WANG Lijia, Manhong LAI, Leslie N. K. LO

Teachers' Interpretations of the Ethical Dimensions of Teaching on the Chinese Mainland: A Case Study of Two Secondary Schools in Shanghai

Abstract This paper highlights Chinese teachers' ethical concerns in their relationships with students, colleagues, and students' parents. Through a qualitative study of 26 teachers, it was found that the teachers were often trapped in a dilemma between teaching to students' real development and teaching to the test. The ethics of professional collaboration were compromised by the dominant norms, including interpersonal harmony and respect for older teachers, and by competition among individual teachers to demonstrate good performance. Moreover, in a situation where parents' trust was diminishing, teachers assumed certain teaching and caring responsibilities for children from disadvantaged families. It is suggested that the professionalization of teachers should provide them with more professional space to transform their ethical considerations into practice.

Keywords ethical dimensions of teaching, teacher professionalism, teacher professional development, China

* The study is supported by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, grant No.: 14JJD880001.[0]

WANG Lijia (✉)

Department of Education, East China Normal University, Shanghai 200062, China

E-mail: ljwang@dedu.ecnu.edu.cn

Manhong LAI

Department of Educational Administration and Policy, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China

Leslie N. K. LO

Center for Teacher Education Research, Beijing Normal University, Beijing 100875, China

Introduction

Ethics is frequently posited as one of the fundamental characteristics of the teaching profession (Campbell, 2008). Teachers work, both as individuals and members of the school community, to serve the best interests of their students (Tirri, 1999; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2010; Husu & Tirri, 2003). It has been found that in teachers' daily practice, their experiences of ethical dilemmas which arise in their relations with students, colleagues and students' parents, together with the solutions to these problems, could influence their sense of ethical efficacy and ethical professionalism (Campbell, 2003; Colnerud, 1997; Tirri, 1999). However, previous research efforts have mainly given attention to teachers' ethical concerns over their students. These ethical concerns in interaction and collaboration with other parties in the communities, such as colleagues and parents, are an area that requires more empirical research (Campbell, 2009). In this study, we try to broaden earlier discussions by addressing how teachers relate to their colleagues and to students' parents in their endeavor to improve students' development.

On the Chinese Mainland, teacher ethics has been an important theme in teacher professionalization since the 1990s, when this became an important aspect of educational reform. Over the past 20 years, ethics has been emphasized in various policies related to teacher professionalization. Recent policy initiatives, such as a "veto" system of teacher ethics (MOE, 2013), which means teachers will lose the opportunity to obtain promotion or registration or even lose their job if they fail in ethical evaluations carried out at school, have further increased ethical concerns about the teacher's role. While ethical requirements have been laid out in policies, little is known about how teachers construct their ethical concerns. As ethical concerns should embody indigenous understanding, further empirical studies of the ethical dimensions of teaching in the Chinese Mainland are needed. This paper is an attempt to enhance such understanding by addressing the following questions:

- (1) How do teachers understand their ethical responsibilities to students? How do they deal with ethical dilemmas in the process of fulfilling these responsibilities?
- (2) How do teachers' required collaborations affect their ethical concerns?
- (3) What ethical concerns do teachers have in their work with parents?

The paper is divided into five sections. A review of the literature on the ethical dimensions of teacher professionalism is provided first. The second part depicts the Chinese context. In the third part the methodology adopted for the research is discussed, and in the fourth part, the research findings are presented. The final part discusses major findings and concludes with implications for future teacher professionalism.

Major Issues in the Ethical Dimensions of Teaching

In recent years, teachers and the teaching profession have become a major subject of discussion in the literature on the global reform of education (Wermke & Höstfält, 2013), and there is “a growing expectation that teachers will act in a ‘professional manner’ ” (O’Neill & Bourke, 2010, p. 159). The concept of teacher professionalism is often presented along three dimensions: (1) ownership of a systematic body of knowledge and skills that can guide teaching practice; (2) authority and autonomy recognized by the “clientele” which enable teachers to exercise their competencies in complex and unpredicted situations; (3) professional ethics, which calls upon teachers to work in the best interests of their clients, and to conduct appropriate relations with clients and colleagues (O’Neill & Bourke, 2010; Hoyle & John, 1995).

Since the 1990s, the ethical dimensions of teaching have been increasingly researched (Campbell, 2008). Ethics, as both belief and practice, is related to right behavior or good character (Becker & Becker, 2001, p. 485). It arises in relation to other people and is considered as an essential aspect of teacher professionalism (Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990; Sockett, 1993). It guides teachers’ practice in their handling of relationship issues and in their decision making concerning their students, colleagues, and students’ parents (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2009).

The majority of teachers identify students as the primary responsibility in their work. Teachers have ethical aims and hope to contribute to students’ personal and social development (Fischman, DiBara, & Gardner, 2006). Providing equal access to knowledge for all students, believing that all students are able to learn, and helping them to perform to their highest possible level are the key ethical elements of teaching (Goodlad et al., 1990; Yost, 1997). To achieve this, teachers should be knowledgeable regarding the content and value of the subjects they

teach. They should choose relevant and useful content for their students, and deliver the knowledge with integrity (Yost, 1997). Teachers should provide good teaching, which will, ultimately, make a positive contribution to a student's life (Boon, 2011). Teachers also attach importance to facilitating their students' moral development. Research into teachers' style and manner (e.g., Hansen, 1993; Fenstermacher, 2001; Richardson & Fallona, 2001) proposes that, through the interaction with students and teaching in the classroom, teachers could exercise a positive influence on their students' moral development. Teachers can also deliver an ethical message to students through the construction of a learning community and by serving as a moral example (Richardson & Fallona, 2001). If teachers provide teaching that is imbued with ethical significance, students can learn to understand the subject, others and themselves in an ethical way, as well as to construct a shared morality (Hansen, 1992).

Compared to the abundance of research on teachers' ethical concerns regarding students, a relatively small number of studies have dealt with the collegial aspects of teacher ethics which are teachers' ethical concerns in their relationship with their colleagues and even these have only indirectly examined teachers' ethical concerns under the theme of ethical dilemmas (e.g., Colnerud, 1997; Campbell, 2008; Husu, 2001). Teachers' ethical concerns should include both individual and collegial aspects (Sockett, 1993; Husu & Tirri, 2001); in order to serve students well, teachers have to cooperate with their colleagues and with parents (Aurin & Maurer, 1993). Some researchers (e.g., Ball, 2003; Husu & Tirri, 2007) have considered the basic ethics of professional collaboration to include teachers cooperating with each other, helping, encouraging and respecting each other, following the rules they have agreed on, and acting as responsible members of the community. It is generally agreed that teachers' contribution to student development is enhanced when based on collective efforts (Little, 2003). To deepen understanding of the ethical dimensions of teaching, as Campbell (2009) commented, it is important to give consideration to "the relational and interpersonal dynamics among colleagues as members of school-based professional communities" (p. 84).

Some researchers have also demonstrated that teachers want to work in collaboration with parents in order to serve the best interests of their students and contribute to students' development (Husu & Tirri, 2001). Teachers and parents share concerns about the students, and, to a certain extent, also share a set of

values, norms, and orientations towards teaching and schooling (Achinstein, 2002). There is no doubt that parents have their own aims and values regarding education, as well as judgments about and expectations of their children. Teachers have to respect parents' rights and authority (Colnerud, 1997; Husu, 2001). Communication with parents and respect for parents' needs are essential to a shared understanding of educational goals, and teachers have to ensure that actions taken are "joint actions" in order for them to help students develop effectively (Husu, 2001; Adams & Christenson, 2000). It was found that in a conflict of values or when the protection of children conflicts with parents' rights, teachers may become trapped in an ethical dilemma that taxes them both mentally and emotionally (Husu, 2001).

Finally, regarding the nature of the ethical dimensions of teaching, researchers have found that school goals and cultural elements such as rules, standards, and norms shape teachers' ideas of what is ethical and what to do in a specific context (Enrich, Kimber, Millwater, & Cranston, 2011; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2010). Recent studies have also emphasized the fact that the changing society has forced school professionals to confront more complex ethical issues (Catacutan & de Guzman, 2015). Since discussion on the ethical dimensions of teaching continues and remains contentious, the ways in which social and educational contexts influence teachers' understanding needs further exploration. This paper sets the study in the Chinese school context with the aim of enriching international understanding of the issue.

Teacher Development in the Chinese Context

In an important official document published by the Ministry of Education in 2012, *Professional Standards for Secondary School Teachers*, the Chinese government identified political rectitude, ethics, knowledge, and skills as the key elements of teacher professionalism in China (Lo, Lai, & Wang, 2013). Amongst a list of desirable attributes, teacher ethics is considered the primary criterion for judging the professional quality of a teacher.

In China, according to the Ministry of Education (MOE, 2012), the ethical dimensions of teaching include four components. First, teachers should possess a correct political attitude and identify with their profession. Second, they should be responsible for student learning and moral development. Third, teachers

should be of good character, being caring and optimistic. Fourth, they should cooperate with colleagues and parents in order to contribute significantly to the students' development ("Practical Suggestions"). Teachers' relationships with their colleagues and parents are important ethical aspects which were also emphasized in the policy papers.

It has been found that in practice, Chinese teachers attach great importance to the knowledge and methods that are related to their specific subjects, but that they seldom enjoy autonomy in their work and tend to conform to the requirements and regulations laid down by the government (Lo et al., 2013). They emphasize an awareness of their responsibility to their students, but often feel trapped in a dilemma between catering for their students' all-round development and teaching solely for the purpose of academic achievement which will determine the students' opportunities in life (Wang, 2012).

Most of the previous empirical studies on the ethical dimensions of teaching in China have employed a questionnaire survey approach (Tan, 2009; Zhu & Liu, 2009). Their findings suggest that the teachers surveyed hoped to become role models of morality for their students. They believed that caring and justice towards students were the most important characteristics of teachers. About half of teachers surveyed had a collegial relationship with their teaching-research group (*jiaoyanzu*).² They supported the initiatives in teaching improvement of their colleagues and were willing to engage them in conversation about curriculum and instruction. As for the relationship with parents, it was found that the connection between teachers and parents was not strong (Tan, 2009).

One piece of qualitative research carried out by Wang (2009) reveals that most teachers emphasized their personal morality rather than the ethics of the whole teaching profession. They confronted various ethical dilemmas in their daily work, including how to solve students' behavior problems and how to balance the conflicting views of parents and influences from colleagues. Based on these studies, the question of how Chinese teachers interpret their relations with different parties clearly warrants further investigation.

² An inter-school organization in which teachers of the same subject collaborate with each other to discuss and improve teaching.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research method. Qualitative data obtained from semi-structured, in-depth interviews was collected during the 2012 to 2013 academic year from two secondary schools in Shanghai. The authors conducted the fieldwork at School A and School B. School A was established in 1996, has approximately 1,100 students enrolled, and is staffed by 83 teachers. School B was established in the 1950s and has approximately 1,000 students enrolled and is staffed by 100 teachers.

The selection of the two schools was based on purposive sampling. First, School A is an ordinary school and School B is a key point school. Compared with ordinary schools, a key point school receives more resources from the government and attracts the best teachers and students in the locality. Second, School A is a senior secondary school and School B is a junior secondary school. Teachers of these schools may be required to deal with different development needs and each may have a distinct understanding of what is good for students. Third, School A and School B have their own operational concepts. School A has developed the notion of “appreciation-based education” (*shangshi jiaoyu*), which requires teachers to find the strength of each student in learning and moral development and seize suitable opportunities to praise students for these strengths with the aim of improving their self-confidence. School B emphasizes its students' academic learning and examination results. The selection of these two schools helps to reflect teachers' perceptions of the ethical dimensions of teaching in different contexts that have various resources, needs, and purposes of development.

Teachers were the informants for the study. According to Tan (2009), teacher moral development could be divided into five stages according to their teaching experiences (i.e., induction period [0–4 years], developmental period [5–16 years], stagnation period [17–21 years], stabilization period [22–27 years] and conservative period [after 28 years]). The study selected teachers based on their length of service and academic subjects taught, and due to the demographic and subject structure of the two schools, we selected 15 teachers from School A and 11 teachers from School B (see Table 1).

Table 1 Summary of Teacher Participants

	Subject	Length of Service (years)		
		0–4	5–16	above 17
School A	Math		3	1
	English		2	2
	Political education		2	2
	Chemistry	1		1
	Physics	1		
School B	Math		1	1
	Chinese	1	1	1
	Chemistry	1		2
	History	1		1
	Physics	1		

All the informants were interviewed separately using semi-structured questions. The interview questions began with the general quest for teachers’ understanding of the ethical aspects of their work and developed further based on the three research questions. The initial interview questions were: (a) As a teacher, what are your most important responsibilities? Why are they important? (b) Have you ever encountered dilemmas in fulfilling these responsibilities? How did you resolve them? (c) How do you work with your colleagues in your daily work? (d) What concerns guide your cooperation with your colleagues? (e) How have students’ parents influenced your work? (f) How did you respond to parents’ needs or wants? These were just guiding questions in the interview; further probing would be developed according to the informant’s answers. The interviews were audio-recorded with the teachers’ permission and verbatim transcripts were made.

The data were coded and analyzed to extract themes related to the research questions. The coding process was carried out in three stages, namely: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In order to triangulate the data, the coding of the data was carried out separately by the first two researchers. When necessary, cross-checking with different informants was also employed.

Findings

Teaching Ethically and Carrying Out Moral Education as the Core Work

Teaching is ethical work; it encompasses the aspects of “teaching morally” and “teaching morality” (Hansen, 2013). As most of the teachers interviewed said, the ethical dimensions of teaching were exhibited in good teaching which meant enhancing students’ intellectual and moral development.

Teaching ethically was first concerned with respecting each student’s uniqueness. In the two schools, all the teachers put responsible teaching for each student at the core of ethical work. As Teacher K from School A said, teaching ethically means “you can teach each student well, make them understand the subject matter” (SchATchK, personal communication, May 24, 2012). The teachers hoped their teaching would enhance the students’ learning confidence and increase their interest in learning. At School B, the teachers hoped they would be able to improve their students’ learning by paying attention to their thoughts and life experiences. Teacher S in School A who had worked for two years pointed out the importance of listening to students’ ideas; he thought that “each student has his own ideas and their thinking is very active” (SchATchS, personal communication, May 23, 2012). Listening to students’ thoughts was not only a way to show respect, but also a way to draw the students’ attention to the teacher’s teaching.

At School A, the idea of respecting differences was explicitly emphasized under the idea of “appreciation-based education”; teachers thought they should attach importance to the needs of different students and be patient, especially with the lower-level learners. Praise was thought to be an ethical approach in teaching. The teachers’ job was to recognize the differences between students, and to discover each student’s area of merit and appreciate it. It was thought that proper appreciation would benefit the students greatly. As Teacher L told the researcher,

If you always criticize a student for his weak points and don’t appreciate his strong points, he will grow up in a shadow. The most important thing is don’t let the child lose confidence. If he loses confidence, he will be reluctant to learn and to follow your advice. (SchATchL, personal communication, May 22, 2012)

Appreciation was thought of as contributing to students' character development and learning. It is clear that, in both schools, teaching ethically was first and foremost concerned with knowing students' intellectual and personal characteristics, and the teaching process was based on the students' unique interests and characteristics.

The second aspect of teaching ethically is about teaching to help students get the highest test scores, and this emphasis on teaching results often in making teachers feel trapped in the dilemma between teaching for student's intellectual development and teaching for tests. As one mathematics teacher at School B put it, allowing students to explore mathematics knowledge makes them more interested in the subject, but instilling knowledge is much faster, so students learn mathematics concepts in a shorter time and are better prepared for the examinations. She said, "There is a contradiction," because she knew instilling knowledge was not as beneficial for students' intellectual development (SchBTchL, personal communication, January 8, 2013). Another teacher at School B echoed this point,

[Learning Chinese] is a question of literacy rather than knowing bits of knowledge to answer test questions. But the College Entrance Examination is there... The goal of our teaching is very specific... developing students' examination skills. Sometimes we feel confused... but we can't escape from the "devil's talons" of training students for high test scores. (SchBTchU, personal communication, January 8, 2013)

Torn between the conflicting aims of the real intellectual development of students, in which learning interest and real understanding are emphasized, on the one hand, and desirable test scores on the other, most of the teachers interviewed said they had no choice but to teach "for the good of the students," and this "good" means students getting final examination scores that are as high as possible. Many of the teachers interviewed used words such as "inculcate" and "compel" to describe their efforts to improve students' test scores. However, this kind of "compelling" action sometimes put them in an ethical dilemma, caused by the conflict between their desire to teach to enhance the students' real intellectual development and teaching them simply to improve their final test results.

The third aspect was the cultivation of students' moral development and

incorporating socially acceptable values, but in this endeavor they encountered difficulties as well. At both schools, “making a student a moral person” was one of the most important aims. Teacher X at School B pointed out, “I don’t think the social climate is very good; I think we should cultivate students’ moral development and give them some direction [as to how] to live a moral life.” (SchBTchX, personal communication, January 9, 2013)

In their daily practice of moral education, some of them, especially older teachers who taught political education, frequently experienced tensions that were reflective of the inherent contradictions of society at large. As Teacher C in School A pointed out,

We all talk about value pluralism in China, but the truth is that moral values are in a [state of] chaos. For example, we talk about honesty every day, but since even the society and the government are not honest, it is really hard for a school to teach honesty. (SchATchC, personal communication, May 31, 2012)

Teacher H at School A, a veteran teacher with 20 years’ teaching experience, concurred with this, saying that, “The contents of our course are positive and conform to social values. But what the students hear and see in the outside world may be negative and conflict with what you have taught” (SchATchH, personal communication, May 21, 2012).

Teacher H doubted the real impact of imparting moral values to her students, but she said, “As a teacher, although I know sometimes they will not accept what I have taught, I still have to teach it. The effect [laugh]... God only knows” (SchATchH, personal communication, May 21, 2012).

From the above, it is evident that conflict lies between carrying out moral education under the order of the central government and paying attention to the real moral experiences of students in their everyday lives.

Unspoken Interpersonal Rules Regulating Collegial Collaboration

For more than 50 years, Chinese teachers have been required to work together in teaching-research groups with the aim of improving their teaching collectively (Hu, 2005). This is considered to be one of the most effective ways of improving their abilities to help “students learn happily and get the best test scores.”

Therefore, for teachers at both schools, how to connect with their colleagues in an ethical way was thought to be an important issue which influenced their daily practice. Although the teachers had great expectations of teaching-research activities, some unspoken interpersonal norms hindered their cooperation.

First, the emphasis on maintaining interpersonal harmony was a significant obstacle to engaging in critical dialogue. As a prominent norm in collegial relationships, harmony among teachers is considered important since it influences teachers' teaching and feelings. Teacher J at School A said, "If you can't deal with it well, you can get in a bad mood, and I don't think I can work in that situation" (SchATchJ, personal communication, May 24, 2012). The best way of maintaining harmony was being seen as willing to "compliment and avoid criticizing others"; and when this rule was applied to teaching-research activities, it meant that teachers were usually caught in a dilemma between criticizing colleagues' ideas or maintaining harmonious relationships. Under great pressure from social norms, most teachers would choose to do the latter.

One important activity of a teaching-research group is to observe other teachers' open lessons. The contents and processes of open lessons are always formal and lacking in interest for the teachers; teachers are organized by their school to listen to and give suggestions on the public lessons. The teachers said they had little interest in this activity, since in order to avoid jeopardizing harmony very few people were willing to offer any useful comments. As Teacher Y from School A said,

When we watch and give comments on another teacher's class, we do not give too many negative comments, right? We Chinese are all like this; we all tend to say something good and give little constructive criticism; [we do not] criticize others or point out the shortcomings of others. (SchATchY, personal communication, May 25, 2012)

Since there were few serious inquiries into novel ideas about teaching in open lessons, the aims of mutual development and achieving any real improvement in teaching were difficult to realize in this kind of teaching-research activity.

Second, respect for elder colleagues was the rule in relationships between younger and older teachers. At both schools, older teachers were thought to be those who had more experience of preparing students for the examinations; they knew what content would be important in tests and which teaching methods

would improve students' learning efficiency. Most of the younger teachers told us that they had to learn from the older teachers' ways of teaching students so that they could get higher test scores, and this requirement had strengthened the traditional custom of respecting elders. Younger teachers said that although they sometimes had their own ideas that were different from those of older teachers, they tended to conceal their own thoughts in order to avoid offending the older teachers whom they were supposed to learn from. One teacher provided his own insight into this phenomenon:

Some of them [older teachers] are stubborn, and since there is no need to quarrel with them, I will accept their ideas; as the saying goes, "older is wiser"; humility is a traditional Chinese virtue; I am the younger teacher so I should compromise. (SchATchZ, personal communication, May 22, 2012)

It was evident that respecting and reproducing elder colleagues' experiences under pressure from the high stakes tests has made young teachers choose to give up on their own professional ideas and their own teaching styles.

Third, in respect of those teachers who all had more than five years' teaching experience, competition in terms of individual performance had hindered the teachers' collaboration for mutual improvement. At both schools, the "performance pay system," which is based on evaluations of teacher performance, was largely determined by students' test scores, and most teachers mentioned that these scores were the most visible evidence of merit. "The rank of scores your students get in the examination will be your rank in the performance evaluation," Teacher K at School A pointed out (SchATchK, personal communication, May 24, 2012). This test-based evaluation has made the teachers more concerned about their own merit rating in teaching and has deterred them from truly helping others with similar teaching experiences. Teacher P in School B who had 30 years of teaching experience provided us with an extreme example. He said that if a particular teacher was responsible for setting the examination paper for all students of the same grade, he would let students of his class know in advance the major themes on the test paper in order to improve their test scores. He thought it was the teacher evaluation system that forced teachers to compete with each other and do things that were unethical (SchBTchP, personal communication, January 10, 2013). Another mathematics teacher from School A

expressed a similar idea. She told us that she wanted to learn from those who taught well, but the truth was,

Sometimes you ask about his methods of teaching, and he is very cautious, just talks to you in one or two sentences. I feel embarrassed to ask him since he may not want the others to know his effective method. (SchATchJ, personal communication, May 24, 2012)

We could see that the performance pay system that linked students' test scores with a teacher's performance has made it difficult for collaboration between older teachers to develop. Professional collaboration that could enhance the all-round development of students beyond the scope of tests and examinations was largely neglected.

Dealing with Uncaring Parents and Parents with Different Educational Values

The development of students is a shared responsibility between home and school. However, teachers at the two schools mentioned that with the decreasing trust of parents, they had to teach the students in ways that met their own ethical standards and to seek different ways of relating to parents.

In the Chinese tradition, teachers used to be thought of as "moral models of the society." Thus, with regard to teaching ethically in the face of parental challenges to their own moral integrity, many older teachers recalled the good old days when they first began teaching. Teacher H at School A told us that when she began teaching in the 1990s, parents showed respect for and trusted the teachers: "They worked with the school and the teachers to educate their children. They thought we would work for their children's good" (SchATchH, personal communication, May 21, 2012). Nowadays, by contrast, since many parents are better educated, and since a diversity of educational values co-exist in the society, many parents are not as ready to accept the teachers' ideas and the kind of education they deliver. As a teacher at School A told us, sometimes parents did not agree with the values that teachers attempted to instill in their children, and they would tell their children that "she [the teacher] is not right; you don't need to do things according to what she tells you" (SchATchC, personal

communication, May 31, 2012). A teacher at School B also mentioned the fact that some parents did not even show proper respect for teachers at parent-teacher group meetings: "They talk to each other when I am speaking in front of the class" (SchBTchD, personal communication, January 9, 2013). Although the teachers were confronted by the mistrust and disrespect of certain parents, in order to retain an ethical relationship with parents, the teachers said what they could do was to conduct teaching according to the dictates of their conscience, and try to gain parents' trust through their good work, as Teacher I at School A gave the following description:

I teach according to my own conscience, I will notify and call the parents using different methods to let them know how their child is performing at school. When I examine myself, I feel no shame; I have done what I should do no matter what the parents' manner is. (SchATchI, personal communication, May 28, 2012)

Moreover, the teachers had to assume certain responsibilities that were transferred from parents who were not attentive to the need of their children. In the two schools, all the teachers interviewed hoped that the parents would fulfill their natural responsibilities for educating their own children. Teacher H at School B said: "Sometimes I think that the education provided by the students' families is more important than that provided by our school, especially the example set by parents" (SchBTchH, personal communication, January 8, 2013). However, many of the teachers at both schools complained that there were many irresponsible parents. Some parents just abandoned their caring responsibilities. One of the teachers at School A and one of the teachers at School B mentioned that some poorer parents were too busy making money and therefore had no time or ability to take care of their children; they had no aspiration for and placed no demands on their children. Teacher F told us that some parents even "consider school as a 'child-care center' " (SchATchF, personal communication, May 22, 2012). Most of the teachers said they had to assume educational responsibilities which should be shouldered by parents, and they found this exhausting. Some teachers mentioned that they had to spend after-school hours helping students whose parents could not assist or supervise their completion of homework. Teacher S at School A said that teachers could not change students' families, but what they could do for children with inattentive parents was to "try our best to

understand their situation, let them know that there is an emotional connection between us. We hope to change them through our own efforts” (SchATchS, personal communication, May 23, 2012). It is clear that when faced with a lack of familial support, which was especially evident among disadvantaged students, teachers tried to devote more time to helping these students and to reach out to them emotionally.

Furthermore, the teachers tried to achieve shared educational values with parents through authentic dialogue and sincere persuasion. Some parents had educational expectations of their children which were different from those of the teachers. Teacher Z from School A said that: “Some parents have arranged everything for their children, and want to send them abroad to study; they think teachers should not ask their children to study hard” (SchATchZ, personal communication, May 22, 2012), while Teacher Z thought these children had great potential and could realize them if they studied harder. Some parents had contradictory requirements for the teachers. Teacher H at School A mentioned that certain parents wanted teachers to work hard to tutor their children after school. However, if the teachers did tutor their children after school and the children got home late, the parents would blame the teachers (SchATchH, personal communication, May 21, 2012). Teacher C from School A commented that sometimes parents undermined teachers’ work. Certain parents not only failed to educate their children, but served as impediment to their progress: “changing parents’ [mindset] is even harder than educating children” (SchATchC, personal communication, May 31, 2012). When encountering parents who had different educational values or even contradictory educational requirements, most of the teachers interviewed said they would try to enter into a dialogue with the parents by letting them know about the teachers’ expectations and trying to negotiate suitable goals which would be beneficial to the students’ development. As Teacher I at School A said, “We try to communicate with them more; I will let them know I am doing what is good for their children. Through continuous dialogue, I think they will understand us” (SchATchI, personal communication, May 28, 2012).

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper has discussed the interpretations of the ethical dimensions of teaching

of teachers at two secondary schools in Shanghai. The findings revealed three main features: ethical pressure resulting from the tension between a desire for the students' real development and the demand for high test scores; dominant social norms undermining teacher collaboration under the performance pay system, distorting teachers' shared understanding of ethical concerns with colleagues; and diverse parental educational expectations compelling teachers to teach according to their own moral conscience.

First, we observed a desire among the teachers to be ethical. They saw responsible teaching as the core of their moral responsibility toward their students (Aurin & Maurer, 1993); this kind of responsibility was exhibited in teaching which emphasizes students' unique interests and life experiences. The teachers also thought that being responsible to students consisted of helping students to realize their learning potential (Strike, 1995), even though there was a certain amount of distortion of this aspect. School administrations tended to use test results as the ultimate standard to judge whether teachers had done their best to help students achieve their best performance in tests. This has led some of the teachers to think that it was their moral duty to compel students to learn and to enable them to pass tests, since tests would determine their future life opportunities. Therefore, the teachers tended to explain driving students to obtain higher test scores as being "for the good of the students." By engaging in this kind of internal conversation, the teachers were attempting to deal with the conflict between their desire to teach for the student' development and test-driven teaching, as they often had to struggle with feelings of guilt for not being able to facilitate the all-round development of their students (Husu, 2001).

Second, it was found that teachers usually fell into an ethical dilemma in their cooperation with colleagues, which constituted an aspect of the ethical dimensions of teaching among Chinese teachers. Our study confirmed Campbell's (2009) suggestion that a teacher's work in a professional community is full of ethical meaning. The work of a teacher at the two sample schools that took part in this study is shaped and influenced significantly by the practice of required teacher collaboration. Unspoken norms of respect and harmony rather than constructive criticism prevented the teachers from establishing a professional dialogue with their colleagues. The cooperation between the younger and the more experienced teachers amounted to a kind of one-directional guidance from the latter which encouraged conformity to the

most efficient ways of teaching students to pass exams. There was little exchange and exploration of different ideas about teaching. It is difficult to imagine that the goal of developing the self and the community for the benefit of student learning could be achieved under such circumstances (Little, 2003). Besides the norm of respecting elder teachers, “competition and performance” has also hindered the traditional ethics of professional cooperation (Ball, 2003). This kind of competition, to some degree, was a result of the performance pay system that is based on performance evaluation and student test scores. It is thus evident that the dominant social norms and performance pay system have presented enormous challenges for the collegial aspects of the ethical dimensions of teaching. They tested the teachers’ capacity for dealing with the conflicting requirements of authentic collaboration and impressive individual performance.

Third, it was found that the teachers attempted to follow the dictates of their own conscience when dealing with parents with different educational values. In recent years, the traditional moral status and public trust that Chinese teachers used to enjoy have been challenged by parents from increasingly diverse social and economic backgrounds. In order to nurture shared values and to provide students with a level of education which is satisfactory for both parents and teachers, the teachers choose to adhere to their own professional values and ideas about teaching, while trying to cater to parental needs with great patience through continuing dialogue (Husu, 2001). Certain teachers had assumed parental responsibilities for students from deprived families. They took care of these students in order to compensate for the lack of support from their families (Hanhimäki & Tirri, 2009), and considered it important to develop emotional connection with them.

The above findings and observations lead us to conclude that high-stake testing and the performance pay system have, to some degree, shaped teachers’ understanding of the ethical dimensions of teaching at the two schools that took part in our study. In their attempts to ensure that the best interests of their students be served, the teachers’ work has been complicated by a context in which test scores were given top priority in schools. In China’s attempt to professionalize its teachers, it is clear that the simple approach to improving their knowledge and skills is far from sufficient. At both schools, the ethical dilemma that the teachers were facing is between the emphasis on students’ test performance and their real development. It should be the task of teachers,

educators, and government officials to chart a course for the all-round development of students. Such a course of action should be based on a vision that can help to alleviate the constraints produced by the dominant social norms and the performance pay system. The healthy development of teacher professionalism requires a concomitant growth of teacher autonomy, expanded space for them to nurture their professional authority, increased opportunities for them to experiment with new ideas, and a heightened awareness of the need for genuine collaboration that is based on shared ethical concerns.

This study has employed a case study method which will limit the generalizability of research findings. We hope future research may expand the empirical efforts to other school categories around China with the aim of deepening our indigenous understanding of teachers' professionalism. Based on the current findings, future research could pay specific attention to teachers' experiences of and solutions to ethical dilemma or ethical tensions in their dealing with various educational stakeholders.

References

- Achinstein, B. (2002). Conflict amid community: The micropolitics of teacher collaboration. *Teachers College Record*, 104(3), 421–455. doi: 10.1111/1467-9620.00168
- Adams, K. S., & Christenson, S. L. (2000). Trust and the family-school relationship: Examination of parent-teacher differences in elementary and secondary grades. *Journal of School Psychology*, 38(5), 477–497. doi:10.1016/S0022-4405(00)00048-0
- Aurin, K., & Maurer, M. (1993). Forms and dimensions of teachers' professional ethics: Case studies in secondary schools. *Journal of Moral Education*, 22(3), 277–296. doi: 10.1080/0305724930220307
- Ball, S. J. (2003). The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity. *Journal of education policy*, 18(2), 215–228. doi: 10.1080/0268093022000043065
- Becker, L. C., & Becker, C. B. (Eds.). (2001). *Encyclopedia of ethics* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Boon, H. J. (2011). Raising the bar: Ethics education for quality teachers. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 36(7), 76–93. doi: 10.14221/ajte.2011v36n7.2
- Campbell, E. (2003). *The ethical teacher*. Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.
- Campbell, E. (2008). The ethics of teaching as a moral profession. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 38(4), 357–385. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-873X.2008.00414.x
- Campbell, E. (2009). Considering the ethical potential of professional communities (Review of the book "Teachers in professional communities: Improving teaching and learning," by A. Lieberman & L. Miller, Eds.). *Journal of Educational Change*, 10(1), 83–87. doi:

10.1007/s10833-008-9097-3

- Catacutan, M. R. G., & de Guzman, A. B. (2015). Ethical decision-making in academic administration: A qualitative study of college deans' ethical frameworks. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 42(4), 483–514. doi: 10.1007/s13384-015-0179-y
- Colnerud, G. (1997). Ethical conflicts in teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 13(6), 627–635. doi: 10.1016/S0742-051X(97)80005-4
- Ehrich, L. C., Kimber, M., Millwater, J., & Cranston, N. (2011). Ethical dilemmas: A model to understand teacher practice. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 17(2), 173–185. doi: 10.1080/13540602.2011.539794
- Fenstermacher, G. D. (2001). On the concept of manner and its visibility in teaching practice. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 33(6), 639–653. doi: 10.1080/00220270110049886
- Fischman, W., DiBara, J. A., & Gardner, H. (2006). Creating good education against the odds. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 36(3), 383–398. doi: 10.1080/03057640600866007
- Goodlad, J. I., Soder, R., & Sirotnik, K. A. (Eds.). (1990). *The moral dimensions of teaching*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Hanhimäki, E., & Tirri, K. (2009). Education for ethically sensitive teaching in critical incidents at school. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 35(2), 107–121. doi: 10.1080/02607470902770880
- Hansen, D. T. (1992). The emergence of a shared morality in a classroom. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 22(4), 345–361. doi: 10.1080/03626784.1992.11075412
- Hansen, D. T. (1993). From role to person: The moral layeredness of classroom teaching. *American Educational Research Journal*, 30(4), 651–674. doi: 10.3102/00028312030004651
- Hansen, D. T. (2013). Foreword. In M. N. Sanger & R. D. Osguthorpe (Eds.), *The moral work of teaching and teacher education* (pp. vii–x). New York, NY: Teachers College.
- Hoyle, E., & John, P. (1995). *Professional knowledge and professional practice*. New York, NY & London, England: Cassell.
- Hu, H. M. (2005). 教师专业发展背景下的学校教研组 [Study of teaching research group in the context of teacher development]. 全球教育展望 [Global Education], 34(7), 21–25.
- Husu, J. (2001). Teachers at cross-purposes: A case-report approach to the study of ethical dilemmas in teaching. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, 17(1), 67–89.
- Husu, J., & Tirri, K. (2001). Teachers' ethical choices in sociomoral settings. *Journal of Moral Education*, 30(4), 361–375. doi: 10.1080/03057240120094850
- Husu, J., & Tirri, K. (2003). A case study approach to study one teacher's moral reflection. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 19(3), 345–357. doi: 10.1016/S0742-051X(03)00019-2
- Husu, J., & Tirri, K. (2007). Developing whole school pedagogical values: A case of going through the ethos of “good schooling.” *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23(4), 390–401. doi: 10.1016/j.tate.2006.12.015
- Little, J. (2003). Inside teacher community: Representations of classroom practice. *The Teachers College Record*, 105(6), 913–945. doi: 10.1111/1467-9620.00273
- Lo, L. N. K., Lai, M. H., & Wang, L. J. (2013). The impact of reform policies on teachers'

- work and professionalism in the Chinese Mainland. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 41(3), 239–252. doi: 10.1080/1359866X.2013.809054
- MOE (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China). (2012). 中学教师专业标准 [*Professional standards for secondary school teachers*]. Retrieved May 17, 2016, from <http://baike.baidu.com/view/7071296.htm>
- MOE (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China). (2013). 关于建立健全中小学师德建设长效机制的意见 [*Advice on building an effective system of teacher ethics for all secondary and primary school teachers*]. Retrieved May 17, 2016, from <http://baike.baidu.com/view/12048503.htm>
- O'Neill, J., & Boruke, R. (2010). Educating teachers about a code of ethical conduct. *Ethics and Education*, 5(2), 159–172. doi: 10.1080/17449642.2010.516633
- Richardson, V., & Fallona, C. (2001). Classroom management as method and manner. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 33(6), 705–728. doi: 10.1080/00220270110053368
- Shapira-Lishchinsky, O. (2009). Towards professionalism: Ethical perspectives of Israeli teachers. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 32(4), 473–487. doi: 10.1080/02619760903257770
- Shapira-Lishchinsky, O. (2010). Ethical dilemmas in teaching and nursing: The Israeli case. *Oxford Review of Education*, 36(6), 731–748. doi: 10.1080/03054985.2010.503686
- Sockett, H. (1993). *The moral base for teacher professionalism*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. London, England & New Delhi, India: Sage.
- Strike, K. A. (1995). Professional ethics and the education of professionals. *Educational Horizons*, 74(1), 29–36.
- Tan, C. B. (2009). 走向新师德: 师德现状与教师专业道德建设研究 [*Towards new ethics: Explorations of professional ethics of teacher*]. 北京, 中国: 北京师范大学出版社 [Beijing, China: Beijing Normal University Press].
- Tirri, K. (1999). Teachers' perceptions of moral dilemmas at school. *Journal of Moral Education*, 28(1), 31–47. doi: 10.1080/030572499103296
- Wang, F. Y. (2012). 教育问责背景下教师的专业责任观 [Teacher's perceptions of professional responsibility in the context of educational accountability]. 全球教育展望 [*Global Education*], 41(3), 46–50.
- Wang, X. (2009). 教师对教学专业伦理的理解及其影响因素: 中国大陆D市的个案研究 [*Study on teachers' understanding of professional ethics in teaching and its influential factors: Case studies in City D of the Chinese Mainland*] (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). 香港中文大学, 香港, 中国 [The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China].
- Wermke, W., & Höstfält, G. (2013). Contextualizing teacher autonomy in time and space: A model for comparing various forms of governing the teaching profession. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 46(1), 58–80. doi: 10.1080/00220272.2013.812681
- Yost, D. S. (1997). The moral dimensions of teaching and preservice teachers: Can moral

dispositions be influenced? *Journal of Teacher Education*, 48(4), 281–292. doi: 10.1177/0022487197048004006

Zhu, N. B., & Liu, L. N. (2009). 中小学教师职业道德现状的调查研究 [Research on the present situation of primary and middle school teachers' professional morality]. 教育科学 [Education Science], 25(6), 37–41.