowledge through empathy, i.e. the ability to understand the perspectives and emotions of other people, both individual and collectively’ (p. 6). The productive link between the capability of *Ethical understanding* and the cultivation of empathy has already been raised in the reflections of the History teachers in this study. Empathy can be a powerful vehicle for developing ethical sensibilities, but as Noddings (2012) cautions, it needs to be ‘other’ rather than ‘self’ referenced. To read the self onto another represents a type of violence toward the other, to frame it in Levinasian terms. This is an important caution of which to take account in the construction of role plays. It suggests that professional learning support that focuses not only on ‘how to’ but the underpinning ‘why’ is essential for teachers as they step into new pedagogies. Dina nonetheless stands as a risk-taker and trail-blazer in this regard amongst her Science teaching colleagues according to Braund’s observations above. What must be noted in all this however, is that what enabled Dina to step into a pedagogically expansive space for both herself and her subject area, was the presence of ethical understanding and the challenge of integrating it into her Science unit of work.

### **Archie’s story**

At the conclusion of this study, Archie, long term Head of Mathematics at his school, found himself holding a position on the connection between ethics and Mathematics which he believed to be at odds with views held by members of his faculty and the broader secondary Mathematics teaching community. He reflected:

Developing the whole person in Maths? Maths teachers wouldn't see that as being their thing...Senior secondary Maths teachers just teach the subject, rather than teach the subject at least to the student. Primary teachers teach the student. (Interview, August 15<sup>th</sup>)

Fast forward a couple of years after Archie's observation, a concern for the education of the whole student has been charged with contributing to the decline in Australian students' numeracy skills. In 2017, an article in an Australian daily newspaper reported that, 'A Sydney primary school-teacher says 'airy-fairy' holistic education of children in our classrooms has been a failure and is the main cause behind plummeting numeracy skills' (Coleta, 2016). Responses such as this suggest that a fundamental scepticism about the value of a holistic education, represented by the presence of a set of General Capabilities in the *Australian Curriculum*, persists. And yet, Archie's experience in the study ran counter to these views. He found that his students' results in the topics where he integrated an ethical perspective and engaged with them more holistically by drawing on their real-world life contexts, were stronger than in previous topic tests, 'Learning of the Maths was strengthened through this approach,' he reflected. Archie's efficacy in respect of this approach and the changes this wrought in his practice were in turn strengthened:

Just because you're a Maths teacher doesn't mean you can't do it. Just becoming more aware made me change what I did in the classroom anyway...[It] depends if the teacher is prepared to write this sort of question. Part of the extra dimension to the problem. You can find ethical implications to every Maths problem if you look for it.' (Interview, August 15)

Although initially an ambivalent participant in the study, Archie's lived experience with his class broadened his pedagogical repertoire and sharpened his vision to take account of possible new horizons in his subject area. And contrary to the view expressed in the newspaper report above, Archie found developing links between ethics and his Mathematics content (that is, adopting a more holistic approach) in no way compromised his students' mathematical abilities, rather the opposite, they were supported and extended. The experiences of both Archie and Lily in this study point to a powerful leveraging of student engagement, and in Archie's

situation student achievement offered by the presence of the ethical dimension in the teaching of the Mathematics curriculum.

### **Nicky's story**

In contrast to Archie's initial scepticism, Nicky, an English teacher found great synergies immediately evident in bringing the ethical to the fore with her current practice of delivering a concept-based curriculum. Elements of her pedagogical practice were, however, re-shaped by her experience in the study. In a self-reflexive move, Nicky, recognising a conflict in the inequity of some of her pedagogical practice and her desire to build a democratic and ethical classroom, restructured the practice of discussion in her class, reflecting that:

I've moved away from whole class free-for-all discussions to micro labs and routines that allow consistent discussion and everybody to have a voice in that discussion, so that people aren't sitting back and you're in a position where you can say what you want to say and people have to listen to it, and then they get some time to reflect and respond to that. (Interview, July 30<sup>th</sup>)

In an analytical move echoing the framing of Bourdieu (1986), Nicky identified in the field of her classroom, a structure that privileged the habitus of some students over others. For some students, their cultural capital equipped them with the language and self-efficacy to present their views and dialogue with others in a whole class forum. Other students however, lacking this 'capital', remained silent in what was the dominant form of classroom discourse and pedagogy. Recognising that her pedagogical choices carry an ethical dimension, Nicky moved to align her practice with her commitment to the valuing, supporting and enabling of all voices in her classrooms, not only those who were immediately at ease with what had been the dominant pedagogy. As a teacher possessing a high level of PCK&S and self-efficacy, Nicky still found challenges to her own professional practice in the conscious and explicit incorporation of ethical understanding into her unit of work. Her previously discussed Levinasian leanings meant that a focus on the ethical would not be confined to the conceptual content of her unit, but that the relationships between *selves* and *others* (including herself) in her classroom would come under scrutiny. In the micro lab structure that she instituted, Nicky sought to

give space for the voices of all 'others' to be heard. This space potentially enriched each of the student 'selves' present, as in the act of hearing the voices of the 'other' and attending to their own responses, those 'selves' would grow in awareness. Nicky's reflections here also point to how the prompt the study provided to incorporate ethical understanding in her unit of work, actually fostered a new way of thinking about and practising the promotion of student voice.

## **Supporting professional learning**

### **Pressures and constraints**

Peter, an English teacher close to retirement, felt he had to abandon fruitful and challenging discussion with his class to prepare his students for a level-wide common assessment task. This experience of being pulled in different directions, though not as intense, echoes that of Harry's. Writing about teachers' perceptions as to what is needed to equip pre-service teachers to teach with a values education focus, Mergler and Spooner-Lane (2012) noted a consistent observation from the teachers interviewed about the disposition of pre-service teachers, 'Pre-service teachers struggle between what is really important, and content. They are driven by assessment, results, curriculum and accountability' (p. 74). Mergler and Spooner-Lane emphasise time spent teaching and lack of confidence of less experienced teachers as the main factors that influence whether teachers will take up new approaches, 'With time, experience and practice, teachers may be willing to allow students greater flexibility in their learning and their outcomes' (pp. 74-75).

This conclusion does not apply to the cases of Harry and Peter both teachers of considerable years of practice. Their 'experience and practice' did not shield them from the demands of assessment, results and accountability. However, it must be noted in turn, that Harry's and Peter's experiences, run counter to those of the other teachers in this study, seven of whom out of nine had been teaching for ten or more years. For these seven and the other two (one of whom was in his first year, the other in her ninth), assessment and institutional imperatives were not experienced as overwhelmingly negative or disruptive pressures. This suggests that, as noted earlier, the response of teachers to a curriculum innovation such as

the incorporation of an ethical element in their subject teaching, is a matter of complex interactions within a web of influences that range from professional to personal, cognitive to affective, and from the macro focus of systems and institutions to the micro focus of an individual classroom.

All biographical and professional backgrounds are different, even so, there are some pertinent learnings here for supporting teacher development in the context of curriculum innovation. The context being one of innovation is key here. In the case of the capability of *Ethical understanding* teachers are not simply subject experts developing a new topic within their area. They are being asked to create something new which impacts upon both knowledge and practice. Assumptions about what an individual's years of teaching experience might or might not afford in terms of their disposition towards innovation are best left in the background. In classrooms teachers begin with what their learners already know and listen carefully to what their learners say about their needs in order to progress learning. The same principles apply in teacher professional learning. Tailored support rather than a one-size-fits-all approach will potentially meet and address individual needs and ensure teacher efficacy is nurtured, and through this meaningful, sustained change enabled. The implementation of curriculum innovation does not occur in isolation from the ongoing academic program of a school, for example the assessment and reporting cycle has to continue. However, if curriculum innovation is to be given the oxygen it needs to live, careful attention and flexibility will need to be applied to ensure it is not stifled by other curriculum demands.

## **Learning with one another**

Three teachers in the study, all at the same school, used one of their professional learning structures - a professional learning team (PLT) - to support their work in the study. Professional Learning Teams (PLTs) or Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are grounded in situated learning models and communities of practice. Although PLCs have become somewhat ubiquitous in recent educational discourse, encompassing just about any staff grouping within a school (Owens, 2014), Vescio, Ross and Adams (2008) propose that PLCs (or PLT) are built on two

assumptions. The first assumption is, 'that knowledge is situated in the day-to-day lived experiences of teachers and best understood through critical reflection with others who share the same experience' (p. 81). The second assumption is, 'that actively engaging teachers in PLCs will increase their professional knowledge and enhance student learning' (p. 81) Such groups can be seen as an attempt to address an historically dominant model of professional development where teachers leave their own context to sit under the tutelage of 'experts'. These 'sorties' are usually sporadic and de-contextualised, and when teachers return to their schools it can be difficult to find time to share information and even implement any learning in their own. Watson (2012), however, suggests the motivation for the adoption of this model of professional learning can be mixed, arguing that, 'indeed PLCs may function as a means to silence dissatisfaction through the hegemonic appeal to 'community' and its normalising function as arbiter of ideological control' (p. 27).

Much of the success of PLCs/PLTs is dependent upon levels of teacher 'ownership' and agency. In the school being discussed here, PLTs were part of a compulsory professional learning program, with priority areas set by the school's leadership team, responding in part to external systemic priorities. Teachers expressed ambivalence and scepticism about the value of PLTs and resented the imposition of them on 'their' time. However, as a mechanism for 'point of need' support, the PLT proved to be an invaluable support for the three teachers involved in the study. They sought permission from the leadership team to form a PLT around the task of the study: teaching ethical understanding within one of their subject classes. The most experienced teacher, Peter, initiated the process as he had become aware through casual conversation that his colleague, Justin, also a participant in the study and in his first year of teaching, was floundering. Peter had undertaken some research which led him to resources produced by Santa Clara University which he adapted for use with his class. This resource was shared with Justin and Dina, for feedback and use in their own classes.

For Justin, this resource and discussion in the group uncovered the pathway for him into the work, '[I] took an introductory class - used Peter's scenario based PPT [using] ethical dilemmas. Then [I] talked about the relation between Ethics and History.' Another teacher who wasn't a participant in the study, joined the group.

Peter commented, 'Jason joined in even though not part of the project. He challenged me and took some of my stuff and used it, took it further.' Dina appreciated the opportunity to discuss material with others and Peter commented that it was 'good to see how Science was coming at it.' As these observations suggest, and the research literature affirms, PLTs promote many positive outcomes for both teachers and students. In this study, although the PLT's lifespan was short, it served to enhance both teacher efficacy and knowledge. These outcomes were cultivated by its being cross-curricular with its members representing a range of subject areas, teacher initiated and led, diverse in its members' years of teaching experience and motivated by an authentically shared, immediate need. What happened in this group of teachers reflects the broad principles for professional learning in a situation of curriculum innovation recommended earlier in this chapter. The group's way of being was marked by collaboration and mutuality. It is noteworthy that this shares the hallmarks of the pedagogical practices that best supported the implementation of *Ethical understanding*.

It is interesting to note that such a structure was not instigated, nor indeed any collaborative structure at all, at School C where five participants in the study were located. It seems counter-intuitive perhaps that such a space did not evolve, especially given that the school possessed a very strong culture of collaborative professional learning, and that four out of the five participants expressed a desire for some support/clarification in their second interviews. In the context of the many demands placed upon these teachers and their myriad responsibilities, taking this further step in what was a voluntary undertaking, was likely not something that could be given priority. However, in School A where the PLT was formed, it is noteworthy that the team, whilst all 'novices' in respect of expertise about ethics as a part of the curriculum, represented teaching experience spanning the continuum from expert to novice. In School C, each participant would have been regarded by others, as well as themselves, as experts in both subject knowledge and pedagogy and there may have been an underlying assumption that they were all individually capable and not needing support. Such subtle expectations of self and others can act as silencers. The pre-existing structure of a

PLT at School A certainly provided a ready-made opportunity for collaboration in advancing the curriculum innovation of the study.

At School C, Natalie framed her need in practical terms, 'Need a toolkit, a "how to" run ethical debates etc.' Lily commented similarly, 'I also felt that I needed cross-curricular help from other departments...to work in isolation is such a shame...I have not been to any PD course which deals with how you teach ethics, teach ethically or lead discussions with students about ethical issues.' Alice pondered:

I do ask questions about my readiness to raise, and engage in discussion and learning around possibly sensitive ethical dilemmas and would like to investigate further how I could do this in a manner that would ensure I am enabling students to make ethical decisions and not teaching answers to ethical decisions... my concern is that we might confuse students rather than clarify this understanding and their ability to engage with ethical issues independent of us and our classroom. (Interview, July 29)

She was also concerned about establishing a common language amongst staff, 'there is a possibility that teachers may take a position - need to keep it open, as a prompt for thinking, for exploring complexity.' Jillian expressed a concern in retrospect that perhaps what she had done was simply transmit 'herself', that is her own views and ethics, rather than develop her students' own individual moral agency:

The one thing that I worry about is whose morality am I giving them? I'm giving them mine, they're learning me.' These concerns could have been addressed productively through professional conversations and the sharing of experience. (Interview, July 29)

In Natalie's and Lily's comments there is a strong pragmatic focus, however in Alice's and Jillian's comments something larger emerges, a conception of communication that echoes a Habermasian approach. Schaefer, Heinze, Rotte and Denke (2013), briefly outline this, 'Habermas' communication theory differentiates between two kinds of rationality, the emancipative communicative reasoning and the strategic or instrumental thinking. Hence, social action can be either success oriented strategic action or understanding-oriented communicative action' (p. 1). Alice's primary concern is understanding that leads to emancipation, rather than



the desire for strategic action expressed by Natalie and Lily which is essentially instrumental in nature. It is the former mindset that best supports teachers in their role as curriculum makers. Limiting oneself to instrumentalist concerns affirms a reductionist view of teacher as implementer. It is important to say here that concerns about the *how*, or the *strategic* to use Habermas' terminology, are valid and need to be addressed. They are however a point along the way in the longer, broader conversation rather than its conclusion. Jillian's concern brings to the surface an element that is absent from the *Ethical understanding* documentation, that is *meta-ethical awareness*. Her alarm at potentially reproducing her own ethical framework underscores the necessity of tackling a core question, 'whose ethics?' Jillian's distressed observation, 'they're learning me' can be connected to Levinas' understanding of how we unthinkingly do violence to 'others' by imposing the template of our 'selves' on their experience.

The coming together of Natalie, Lily, Alice and Jillian in conversation about teaching the capability of *Ethical understanding* would provide opportunities for professional reflection and transformation. Such a forum would constitute an enactment of Levinas' learning with and from the *other* and indeed mirror the classroom milieu they each appeared to be seeking in integrating the ethical capability.

Finally, I argue further that the insights generated from this analysis also have relevance to a range of contexts where new curriculum elements are to be implemented. As such, this potentially broadens this study's contribution and currency by offering valuable guidance borne out of the lived experience of practitioners.

## **Pedagogies for ethical understanding**

Through their reflections about the challenges to their practice as outlined in the preceding section, teachers in the study were contributing to a growing body of knowledge about pedagogy in the field of moral education. Insights generated through this study indicate, however, that more extensive research is still required. In making the comment, 'You need different pedagogy for teaching about ethics',

Harry only hints at what this pedagogy might look like. Comments cited earlier by other participants, focusing on a democratic classroom climate, student voice, a holistic view of learners, and connections to students' worlds beyond school, are consonant with the limited research that has been conducted into pedagogy in the sphere of moral education (see for example Lovat, 2011; Ruiz, 2011 and Tirri, 2011).

One pedagogical tool that cultivates a number of the aspects listed above, the 'dilemma discussion', was employed by four of eleven participants in the study. This practice can be located in the cognitive developmental approach to moral education championed by Lawrence Kohlberg in the late 1960s and 1970s. Critics have noted however that the Kohlbergian dilemma discussion method is primarily concerned with developing moral reasoning and does not look to measure or assess impact on moral action. Indeed, as Patry, Weyringer and Weinberger (2007) note there is a significant body of research that documents the gap between moral reasoning and moral behaviour. More recent conceptions of this approach have attempted to address this gap. For example, in Lind's (2005) Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion (KMDD) 'semi-real, educative' dilemmas are posed. These 'are dilemmas which do not affect anyone participating in a dilemma discussion, but are on the one hand likely to cause real conflicts between the moral ideals of a person, and on the other hand also cause controversies between the participants, thus triggering real moral emotions' (Lind, 2005). A dilemma is deemed 'educative' when it strikes a particular balance of emotion, 'if it triggers moral emotions enough to stimulate learning, but not too strongly to prevent learning' (Lind, 2005).

This approach thus seeks to remedy the perceived imbalance arising from a focus on the cognitive dimension in a Kohlbergian dilemma by also seeking to engage the affective domain of students in a safe but meaningful manner. Lind also notes that the practice of KMDD requires adequate time to be allotted for the fullness of the process to be experienced. In a school setting, with timetable and curriculum constraints operating, a generous and imaginative response to incorporating such an approach would be required but could be difficult to obtain. However, some participants were sufficiently resourceful to find ways to make the approach work

for them. The ways in which participants took up dilemma discussions enabled an engagement of the affective dimension within students either through their participation in roles or as themselves in given scenarios (see discussion of examples in Chapter Five). Teachers found this a productive means of opening up multiple perspectives and developing empathy.

The 'different pedagogy' to which Harry refers has begun to be explored and delineated in some detail in Australia through research undertaken within the Commonwealth Values Education Project (2002-2010). In reviewing Stage 2 Cluster projects, involving 141 schools grouped in 25 clusters, the writers of the 'Values Education Good Practice Schools Project' (2008) produced a list of qualities that characterised values pedagogies. These were formalised into a Commonwealth of Australia publication, *Values-centred Schools – A Guide* (2011). Here, 'effective' pedagogies for values education are described as:

1. Student-centred rather than teacher/content centred
2. Open, non-didactic, constructivist, risky
3. Engage students through thinking, imagination, feeling, activity and reflection
4. Empower students and share control of the teaching learning situation (student agency)
5. Engage students through real and authentic experiences
6. Enable student action and provide opportunities to enact the values in real ways
7. Consistent, congruent modelling of the values
8. Provide safe and supportive environments (Australian Government, 2011)

In listening to participants' descriptions of the implementation of their units in which ethical dimensions were highlighted, all pedagogical elements listed above were present in some way across their experience, except for number six. Number six, arguably, may be a longer-term aim and outcome in a learning area infused with ethical understanding. The consonance between the nature of the pedagogies employed by participants in the study and the values pedagogies above, suggests there is not a single practice, but rather a coalition of pedagogical practices that

support students in developing ethical understanding. It is also interesting to note that pedagogical approaches such as these are likely to form the necessary underpinning for the expansive style of character education discussed at length in Chapter Two which aligns with the orientation of the capability of *Ethical understanding* in the *Australian Curriculum*.

Such lists can be viewed as somewhat utopian and they are certainly not new. The challenge is to find the mechanism which can enable and produce such pedagogy in practice. Not every teacher in this study drew on all of the elements, however, each teacher did push out some boundary and enlarged their current practice to make room for an ethical dimension to be active and present. Certainly, they echoed in their classroom work the views of Finnish teachers in a study conducted by Kirsi Tirri (2011). In this, Tirri identified 'invariant' components across schools of an holistic pedagogy, 'All the teachers emphasised the importance of providing the students with the skills and tools to form a worldview. These skills include independent thinking, argumentation skills, and ethical reflection' (p. 164). It appears that the prompt to embark upon this new focus of ethical understanding seems to have lead already proficient teachers further in the direction of enacting such qualities and increasing awareness of areas of their practice that require interrogation.

Narvaez and Bock (2014) argue similarly for a pedagogy of moral education that draws upon recent research in neuroscience in education. They argue that a pedagogy for moral education, 'should not be approached as 'Either/Or', as a choice between rational moral education and character education, or between deliberative reasoning and intuition development. Both systems are required for moral agency' (pp. 141-142).

This echoes the approach developed by Lind in the Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion (KMDD) discussed above. Narvaez and Bock contend that the intuitive mind 'makes decisions...takes actions without conscious awareness most of the time. Yet the deliberative mind is vital for guiding intuition development and countering poor intuitions. A person without one or the other is missing a critical tool for moral personhood' (p. 142). Developed out of her work in the Minnesota

‘Community Voices and Character Education Project’, Narvaez proposes the Integrative Ethical Education (IEE) model which, ‘provides an intentional, holistic, comprehensive, empirically-derived approach to moral character development’ (p. 148). The third step of this model involves teaching ethical skills across the curriculum and in extra-curricular settings using a novice-to-expert pedagogy. This pedagogy consists of four levels: Level 1: Immersion in examples and opportunities; Level 2: Attention to facts and skills; Level 3: Practice procedures, and Level 4: Integrate knowledge and procedures (see p. 151).

The dynamic that underpins this process is evident in the units of work developed and taught by teachers in this study, the first two steps of the model (the establishment of a caring relationship with students and a classroom climate of mutual respect) already being in place. Although not entirely conscious of these elements in their practice, teachers in the study like Justin, Fran, Nicky, Peter, Alice, Jillian, Dina and Harry were all drawing upon their students’ deliberative and intuitive minds and assisting them to move to a place of integration of these in their knowing. This ‘place’ appears to possess the characteristics of Habermas’ third type of knowledge, emancipatory knowledge. This was well illustrated in one of Peter’s lessons focusing on the film *Rabbit Proof Fence*. Students were mind-mapping what they already ‘knew’ about the relationship between Europeans and the Indigenous population of Australia. Peter noted in his journal:

The class was very keen to identify the indigenous population as unclean, uneducated and uncivilised and that there was a need to remove children from their families to civilise them. This view stood in stark contrast to their stance expressed in an earlier lesson. This surprised me given the previous lesson and their ethical decision to provide support to keep children with their families where there is no violence against the children.  
(Journal entry)

This contradiction provided Peter with the opportunity to explore with the class their intuitive response on the one hand and their deliberative response on the other, and how these two might be brought into dialogue in order to illuminate each other. It is in this process of self-reflexivity that Habermasian emancipation

can occur and a critical understanding of self, wider society and the relationship and dynamic between the two developed.

As noted earlier, the experiences of teachers in this study contribute to a growing understanding of the range of pedagogical approaches that support expansive moral education. These experiences speak to the importance of combining relational and deliberative approaches to ethical understanding in order to both honour and develop the whole person. In this view these approaches are not polarities or in a binary relationship but rather two parts of a relational whole that in their dialogue create something larger than their individual entities.

In this chapter I am considering insights and reflections that participants brought to my attention through the interviews and their journals. As stated at the outset of this chapter, whilst related to the research questions, they are not directly focused on them. Yet, they were so potent they could not be ignored. Another aspect that comes into this category is student engagement and the development of empathy in students. The impact of the capability of *Ethical understanding* on students was clearly outside the scope of the research questions. Yet, participants could not help but speak of this as they undertook this study ‘with’ and ‘for’ their students. All participants pointed to the way in which teaching to incorporate ethical understanding engaged students powerfully in classroom learning.

## **Ethical understanding: cultivating student engagement and empathy**

The educational research literature about student engagement in schools is extensive and constantly expanding; it appears to represent a kind of holy grail for teachers on multiple levels. It is by no means a stable and uncontested concept (see Appleton, Christenson and Furlong, 2008), but it has been identified as cultivating the ‘progress’ of learners, supporting positive classroom behaviours, enhancing parental satisfaction with schools, and contributing to productive teacher-student relationships (see Willms, 2003; Willms, Friesen and Milton, 2009). It is in the foreground of the minds of those who frame and administer policy, as well as those who lead individual school communities, especially in an

era that is increasingly litigious and where there is a burgeoning demand for accountability to 'standards'. Educational jurisdictions throughout Australia have prioritised student engagement in policy frameworks (see DET, 2016). Similar patterns are evident in both New Zealand and Canada. It is not surprising then that researchers have sought to uncover and document the processes and mechanisms that promote and build student engagement.

Fredericks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004) present a well-regarded multidimensional model for understanding student engagement that encompasses cognitive, behavioural and emotional dimensions. It is argued that these three elements are heavily interdependent, 'Defining and examining the components of engagement individually separates students' behaviour, emotion and cognition' (p. 61). Finn and Zimmer (2012), reviewing the research landscape in this field, note the recurrence of four aspects of engagement: academic, social, cognitive and affective. The latter is described as occupying a foundational role in their dynamic interaction, 'Affective engagement provides the incentive for students to participate behaviourally and to persist in school endeavours' (pp. 102-103). There is a dominant thread in the literature on student engagement (however many dimensions the concept is assigned) and present in the work referenced above, that posits a causal link between engagement and academic achievement. David Zyngier (2008) challenges this link, noting that, 'educators cannot presume that students with a satisfactory or high level of academic achievement are also engaged – many indeed withdraw from school' (p. 1770). It is beyond the scope of this study to consider this link critically, in large part it was not in the study's remit for participants to assess student work and make comparisons with earlier student academic performance. This would however constitute important research in developing an appreciation of the impact of the capability of *Ethical understanding*.

A significant feature in respect of *engagement* that almost all participants recounted in their teaching experience, was that bringing an ethical aspect into their unit of work resulted in increased levels of student engagement with subject content. In referencing such cognitive engagement, it is important to be clear that this was not some sort of code in participants' minds for academic achievement. Rather, it indicated student interest and focus. However, in one case, a respect of a

Mathematics test, Archie specifically noted his surprise that academic achievement was higher than anticipated. Peter noted in studying *Rabbit Proof Fence*, 'Definitely enhanced their engagement - judging actions people were taking, what other actions were available to the characters.' When Harry explained that much contemporary scientific knowledge about hypothermia has its origins in the Nazi concentration camps of World War Two, students embraced the challenge of such complexity, finding perhaps a deeper respect for and valuing of that knowledge through an awareness of its contextual heritage:

We did have an interesting conversation and the students were perplexed. They could see the dilemma and how appalling it must have been for the people who were part of those experiments and many of them who died in those experiments. But it was interesting that at the end there was a general feeling that if it saves lives now we should use it and while they don't feel that the means justifies the ends necessarily there was a feeling that it's happened, we can't do anything about that, but if we can use that information in a positive way to save lives then we should use it. The conversation could have gone [on] for the rest of the lesson. (Interview, August 15<sup>th</sup>)

Similarly, Jillian commented on increased levels of engagement in all her students, but noted that differentiation in her pedagogical approach was a leveraging factor in this for a particular group of students:

I was really impressed with some of the oral responses of my class - mixed ability with some pretty weak kids in it. Those who find it difficult to communicate their thoughts and ideas in writing seem to be confident in putting across their feelings and reflections in discussion, which is great. (Interview, July 29<sup>th</sup>)

Looking more closely at this lens of cognitive engagement, Corso, Bundick, Quaglia and Haywood (2013) suggest that relevance is a key factor, 'a student's implicit or explicit estimation of the relevance of the content to him or her' (p. 56). This 'relevance' is further defined as, 'relevance to one's interests, relevance to one's future goals, and relevance to one's identity or sense of self' (p. 56). Over half the participants in the study made explicit reference to the way in which the ethical



dimension of their unit engaged students because of the links that were drawn with aspects of students' own lives and context. Commenting on the approach used, Justin observed:

It's a way that you can make it more relevant. I changed things so that ethics was there – wasn't in first term. Positive take-aways: for this group is that this group is more engaged with History because they can see the relevance to their own lives. (Interview, November 13<sup>th</sup>)

Initially Archie thought his students were 'fired up' for the sport of it, but he noted a change in the tenor of the discussion, 'they got the link actually, they said well this is something, that you don't just do Maths in a Maths room all the time. There's other things you can jump into.' Fran noted that the possible links and parallels she opened up between German society before and during World War Two and contemporary Australia cultivated increased agency and voice for students, 'But they felt greater ownership of it as well...They felt they had a connection to it. They do want to talk about these things. It had great application to their lives here'. Dina found that students enjoyed the work on sound and the mosquito alarm because, 'bringing this perspective was extremely relevant - gave them the chance to look outside the curriculum.' Natalie observed that working hard to establish 'relevance' for the students made them 'more ready to take on the content.' Although these are merely snippets of classroom experience, taken together they speak of the way in which the requirement to teach for ethical understanding lead teachers to foreground relevance which in turn resulted in greater cognitive engagement.

Cooper (2014) in her single site study, suggests there is a paucity of research to assist practitioners in evaluating the myriad of suggested pedagogical strategies to enhance student engagement. Her review of literature highlights the link between contexts where the focus enables the cultivation of adolescents' identity development and increased levels of engagement. Cooper argues in her study that connective instruction is a pedagogy that, with greater success than other approaches, promotes engagement. Drawing on a model developed by Martin and Dowson (2009), she argues that connection is achieved for students on multiple levels: with the teacher, as the student is known and affirmed; with the content, as

it is shaped and presented as relevant to a student's lived experience, and through the instructional style which promotes and supports student agency. She notes, 'The engaging element of connective instruction under this conceptualisation is that such instruction honours who the students are - acknowledging that they are particular people with particular interests, points of views, personalities, and experiences (p. 367). My analysis of teachers' narratives suggests that the presence of ethics and ethical understanding in participants' classrooms fostered a similar type of connective instruction which, in turn, promoted their students' engagement in the topic being addressed.

Although participants testified in their experience to a powerful link between their students' engagement and the presence of an ethical dimension, these instances of increased engagement need to be considered with some caution. Ainley (2012) reminds us that novelty, colour and movement are transient and that, 'Interest is not static...this is only the first step to the forms and quality of engagement with classroom activities that are likely to lead to acquisition of knowledge and understanding' (p. 299). Further research, drawing data directly from students as well as teachers, involving larger cohorts of participants and extending over longer periods of time, would be necessary to establish something more than a suggestive link between ethics in the curriculum and increased levels of student engagement. Nonetheless, the experiences of teachers in this study stand as a solid kernel of evidence that points in this direction.

In this study, a number of participants spoke of empathy as being a significant element in the evolution of ethical understanding in students. The three History teachers referenced the development of historical empathy as a core task in their subject, and not only because it is now a mandated aspect of the *Australian Curriculum's* History curriculum. Several participants employed a 'walk in the shoes' approach to scenarios they presented to their students to enable the latter to 'feel into' and experience imaginatively the situations of others. Jillian took this approach to its limit in inviting the grandfather of one of her students, himself a survivor of the holocaust, to visit and speak with her class. Empathy has come to the fore in many discourse communities in the twenty-first century as global complexities develop into human crises. Economic and social theorist Jeremy

Rifkin penned *The Empathic Civilization: The Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis* in 2009. Rifkin argues that advances in neuroscience suggest that the species of human beings is essentially empathetic in nature rather than individualistic and materialistic. He posits that future hope lies in the cultivation of humanity's 'essentially' empathetic disposition. Educational psychologist Michele Borba, author of *Unselfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About-Me World* (2016), follows Daniel Goleman's work in emotional intelligence, arguing similarly that self-absorption and a rise in narcissism is undermining the moral fabric of young people's lives and consequently jeopardising stable and harmonious futures for them. Whether or not one follows this argument in its catastrophic vision, empathy is being positioned as a vital attribute in the twenty-first century. This may also be the case because of what has emerged, for some, as the limitations of social and emotional education (SEL). Burroughs and Barkauskas (2017) remark, 'A student can be educated little, if anything, about how she ought to act or respond to ethical challenges present in relationships or underlying instances of emotional upheaval' (p. 228). It remains the case that empathy is what draws us into the interpersonal space and to follow Levinas, that space is immediately ethical. Thus, the relational approaches to putting ethical understanding to work in participants' classes, which also bring empathy into focus, demonstrate the pedagogic potential of the capability to integrate cognitive, affective and social dimensions of a student's learning and development. This holistic, integrated learning is increasingly identified as that which will best prepare students for the challenges and complexities of our contemporary world outlined in part in Chapter One.

## **Conclusion**

Much of the discussion in this chapter has focused upon the ways that the request to integrate *Ethical understanding* into their subjects led participants into challenging encounters with their own practice and reshaped their pedagogy. As has been discussed earlier in this thesis, many of the participants conceived of ethics and ethical understanding as being relational at heart. On this view, ethical consideration and ethical endeavour were not seen simply as the application of a

set of normative principles to a difficult situation requiring action. In the diverse content of the units they presented to their students, participants foregrounded instead the complexities of human needs and desires, and the often perplexing interaction of these between individuals and communities. For some participants, however, this relational focus of ethics moved even closer, as they saw it operating in the dynamic between themselves and their students, and in the very act of teaching. Peter was surprised to find a resistance in himself to welcoming in the views of his students, 'I found it interesting - my ethical position relative to where the kids are at.' Lily wondered about questions of equity for her students (across classes, across years) when she admitted to an 'ad hoc' approach to incorporating the ethical. And Jillian recognised a lack of thoughtful care and reflection in her approach, 'It's just gut instinct, I should look at what I'm trying to do here.'

These participants are perhaps touching upon what Ruiz (2004) calls the *pedagogy of alterity* and Joldersma (2001) the *pedagogy of the other*. Ruiz and Joldersma both follow Levinas and attempt to draw out what a Levinasian frame might look like in the encounter between teacher and student. The comments of Peter, Lily and Jillian suggest an awareness of a totalising approach in their pedagogical dispositions and a consequent diminution of *the other*, their students. Whilst this was not a widespread response amongst participants, it does point to the depths that the experience of teaching this General Capability may plumb and the potential for productive disequilibrium it may provoke.

The perception of the relationship between teacher and student as being intrinsically ethical, as alluded to by participants above, is an important idea that has emerged in this study and points to the broader professional conversations that the presence of the capability of *Ethical understanding* in the curriculum can provoke. More broadly, it is also pertinent for the field of pre-service teacher education. Although pre-service teacher education is not within the scope of this study, the participants' remarks are a reminder that this dimension of pre-service education appears to have been marginalised. That is, the teachers in the study felt the absence in their professional backgrounds of the capacity to deal with the new ethical capability focus as well as understandings of the practical, pedagogical and philosophical relations between teacher and student. Elizabeth Campbell (2013)

notes a range of scholarship that points to, 'an absence of a rich moral or ethical language in the discourse on teaching and teacher education' (p. 414).

Gunzenhauser (2012) identifies this paucity in school leaders and links it to the dominance of accountability, testing and performativity, 'The language of philosophy of education is rarely used by teachers and school leaders to describe their visions or the challenges they face to be externally accountable' (p. 15).

Moreover, it seems that teachers' connections with ethics are at risk of being circumscribed to 'ethics as professional codes of conduct' (for example see the Victorian code: [www.vit.vic.edu.au](http://www.vit.vic.edu.au)). Yet the experience of teachers in this study as they sought to integrate the General Capability of *Ethical understanding* into their subjects suggest both a need and desire to draw on a much wider and deeper notion of ethics. Their lived experience lends substance to Campbell's (2013) call for reform, 'The vacuum prevails in contemporary teacher education programs, in which a sound exploration and appreciation of the moral agency and ethical identity of the teacher, as these are reflected in the nuances of practice, should be fostered and honed' (p. 415).

The experiences of the teachers in this study have certainly provided valuable insights into pedagogical practices that support teaching and learning in the field of moral education specifically, as well as more broadly, significant understandings regarding the implications of curriculum innovation for teacher efficacy, agency and professional identity. What is most striking however as the narratives highlighted in this chapter are reviewed, is the impetus that integrating the capability of *Ethical understanding* provided for participants' reflection on their own professional identity and practice. For some it was a surprising occurrence, when the focus was ostensibly trailing a new element of curriculum, to be prompted to ponder the deeply ethical nature of their classroom relationships with students.

## Chapter Eight: Conclusion

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A lawyer friend recently recounted a moment of despair when she was interviewing a new graduate for a position in her firm. She asked the candidate what they understood *being truthful* entailed. The response was *not lying*. Much could be said about this exchange, but in the context of this thesis it points simply but powerfully to the complexity and challenge of the field of ethics. It seems we live in a time when ethics, however you define that term, seem to be in short supply. Recently we have witnessed the fall of celebrities, public figures, sportspeople, religious leaders and trusted financial and social institutions as their *unethical* behaviours have been uncovered. As a society - and I suggest this is a widespread experience around the world - it seems we are in the midst of an ethical crisis. It's not unusual at such moments for public discourse to arrive eventually at Education's doorstep. 'How can we stop this behaviour from occurring again in the future? What are schools doing about young people's values?' Whilst the latter question doesn't acknowledge the complex influences in an individual's moral formation, it is true that schools as institutions and the teachers within are, in part, inescapably responsible for shaping young lives. My study focused on one aspect of what is happening in schools Australia in respect of education about ethics. As I close this thesis, social, political and economic turbulence remains *the* constant of global experience. The challenge for educators to prepare young people for life in an unstable world remains compelling.

When I began this study a major period of curriculum reform was in process. For the first time in Australia's history of school education a national curriculum framework had been agreed upon and was in its first phase of implementation. Further, this new framework embedded a three-dimensional structure, ascribing importance to disciplinary knowledge, skills and understanding; general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities. A key aim of this study has been to examine how this structure appears and functions when grounded in practice. It is hoped that this work contributes to knowledge about affordances and pitfalls that might be encountered in practice, informing development of the *Australian Curriculum* as it moves forward.

For several years prior to the emergence of the *Australian Curriculum* I had worked extensively in the field of Values Education. Until the advent of the *Australian Curriculum*, what can broadly be called ‘moral’ education, (of which Values Education is one manifestation), had been undertaken either in non-academic subjects like ‘Personal Development’ and extra-curricular service learning activities, or in Civics and Citizenship programs. My work in Values Education however had been focused on the integration of values perspectives into learning areas and subjects of the formal academic curriculum. Given this particular focus, along with working in pre-service teacher education, I was curious to see if, how and where Values Education would appear in this new *Australian Curriculum* framework. I found it located largely in the General Capability of *Ethical understanding*. Its shape and focus however were substantively different to earlier emphases in Values Education, which is what would have been most familiar to teachers. *Ethical understanding* appeared to me to have been shaped by two fields: Critical thinking and traditional philosophical Ethics. Such a marked contrast to the focus of earlier Values Education projects caused me to wonder how this new capability would be understood by teachers and put to work within their subject classrooms. The methodology chosen enabled me to design a study which would elicit teachers’ views and experiences in a context of curriculum ‘making’.

Employing this design and guided by the work of Emmanuel Levinas and Jürgen Habermas, the overall findings and emerging themes of this thesis can be grouped as follows: the nature of *Ethical understanding*; the place of *Ethical understanding* in the *Australian Curriculum*; the impact of teaching with an ethical perspective on teacher practice, and the impact of teaching with an ethical perspective on teacher professional identity. I consider each of these areas in the paragraphs that follow.

## **Overall findings**

Participants’ views on what constitutes ethics and ethical understanding were both broad and diverse. Two participants had some background in values education and philosophy and clearly drew on this knowledge, however the other participants were drawing on personal understandings developed through life experience - what we might call ‘everyday ethics’ as distinct from academically-

informed ethics. In broad terms, half of the understandings offered could be described as adopting a cognitive approach and the other half an affective approach. Whilst participants' views were also clearly influenced by their dispositions towards knowledge shaped by the epistemological assumptions embedded in their disciplines, I noticed that school culture also exerted an influence. All participants in one school where there was a strong emphasis on regulating student behaviour, initially framed their understandings of ethics in terms of what is right and wrong action. Participants in the school which possessed a strong tradition of and reputation for pastoral care, initially spoke of ethics as what governed and enabled positive interpersonal relationships. Participants from the school which emphasised and supported the importance of independence for its students and extensive and expansive professional learning for its staff, held individually distinctive views.

After teaching their units of work, several participants spoke of their view of ethical understanding as having been enlarged. Also, a shift in emphasis had occurred - away from right and wrong action, towards ethical understanding being a means of cultivating care, empathy and interpersonal relationships. It was clear that participants were not jettisoning the 'rational' dimension of ethical understanding, but their experience revealed this alone to be a diminished construct. In this experience the participants made a resonant connection with a contemporary turn in the field of philosophical Ethics which has also been embraced by educational philosophers. A noteworthy aspect of the participants' responses is the strong presence of ideas about ethics framed according to relational paradigms. In the *Australian Curriculum's Ethical understanding* documentation, this relational aspect of ethics is barely present - the rational cognitive paradigm dominates. The experience of participants in this study as they implemented this capability in their subject classrooms points to the need for the *Ethical understanding* learning continuum to be more expansive and comprehensive in its framing of what ethics is about and what it might look like in a diversity of subject classrooms.

What is proposed in the *Australian Curriculum*, the integration of capabilities, one of which is *Ethical understanding*, into the learning areas and their subjects, is a



new and distinctive approach in the field. In the last twenty plus years this approach of integrating a form of moral education into traditional academic subjects has been trialled in a few small-scale instances in English speaking countries. The participants in this study embraced and endorsed the contextualised and integrative approach to moral education adopted in the *Australian Curriculum's* framework. They found the integration of the two dimensions - the academic subject and the capability of *Ethical understanding* - provided deep learning in which each dimension was enhanced by the other. Indeed, their experience suggests that the infusion of an ethical element into subject content engages students and supports, enhances and in some instances, deepens their disciplinary knowledge. This speaks into the wider debate about what knowledges ought to comprise the school curriculum. Young, Biesta, Wheelahan and others argue that the movement towards capabilities and competencies sells students short by denying them access to powerful disciplinary knowledge. This study suggests that such a binary representation is problematic and that a capability like *Ethical understanding*, which could be placed within the ubiquitous hold-all of '21<sup>st</sup> century skills', can potentially deepen disciplinary learning rather than diminish it.

The capability of *Ethical understanding* stands apart from other General capabilities of the *Australian Curriculum*. Jürgen Habermas's three types of knowledge interests, discussed in Chapters One and Two, are helpful in delineating this difference. Capabilities like *Literacy*, *Numeracy* and the *Information and Communication Technology Capability* (ICT) link to Habermas' technical knowledge interest. It could be argued that *Intercultural understanding* and the *Personal and Social Capability* are linked to the hermeneutic communicative interest. It is the *Ethical understanding* and *Critical and Creative Thinking* capabilities that appear to be aligned with the emancipatory knowledge interest. Habermas suggests that it is emancipatory knowledge that leverages personal, and ultimately social, transformation. An earlier comment of one of the History teachers in Chapter Five concerning the impact of her unit of work on her students bears repetition here:

I don't think that any girls could finish the topic, as we have in past times, thinking that that could never happen to us, which I think is a really good place to be - it's greyer, being grey is a more adult place to be.

In this study the incorporation of an ethical perspective, whatever shape that took, appears to have provided the conditions for students to adopt a critical, reflective stance in relation to themselves, others and wider society. Such a disposition holds the seeds of emancipation and transformation.

Most teachers in the study observed that working with an ethical dimension engaged a wider range of students. That engagement appeared deeper than had previously been the case. Engagement is always high on the agenda of teachers as they seek to enhance the learning of their students. Increased engagement through the presence of the ethical dimension also enabled opportunity for the development of empathy in students. The experiences of the teachers in this study suggest the connection between teaching for ethical understanding, increased student engagement and the cultivation of empathy creates a powerful dynamic in the classroom. It is perhaps in this dynamic that an environment is brought into being in which students might be formed to engage positively and productively with the complexities of our times.

In preparing units of work for their classes, participants in this study were invited to inhabit the gap between policy and practice. They were provided with the *Ethical understanding* curriculum documentation as their formal reference point. Their ambivalence toward this material has been discussed earlier in this thesis. What emerged to fill this gap was their knowledge, their uncertainty, their creativity and willingness, or not, to take risks. The action and experience of teachers in this study underscored the oft ignored reality that teachers are *always* more than implementers of curriculum. They are to a greater or lesser extent (and in this study I suggest 'greater' applies) curriculum *makers*. The bridges constructed by teachers between policy and practice represent new knowledge about both *Ethical understanding* and their academic subjects. This knowledge should constitute a vital part of a dynamic cycle of curriculum evaluation and evolution in which curriculum developers and practitioners are co-creators.

In this study, participants took up a variety of pedagogic practices to support the cultivation of ethical understanding. For some, following this demand took them into places of pedagogical discomfort. Practices that were more student-centred, that involved 'walking in the shoes of another' experiences, and dialogic rather than monologic classroom discourse, were favoured and drew students powerfully into reflective ethical spaces. One Science teacher had never used role play before. In one of the History classes the grandfather of one of the students who was a holocaust survivor, was invited to and did speak publicly for the first time to that class. All participants recognised that incorporating ethical understanding into their subjects was a move that enhanced the space for student voice in their classrooms. Just like the learners in their classrooms, teachers require safety, support and encouragement if they are to expand their pedagogical repertoire effectively. Integrating a capability like *Ethical understanding* requires more than an intellectual stretch for some - it can ask for a new way of being in the classroom.

The participants spoke frankly about the impact of the activation of a conscious and explicit ethical element in the classroom on both their pedagogy and their teacher *selves*. They connected the presence of an ethical element with challenge and transformation in both their identity and practice. The study indicates that the presence of an explicit ethical dimension, enacted in a variety of ways by teachers, engaged both teachers and students at deep levels of their humanity. This suggests the experience of teaching with this capability holds potential not only for student development but teacher development as well, at both a professional and personal level.

The experience of participants in this study would suggest that an ethical dimension is a disruptive presence in the classroom, but an overwhelmingly positive one. In this study, bringing ethical understanding into the classroom had a ripple effect beyond the immediate task of integrating it into a subject-specific unit of work. Most teachers in this study ventured beyond their subject content knowledge into a deeper disciplinary knowing. For some teachers their experience in the study took them into the rarely examined territory of teacher identity. In following this invitation, which was at times confronting, they were able to become more consciously aware of their teacher selves as ethical identities. These

experiences certainly provide insight into what types of professional support might be apposite for teachers engaged in this endeavour. They also point to a gap in the scope of many pre-service teacher education courses that are often framed around a technical expertise and training model rather than a humanistic holistic model of formation.

## **Strengths and limitations**

All studies of course have limitations and this study is no exception. As a qualitative study, it shares many of the common strengths and limitations of this form of research. There is no pretence on this writer's behalf to claim generalizability in the findings of a study derived from such a small number of participants. Further, the fact that participants were volunteers sparks an immediate reminder that there are voices of those who did not participate yet to be heard, and indeed these voices may sound a counterpoint to the views gathered in this study.

However, the aim of the study was to understand qualitatively how a group of teachers from varied subject backgrounds would respond when asked to integrate attention to ethical understanding as a 'general capability' within their subjects. Because this integration was not a point of mandatory implementation in the *Australian Curriculum* the research worked with those who volunteered to take part in the project with this focus. They were not responding to a 'top down' compulsion. This afforded participants an open, experimental space largely unimpeded by the myriad contextual constraints of the school curriculum and its attendant assessment imperatives. The experience of participants was inevitably shaped by these conditions. The school and participant samples were limited and not representative of the full diversity of school profiles and teacher experience. A much larger sample would help to uncover trends and patterns beyond this particular enactment, however, my aim here was to illuminate a set of processes and reform in action. Chapter Five is a pertinent case in point. All participants, through their experience, agreed that ethics of some description has a place within the teaching of their subjects. Some noted that students' academic results were strengthened when ethics was combined with subject content. This outcome holds

much promise, but practitioners are not wooed by possibilities. A more substantial and detailed study specifically addressing the link between the explicit teaching of ethics within subject content and academic performance of students, would be needed to have a widespread influence on practice.

Decisions were made in the design of this study - decisions that carried within them limitations for the work. The small sample of participants, whilst allowing for the gathering of rich data, cannot be regarded as statistically significant. Findings therefore are of necessity suggestive and begin the outline of a future research path, rather than provide the path in its entirety. The lack of diversity within the school sites is regrettable. Whilst significant variation exists within and between all schools, even if they are systemically alike, a greater number of school sites within a study like this would have expanded variables such as socio-economic status, gender, systemic identity etc, which in turn may have broadened the actions and experiences of teachers in their work of taking *Ethical understanding* into the classroom. In choosing the case study design, I immediately stepped into what Guba and Lincoln (1981) describe as the 'unusual problems of ethics. An unethical case writer could so select from among available data that virtually anything he wished could be illustrated (p. 378). An ironic challenge for a study focusing on *Ethical understanding*! The questions developed for interviews and suggestions for journaling were researcher-generated and carry with them inherent bias. As Stake (2005) notes, 'Qualitative case study is highly personal research' (p.135), and I would add that it is therefore risky and demands of the researcher intense rigor and integrity.

Discerning what can and can't be claimed reasonably from a study such as this is best described as a form of academic tightrope walking. The awareness of the limitations of such a study, whilst essential for authenticity and balance, can tip over into a kind of minimising that undermines and eclipses its genuine value and substantive contribution to its field. The great strength of this study is its capturing of the experiences of a group of teachers at work creating new curriculum that draws upon their expert and everyday knowledges whilst concurrently taking them into unknown territory. It provides us with eleven individual maps of the terrain of that journey and impressions of the destinations reached. At the time of

the submission of this thesis, there appears to be no other published research examining the way teachers have put *Ethical understanding* to work in subject classrooms. The experiences of the participants are not offered as templates for practice but rather lenses that might provide insight and inspiration for the thinking and imagining of other practitioners who seek to enact this aspect of the *Australian Curriculum*.

## Final remarks

Schooling is inherently ideological as it is fundamentally about who and what we value and how we think about ourselves in relation to others and the wider world. As such it is not immune to the push and pull of political contestation; indeed, it is often the site where different political visions are played out with intensity. The *Australian Curriculum*, having been born under the aegis of a Labor government was subject to review when a Coalition government came to power. The General Capabilities were regarded favourably in the submissions received and consultations undertaken, however the reviewers, Dr Kevin Donnelly and Professor Kenneth Wiltshire, nonetheless recommended that only three capabilities maintain their cross-curricular status. These were the clearly instrumental capabilities, *Literacy, Numeracy and ICT capability*. In the revisions that followed ACARA quietly ignored this recommendation. Whilst the General Capabilities remained untouched in this process, little has been done to nurture their development, as a kind of inertia has set in respect of them in the wake of the review. Sadly, this aspect of curriculum innovation has been subjected to political-agenda hijacking and stifled for a time.

The experience of participants in this study reminds us that there is a vein of gold waiting to be mined further in explicitly bringing the capability of *Ethical understanding* into subject disciplines. Diverse views of ethics and ethical understanding were evidenced in the small participant sample of the study. Further research based on a numerically larger and varied participant base (school systems, school SES), in addition to the inclusion of other subject areas and year levels may yield an even greater diversity and complexity in the way ethics is conceptualised by practitioners. This data, along with the turn discussed earlier in

this thesis in the area of philosophical Ethics and ethics in Education, could inform the development of this capability, building its robustness to meet the needs of students as they step into the unknown terrain of the coming decades. In seeking to understand how this capability could be taken into the classroom and enacted, teachers - their thinking, feeling and their work - were at the heart of the study. In their reports of their experiences, a small amount of evidence and some speculation was offered as to the connection between subject content infused with an ethical dimension and enhanced academic outcomes for students. Student experience was not in the scope of the study, though teachers obviously referenced it. The connection posited here between ethical understanding and enhanced academic performance for students is certainly an area that invites research.

As I type these final reflections, the *#MeToo* movement has gathered remarkable momentum. Abuse of power in its many and varied guises is being exposed. People are saying this is not, and never has been, *OK*. Through horrible pain and suffering a rising level of human consciousness seems to be emerging. A longing for people to live ethical lives marked by compassion and respect is palpable. The stage is thus well set for educators to take up their part of this challenge in cultivating ethical people and ethical societies. The experience of educators in this study demonstrates they are willing and have to hand tools like the capability of *Ethical understanding* to guide and propel them.

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