Reasoning about Ethics and Morality in the School Classroom: A Grounded Theory Case Study with a modified Kohlbergian Theoretical Framework

1.   Introduction

The motto of a certain primary school in northwest Sydney is "Learn to Live". Like many primary schools across the state and nation, this primary school specifically inculcates in its students a set of 'core values' such as kindness, loyalty, effort, responsibility, truth, respect.[1] Children at the school can rattle off the list of core values and receive instruction in identifying them, as well as reinforcement in enacting them by all teachers and the principal. Every Wednesday, children at the school can opt to take classes in philosophical ethics, which were started by a large group of parents wanting an alternative to mandated scripture courses. These ethics classes were piloted in 2010 and began running in NSW in 2011.[2] These ethics classes give students the opportunity not just to hear about moral values, but to engage in philosophical reasoning and discuss moral dilemmas. The hope in enacting such programs is presumably to shape the children's moral development in such a way as to create the right atmosphere, the ethos, for learning. Yet, how do children develop morally? How is moral development connected with learning? Are such programs helpful?

Theoretical framework Morality as defined by Kohlberg is concerned with making judgements, reasoning, and deciding which rules to follow in situations where there are conflicts or competing demands between human agents (Kohlberg 1969). Kohlberg's theory is a decidedly cognitive theory of moral development in that it locates moral capacity primarily in the capacity to make judgements and to reason, rather than in the capacity to have empathy, to have appropriate moral sentiments and emotions , to care for others, or as residing within a moral "sensibility" (Arnold 2000, p.369).[3]

Kohlberg's cognitive-developmentalist theory holds that there is a hierarchical invariant sequence of cognitive stages through which children pass as they become more sophisticated in reasoning and making moral judgements. In particular, Kohlberg identified three levels of moral : Level I (preconventional morality); Level II (conventional morality); and Level III (post-conventional morality). At level 1, (stage 1) individuals are mainly concerned with avoiding punishment . At level 1, (stage 2), individuals incorporate the idea of fairness as a mutual exchange into their reasoning, but the evaluation of fairness is still based on self-interest. At level 2, individuals begin to take into account social expectations and the fact that they are part of a social system; (stage 3) involves regulating one's actions so as to please others and conform to their wishes, while (stage 4) is a 'law and order' orientation that aligns morality with upholding the socio-legal order. At level 3, (stage 5) individuals take up the idea of a social contract and derive the idea of individual rights from it, and at the very highest 'post-conventional' level (Stage 6), they begin to reason on the basis of universal moral principles themselves (Kohlberg 1969, p.376 (table 6.2)). [4]

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[1] The NSW state schools provide a variety of resources on values education, available at http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/studentsupport/studentwellbeing/values/reading/index.php. The Australian federal government also has resources at: http://www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/default.asp?id=8655.

[2] More information about the ethics classes, which are run by Primary Ethics, is available at:
 http://www.primaryethics.com.au/.

[3] Furthermore, as some commentators have pointed out, Kohlberg's emphasis is on moral cognition rather than action: Kohlberg does not consider how moral beliefs translate (or fail to translate) into action (Straughan 1985).

[4] An expanded view of Kohlberg's hierarchy is available in Krause et. al. 2010, p.120. See also Woolfolk (2007), p.88. Note that Kohlberg initially divided phases of moral development just into levels but later differentiated between two stages at each level (Langford 1995, p.75).

For Kohlbergians, cognitive development is a necessary condition for moral development (Kohlberg 1969, p.391). Kohlberg (1969) suggested a correspondence between Piaget's stages of cognitive development and moral stages as follows: Piaget's concrete operational stage (occurring approximately between 7-11 years)—in which students must operate on concrete, present experiences-- corresponds to Kohlberg's conventional level (stage 3, 4) of moral development. Piaget's formal operational stage (11 years plus, according to Piaget)—which enables thinkers to hypothesize and reason based on general logical principles detached from a specific present context— corresponds to the development of principled, post-conventional morality (stage 5 and 6).

Kohlberg predicted that the sequence of moral development was unidirectional (from lower to higher stages) and that the sequence was relatively irreversible, stepwise, and cumulative. Kohlberg (1966) further accepted (citing empirical work from Turiel (1966)) that a person at stage *n* could understand moral reasoning at stage *n* but would not do well in understanding reasoning either at stage *n+2* or stage *n-1* (Leming 1985, p.247). Exposure to moral reasoning at just higher levels was therefore predicted to stimulate development in moral reasoning. One obvious way to expose students to moral reasoning was to engage them in reasoning about hypothetical moral dilemmas in a philosophy class. Such exposure and engagement in discussion of moral dilemmas resulted in students being assessed as performing at a higher stage of Kohlbergian moral development (Blatt & Kohlberg 1969).[5]

Although few contemporary theorists completely accept the step-wise hierarchical sequence of moral development outlined by Kohlberg, there is support for the notion that improvement in moral judgement involves a person's widening perspective on the world to include not just one's immediate self or even the perspectives of others, but also an appreciation of societies, systems, and underlying principles.[6] The shift in perspective-taking that occurs as persons move from lower to higher levels of moral development is an integral part of the theory, but is clearly not limited to moral development alone and forms a common bridge between development in affect, social relations, and cognition.[7] Selman (1976) found that the development of perspective-taking correlates with the development of empathy (the capacity to understand how others feel). Further research indicates that the level of perspective-taking ability in children correlates generally with pro-social behaviour (Krause et. al. 2010, p. 128, p.130). Empathy may be more important to moral development than Kohlbergians acknowledged.[8]

Methodologically, Kohlbergians assessed the moral development of students by evaluating the quality and themes of their moral discourse and thus placed a premium on verbal and abstract reasoning skills. Criticisms of Kohlberg's methods include the claims that its analysis relied on selective ad hoc quotation (Langford 1995, p.82) and that its codification scheme was biased against other cultures (Nucci 2001) and the female gender (Gilligan 1982; Krause et. al. 2010, at p. 122). Kohlberg's claim that the stages of moral development are universal attracted much discussion, but his claims about the

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[5] Quite apart from specifically Kohlbergian claims, there is evidence to show that students who participate in collaborative philosophical inquiry show improvements in their (critical) reasoning and social benefits overall (Millett & Tapper 2011).

[6] Bee (2000) describes the process of shifting through the levels of Kohlbergian hierarchy as "a process of decentering" (Bee 2000, p.212).

[7] Kohlberg (1969) acknowledged the importance of 'role taking' in socialization in stimulating moral development.

[8] There is an exhaustive literature on the topic of empathy. A starting point is Hoffman (2000) and Selman (1976). There is also a fairly extensive tradition linking empathy with cognitive development in disciplines such as history (Collingwood 1946), geography (Kleenman 2009). Furthermore, Dewey (1909) suggested that the human sciences were especially important in moral education.

influence of family background and socioeconomic status (SES) on performance of students on moral reasoning tasks have received less attention. Kohlbergian methods of assessing moral development are clearly biased in favour of the middle-class insofar as there is evidence to show that, as Lareau (2011) demonstrates, middle-class families employ a technique of deliberate cultivation of their children's talents through provision of stimulating discourse and an array of scheduled extracurricular activities (especially team sports). Such an upbringing will influence childrens' development of (verbal) moral discourse and thus their perceived (Kohlberg level) of moral development.

Aims and Research Questions

This research study aims to describe the relevance and applicability of theories of moral development to the process of teaching and learning in the contemporary classroom context. The overarching research questions informing the study seek to draw connections between moral development and development in other areas, such as cognition, social cognition, and emotional development. In particular, the research questions include:

1. What evidence is there of connections between moral development and other kinds of cognition in a classroom context?
2. What observations have been made of class behaviour and reasoning that are consistent with and inconsistent with the predictions of Kohlberg's theory of moral development?
3. What are some of the influences on the moral development of students, and what role does school have?
4. How might teachers improve their teaching so as to promote moral development in their students?

Although this research is descriptive, an ultimate end would be to recommend ways of fostering moral development in the class room. Given what is already known about moral development, it was hypothesized that teachers would find connections between moral development and other aspects of cognition; that teachers would make observations inconsistent with Kohlberg's strict sequence of moral development; that teachers would find differences in moral development according to SES background, and that teachers would facilitate moral development in their students by engaging them actively in explicit consideration of moral dilemmas.

2. Method

An interview with a classroom teacher was undertaken to provide insight into how moral reasoning appears in a particular classroom context. The demographics of the school community and the profile of the classroom teacher are given below (see also Appendix 1: Proforma).

Participants

The participant SK was recruited from a large, Australian multicultural public primary school in northwest Sydney. It is a large, multicultural school with 800 pupils and places within the upper third of NAPLAN results. The population sending children to the school, from northwest Sydney, is (according to ABS 2006), 67 per cent born in Australia, with significant minority populations born in China, India, England, and New Zealand (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). The general geographical area from which the school draws is known for its relatively high population of Christians and is colloquially referred to as "the Bible Belt".

The participant SK is an ethics teacher, aged between 30-35 years old, and a member of *Primary Ethics,* a not-for-profit organization that delivers ethics lessons to students in NSW public primary schools.[9] SK currently teaches year 3 and 4 ethics classes, and previously taught years 5 and 6. SK is a parent educator with two primary school aged children at the school where she teaches. She holds a bachelor's degree in archaeology from a regional Australian university and is currently undertaking a degree in secondary education with a specialization in history. SK may be inferred not to be active in organised religion given her commitment to teaching secular, philosophical ethics as an alternative to religious scripture classes which are held at the same time.

Procedure

The participant was approached directly in person by the researcher at the school and requested to interview. At the participant's request, a written copy of the interview questions was distributed the night before the interview in order to enable the participant to reflect on her answers. Informed consent was sought and obtained, with full confidentiality ensured by use of the participant's initials only in all reporting on the interview.

Interview questions were asked on the general theme of connections between teaching and learning generally in the class and the role of teachers in facilitating moral development in students. A verbatim transcript of the interview is included in Appendix 1.

The interview was conducted with SK at the researcher's home in a quiet setting with no interruptions. Responses were recorded using a smart phone voice recorder and then transcribed using QSR NVivo10 software. In accordance with the method of grounded theory, which aims to create theories grounded in actual data, the qualitative data analysis proceeded by the creation of codes after inspection of the data collected at interview.

3. Results

The participant SK covered a large number of topics in the interview, and drew links between cognitive, emotional, and moral development. Overall, SK was less concerned with social development and sociocultural factors influencing moral development and concentrated on the role of discussions 'at the kitchen table' and among students themselves as major influences. She explicitly stated that the ***teacher's role*** was to 'facilitate' thinking about, rather than 'teach' moral values: "I don't think it [my role] is to teach moral values. My role is to facilitate...." (Appendix 2, p.17).

SK's saw her role as a future history teacher as one of promoting inquiry and thoughtfulness, and in particular, promoting an appreciation of the ethical significance of historical events:

> "My aim is not to get them to recite facts, it is to get them to think about it and say 'That's interesting I would like to learn more about that'. With me being a history teacher that is what I would aim for. Although history is full of facts, it's more from the ethical side to find out 'Why did they have a slave trade?','Why did they burn witches at the stake?', or that sort thing rather than just that that's what they did do." (Appendix 2, p.17)

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[9] The history of Primary Ethics is available at: http://www.primaryethics.com.au/history.html

An early emergence of formal operational thinking?

The participant SK observed **hypothetical reasoning** in eleven and twelve year old students—which is consistent with Piaget's theory that formal operations emerge around 11-12 years of age. But SK also thought that younger students, ages 9-10 years old, were able to engage in hypothetical reasoning about scenarios. For example, her year 3 and 4 students speculated on the causes of a child's outcast status and concluded that they needed to ask more questions (Appendix 2, p.21).

SK stated that pre-pubescent kids could be 'mature' in a cognitive sense and stated at the outset of the interview that she thought Piaget was wrong in his estimation of the cognitive capacities of primary school aged children (Appendix 2, p.14). She speculated that exposure to news and discussions around the kitchen table might improve the ability of children to reason morally and hold moral discussions.

The importance of perspective-taking and empathy for cognitive and moral development

SK drew a connection between the ability to abstract from the present situation and engage in hypothetical reasoning and the ability to engage in historical and moral inquiry. Moreover, she agreed that perspective-taking was related to the ability to engage in both historical and moral inquiry. SK thought that history imposed 'unique cognitive requirements' on learners. The capacity to engage in hypothetical and counterfactual reasoning was required for advanced historical inquiry but only cognitively possible after children attained the ability to abstract from their current temporal perspective. This cognitive development in turn enabled children to be more empathetic towards historical actors, to ask " if I were in that situation, how would I feel about my land being invaded?" (Appendix 2, p.17). [10]

SK drew an explicit connection between emotional and moral development, particularly between the ability to be empathetic with an animal and the ability to act humanely towards animals. SK commented on how one boy thought it was alright to kill an animal in a way that caused suffering on the grounds that he considered the animal to be insignificant or unworthy (Appendix 2, p. 21).

The influence of family background and SES on development of moral discourse; relative non-influence of gender and culture

 The participant SK noted that socioeconomic status (SES) appeared to be related to confidence in partaking in an ethics discussion. In particular, she stated that students who she knew to be from low

SES backgrounds "had more of a learning curve" in ethics class, but "enjoyed it all the more" (Appendix 2, p.19). By contrast, SK stated kids she knew to be high SES "do seem to be more confident kids. They are used to having this kind of [ethical] debate, juicy discussion over the dinner table" (Appendix 2, p.20).

SK resisted the suggestion that gender and culture were especially responsible for variations in moral and cognitive development. She observed gender segregation among year 5 and 6 students. When asked about cognitive development, she said "But[with] the [cognitive] abilities I really just think it comes down to the individual."(Appendix 2, p.14). In terms of emotional development, "The boys were just as emotional about animal welfare as the girls." (Appendix 2, p. 20).

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[10] When asked about links between emotional and moral development, SK commented on how one boy thought it was alright to kill an animal in a way that caused suffering on the grounds that he considered the animal to be insignificant or unworthy (Appendix 2, p. 21).

Kohlbergian levels of moral development

SK stated that her year 5 and 6 students had to be disciplined or managed in a way that operated at lower Kohlbergian levels, levels 1 and 2. She stated, " Some of the behaviour management is more like the fear of punishment.". When asked "In year 5 and 6 as well?", she replied, "I think even *more so* at years 5 and 6" (Appendix 2, p.15). She also saw the influence of a level 2 concern for conventional morality at work in her students' desire to "be part of the gang, the social norm"

(Appendix 2, p.15). Some of syllabus documents for the ethics class require discussion of moral dilemmas (like the Heinz dilemma) that may be tackled at a variety of levels. SK commented that some year 6 students entertained the notion that graffiti could be a work of art, even though it was generally illegal (Appendix 2, p.20).

The improvement of moral and cognitive reasoning through collaborative discussion and inquiry

SK was committed to the use of discussion in philosophical ethics as a means of getting children to learn from one another how to reason ethically. She indicated that she valued peer-learning and collaborative inquiry: "The beauty of [ethics class discussions] is that they are learning from themselves, from their own input." (Appendix 2, p.21). The value placed on collaborative learning is reflected in the class rules: "What I particularly like is the rule "Don't talk to the teacher, talk to each other". It is not to impress me. It is to draw out the discussion from your peers". (Appendix 2, p.16).

A condensed summary of the main themes emerging from the interview is presented in table 1 below .

Code	Quotes from the participant
Cognitive and moral development—empathy, perspective-taking and the development of abstract and hypothetical thinking	" I think that is definitely with abstract thought that you need to be able to take the thought of, well if I were in that situation, how would I feel about my land being invaded?"
The intellectual discipline of history and cognitive development	"So, a younger child would be able to say well Henry VIII had six wives. But an older child would be able to analyse well what were the consequences of each wife and when and why he chose to move onto the next wife and that sort of thing."
Emotional and moral development	"There was one boy I remember who was saying that, you know, it was some kind of insignificant animal in his opinion so it didn't matter how they were...they weren't necessarily worthy of humane [killing] ...it didn't matter how you killed them they were kind of unworthy. His general attitude was a lot more immature as well."
Influences on moral development and expression such as family background, SES and class, relative non-influence of gender and culture	"... The ones I know that are higher SES families do seem to be more confident kids. They are used to having this kind of debate, juicy discussion over the dinner table."
Kohlberg levels and classroom management	" Some of the behavior management is more like the fear of punishment…even more so at years 5 and 6." -"They want to be part of the gang, the social norm."
Teacher's role	"My role is not to teach them moral values. It is to facilitate…."
Improving moral reasoning through philosophical inquiry, peer learning, teacher-as-facilitator	"They knew that you had to ask more questions". "The beauty of it is that they are learning from themselves, from their own input"

Table 1: Codes used to analyse SK's interview. A fuller version of the table is included as an appendix.

4. Discussion

The participant SK drew strong links between moral development and cognitive, emotional and (to a lesser extent) social development. In terms of cognitive development, SK rejected orthodox Piagetian theory which holds that children are not capable of operating at the formal abstract level of thinking until at least about 11 years old, and she seemed to find Kohlbergian stages not developing in a unilinear progression. She identified year 3 and 4 students as being able to operate hypothetically in entertaining moral scenarios. She identified a few year 6 students as being able to engage in post-conventional thinking with regard to the dilemma of how to regard graffiti. At the same time, some year 6 students needed to be disciplined at a Kohlbergian stage 1 level.

SK held that capacity to engage in hypothetical and counterfactual reasoning was required for advanced historical inquiry but only cognitively possible after children attained the ability to abstract from their current temporal perspective. This cognitive development in turn enabled children to be more empathetic towards historical actors, to ask "how would I feel about my land being invaded?" (Appendix 2, p.17). With empathy, the moral significance of historical events could finally be appreciated.

The participant's acknowledgement of the importance of perspective-taking and empathy in cognition was particularly interesting. Whereas the tendency of Kohlbergians has been to reduce and minimize the role of emotional development in moral cognition, the suggestion SK made is that a certain degree of emotional and moral development is necessary for full cognitive development. This suggestion has been made by historians such as Collingwood (1946), who stressed the role of empathy in the historical imagination. More recently, geography educators such as Kleenman (2009) have emphasized that the ability to appreciate another's perspective is important for a full appreciation of geography.

A lack of empathy was seen by the participant as a deficiency not only cognitively but also morally. SK commented on how one boy thought it was alright to kill an animal in a way that caused suffering on the grounds that he considered the animal to be insignificant or unworthy (Appendix 2, p. 21). An apparent lack of empathy towards the animal (an emotional flatness) seemed to accompany an arrested moral development. One may infer that for SK part of the purpose in entertaining moral questions is not just to cultivate reason, but to cultivate empathy towards others (including other animals as well as people).

SK was uneasy discussing the issue of class and SES in some respects and repeatedly qualified but made observations of a correlation between individuals with known low SES status and their lack of sophisticated moral discourse. References were made to the family environment and the different cultural capital available within that environment. Specifically, higher SES children were seen to have more experience in discussing moral and current affairs issues, which is consistent with Lareau (2011). SK presumably saw ethics classes at school as compensating somewhat for the lack of stimulating discussion of current events and moral dilemmas in low SES homes compared with others. This compensation theory may have been her reason for stating that the children she knew to come from low SES backgrounds "enjoy the ethics classes all the more" (Appendix 2, p.19)

The participant's grasp of the relation of socialization to moral development appeared primarily in her advocacy of peer-to-peer learning as she emphasized that students learned from one another in philosophical discussion. In keeping with her role as a facilitator of children's discussion, the

participant directed the children to address one another and learn to converse with one another rather than to respond as isolated individuals to the teacher's comments. One may infer that the societal and collective dimension of the classroom is important in this teacher's thinking about moral development.

5. Conclusion

This study has contributed to an argument for the claim that there are links between moral development and other kinds of development, especially cognitive and emotional. As students engage in moral reasoning, they practice not only their reasoning skills, but also implement their capacity to shift their points of view and entertain hypothetical scenarios. The result is that students expand their capacity to understand others, and they learn to rise beyond their current circumstances in their thinking about what to do. In addition, students have the opportunity to develop empathy for persons (and animals) in situations different from their own.

The interview conducted with an ethics teacher provided evidence that Kohlberg's levels of moral development are in evidence in the classroom but not necessarily in the context-free, linear, hierarchical sequence recommended. Furthermore, there was support for the notion that discussion of moral dilemmas improves students' moral discourse and reasoning abilities. In particular, for low SES children, provision of a class in philosophical discussion was perceived by the participant to compensate for a lack of discussion of current affairs at home.

One limitation of the case study conducted is that the participant SK is not yet a qualified teacher but rather a pre-service teacher. A related limitation of this case study is that SK's classroom experience is primarily drawn from ethics teaching rather than from classroom teaching of other subjects, such as history, science, or mathematics. The limitation arises as SK may be biased in favour of over-estimating the centrality of ethics to development and may be heavily invested in promoting the benefits of studying ethics for development. However, as SK's experience is directly rather than peripherally connected with teaching moral reasoning, there is the advantage that SK has thought explicitly and critically about moral development to a greater degree than some teachers for whom the topic may be perceived as peripheral to their main instructional goals.

As a direction of future research, it would obviously be advisable to interview more teachers on their views of moral development. One possibility is to interview both ethics and non-ethics teachers to determine the biasing effect of teaching ethics on one's view of moral and cognitive development. Another possibility is to more effectively document the gains in ability to express oneself in moral discourse obtained by ethics students, and to see whether low SES students make greater gains than higher SES students.

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Appendix 1: Proforma

Proforma

Date of interview: 27 October **Time: from ………10:30am……… to …11:15am…………..**	

Where conducted (e.g. classroom/office/home):

Home

Interview conditions (e.g. interruptions)?

Quiet, no interruptions.

How was rapport established with teacher (how recruited):

- Participant(s) recruited from researchers' local school.

SK is a fellow ethics teacher and member of Primary Ethics, a not-for-profit organization that delivers ethics lessons to students in NSW public primary schools.

Materials used:

Mobile phone (for tape recorder), paper hand-out of interview questions.

Teacher profile: SK is a parent educator with two children, aged 30-35 years (?), SES is likely middle class (administrative office work prior to retraining as a teacher). She has a degree in archaeology and is working towards a degree in secondary education with a specialization in history. She has no overt religious commitments.

Teaching experience: SK is technically a pre-service teacher, but actively engaged in volunteer teaching on a weekly basis for the past two years in conjunction with preservice training and coursework. She currently teaches year 3 and 4 ethics and has taught years 5 and 6.

Reflections/views on educational philosophy/ views adopted for teaching:

SK strives to develop a 'community of inquiry' approach when teaching philosophical ethics. The orientation is constructivist with a premium based on active learning and student construction of their understanding of the topics at hand.

The belief underlying the curriculum of Primary Ethics is that students can reason philosophically even when younger than Piaget's suggested onset of formal operational thinking from 11 to 12 years old provided that the students are scaffolded in the appropriate way and provided with background information they may lack.

Profile of school (SES, demographic, religion etc):

X is a NSW public primary school located in northwest Sydney. It is a large school with 800 pupils and decent (300 out of 900) NAPLAN results, particularly given its high levels of recent migrant with NESB population. The population sending children to the school, from northwest Sydney, is reputed to be more religious (particularly Christian) than average compared to inner city Sydney.

Characteristics of class (e.g. gender, special needs, socio-cultural issues):

Students are of mixed gender and sociocultural backgrounds. SK currently teaches year 3 and 4 Ethics, and previously taught years 5 and 6. The classes are mainstream and comprehensive with probably a few gifted and a few minor learning disability children. This information is not released to ethics teachers by the school.

School community: (e.g. School / parent partnership, NESB, cultural differences)

The population sending children to the school, from northwest Sydney, is (according to ABS 2006), 67 per cent born in Australia, with significant minority populations born in China, India, England, and New Zealand. 89 per cent were Australian citizens.

The school cultivates strong ties with its parent community through regular events such as school performances, sports days, and art shows.

Appendix 2: Verbatim Transcript

<u>**Verbatim Transcript Interview on 26 October 2012 with SK**</u>

I-Interviewer

P-Participant

(Introduction)

I- It is October 26th and I am here with SK and I am conducting an interview about teachers' perspectives on moral development and its relation to cognitive, and social, and emotional development. Kind of the whole gamut. **I'd like to start by asking S. about her background and her connection with teaching.**

P- I have a bachelor of arts in archaeology and paleoanthropology. I have this year completed my first year of a Bachelor of Secondary Education with a view to becoming a history teacher.

I also have a TAFE certificate IV in TESOL, the teaching of English to speakers of other languages, so that's for adults---- I guess it's for anyone, but my practical was with adults. And I have been involved with Primary Ethics since the pilot stage in 2010.

I- Could you just explain what Primary Ethics is?

P-Primary Ethics began as a parent initiative to provide an alternative for the students who attended non-scripture, because they didn't have any other alternative to attending the faith-based classes during the mandatory scripture time, the weekly mandated half-hour across New South Wales that had been the case since the department of education had begun in the say 1900s. After lots of lobbying, years of lobbying the Department of Education finally agreed to a pilot study which was written through the St James' Ethics Centre by Professor Philip Cam, from the University of NSW, and it was Philosophical Ethics. So it gave the students--it was still a choice, they could still choose to go to non-scripture if they wanted to, but at least now they had three options: if they were wanting to do a faith-based class they could go to scripture, non-scripture-- non-scripture was basically colouring in, twiddling your thumbs--a waste of time, or families could choose to send their kids to ethics.

Ethics, which is...it covers everything...-it is age-based. From 2010 it was just for 5th and 6th graders. This year at the start of term 3 September 2012, 3rd and 4th graders have been introduced to it. I know I just said that the families have chosen to put the kids in, but the drop out from the students returning to non-scripture is almost non-existent, so the kids are actually wanting to be there which is is fantastic.

I- Yeah.

I-So you have been teaching this two years?. So as you said since the pilot. So that's actually getting a lot of classroom hours.

P- It has really been a fantastic experience. And really, as a parent--my son is in 3rd grade now and he is in my ethics class and I have daughter in 1st grade-- to see how the mind works in 5th and 6th graders, eleven and twelve year olds, I am so impressed with what they are

capable of. It really shows **how varied their cognitive development can be**. But, I really think that the ages that Piaget and Kohlberg (well he didn't really have ages set on it) for Piaget to say this [kind of [reasoning is only possible] at early adolescence, but I think it is [at] pre-pubescence the [kind of] maturity that kids have.

Kids are so much more exposed to more mature issues, things are discussed a lot more, I really think that has increased their maturity.

I-**Yeah, there might be some research showing that if you explicitly discuss moral problems kids will improve in their moral reasoning.** So, yeah, Piaget probably would have thought that some of the reasoning that goes in an ethics classroom wasn't possible for yr 5 or 6 or was only just starting to be possible.

P-I think the kinds of families that have chosen to send their students there are the ones that are likely to be discussing it around the kitchen table. Literally the news of the day, the current affairs of the day. The issues that we discuss in the ethics classes, the kids are happy to take home and continue those discussions, or talk about what was discussed in class and the different aspects of the opinions of the group.

(6:17-7:25)
I- You are so well up on this. I just thought I would ask. You have yr 3 and 4 now, and you've had yr 5 and 6. Can you see differences in their ability to engage in moral reasoning and can you relate this to their cognitive development at all?

P- I think, the [years] 5 and 6 I could see there were other issues at play in terms of...I think puberty was making a difference.

I- OK.

P-I think that they were more segregated in terms of how they wanted to sit. Boys down at one end and girls at the other. And if they were asked to sit boy girl boy girl that was more of an issue than for the younger ones.

I--Yeah, they don't like it do they?

P-No. What they had to say, in some respects was more worldly. But I think it just depends on the individual child, or the family. Like in my 3rd or 4th grade class I have only had them for a term. I was going to say this was the first combined year class but it is not. The others that I'd known in 5th grade, 6th grade....The only kind of segregation I can see that the 3rd graders tend to sit together and the 4th graders tend to sit together. ...whereas for the other ones it was more gender segregated. I think it is just because they are more familiar with each other, they've spent more time together. **But the abilities I think it comes down to the individual.**

(8:11)
I- Are you noticing any differences in the kinds of reasoning that the children can engage in upper primary versus that middle primary? I guess what I am getting at is Kohlberg has this theory about the levels of moral reasoning. At the preconventional level, it's about reward and punishment and what's in it for me. At the next level, it's about society

and what society expects of us. And then at the highest level, the postconventional level, it is about the moral principles themselves. Do you have any examples, like...

P- Some of the behavior management is more like the fear of punishment.
I-Right.
I-In year 5 and 6 as well?
P-I think even *more so* at years 5 and 6.
I-It would be at the preconventional level? The things that are motivating them are instrumental.
P-They want to be part of the gang, the social norm.
I-So that's starting to become the conventional level? P-I think that is linked to the puberty issue.

P- They want to be different but they want to be part of it..but they don't want to be embarassed by being isolated as the naughty one. ..If you do draw attention to them to say you know as a pseudonym "Johnny are you following the class rules?", "we have got the class rules so everyone is exactly the same", the older ones would be more embarassed...the younger ones have more immaturity in that they need more prompts, reminders.

P-There's one little boy, what he said is good stuff but he might go off on some silly tangent about you know well I can relate this to playing computer games. It wasn't relevant but he just wanted to talk about computer games.

I-Wandering attention?

(11:09-12:53) I- I have some general questions that we all have to ask. Do you have a general philosophy of education or approach?

P- I think education should be holistic, it is not just about facts. It's it should be more about wanting to inspire learning. And so of course they need to learn how to read and write and the techniques for that, but they also need to learn the techniques of learning. My aim is not to get them to recite facts, it is to get them to think about it and say 'That's interesting I would like to learn more about that'. With me being a history teacher that is what I would aim for. Although history is full of facts, it's more from the ethical side to find out 'Why did they have a slave trade?','Why did they burn witches at the stake?', or that sort thing rather than just that that's what they did do.

I-Be able to reflect on the significance of facts?

I- The Department of Education history curriculum K-10 (through the Board of Studies) actually has an ethical cross-curriculum path. They want them to reflect on the ethical aspects of events and why these things happened...colonialization and you know, sending people to Australia as convicts, and you know, the whole gamut of history, looking at it through an ethical lens.

 (12:53-16:04)

I-I think you have almost answered another question, which is do you think it is your role as a teacher to teach moral values?

P- I don't think it is to teach moral values. My role is to facilitate, which is what primary ethics want us [to do], they kind of use that interchangeably-- facilitator and teacher.
I am not there to teach them my moral values. I am there to teach them to respect each other.
So long as they respect…
[recitation of class rules]

One person speaks at a time.
Pay attention to the person that is talking.
Build on other people's ideas.

I-All the class rules...are..about getting them…

P- To respect each other. To foster the communication in the class.
What I particularly like is the rule "Don't talk to the teacher, talk to each other". It is not to impress me. It is to draw out the discussion from your peers.

I-So, you are creating a **community.**..

P-Yeah, a level playing field where everyone is safe, that's a very important thing, because I can see, um, with that framework of the level playing field, that everyone's opinion is respected, that it is a safe environment, there aren't any put downs, the shyer kids do warm up. It might take them a couple of weeks, they definitely do develop, they are much more forthcoming with their opinions because they know that it is valued.

I-So you are modeling the respect yourself?

P- Yeah, well, I talked about this boy talking about his computer games. I put it back to the class to say, "How do you think it would work in terms of whatever our theme is for that day"

I-You kind of redirect the flow of the conversation.

P-One example in particular. My very first lesson. It was this 6th grade boy and the question was "If you were in the supermarket and you saw high school kids shoplifting and they saw you see them. What would you do?" The other students said they would tell the security guard. This one boy said he'd 'kick them in the nuts.'
I-Ugh.
P- That's kind of a shocking thing. But I just bit my tongue and put it back to the class, and said, 'how do you think that would work out? What are the consequences of that?' They thought it through and said, 'Well you are putting yourself in danger." "Two wrongs don't make a right". Some others said they would go to shopping centre management and they would have proof on camera, and even if they saw me see them, they would still want to do the right thing.

I-So you are getting them to evaluate each other's reasoning.I suppose that gets around the Piaget concern about it being too abstract because you are giving them a concrete situation to think about.

…

(17:31-)

I- OK, what do you think the link is or relatonship between students' moral development and their ability to learn, like if you were teaching history, not just ethics?

(17:42)
P- With history research has shown that they need much more generalised themes up til early adolescence and then from year 9 ish onwards (from middle of year 8 on) early adolescence year 9 on it could be more concrete [specific] events...so you could talk about explorers but it would be more as a theme rather than specifics. The specifics need to be understood...which kind of sounds contradictory-- but because they are able to think in a more abstract way as they get older, so like say...Henry the VIII

(I-I am wondering what about perspective taking?)

P- So, a younger child would be able to say well Henry VIII had six wives.
An older child would be able to analyse well what were the consequences of each wife and when and why he chose to move onto the next wife. So it is a kind of a deeper analysis comes with their age, so the deeper analysis is the cognitive development.

I-Um OK

I-OK so they can look more at the consequences, so that's that hypothetical...
P-Yeah, exactly
P-The hypothetical is what would have happened if the Europeans didn't come to Australia or if the French got here first?
I-OK so they can look more at the consequences, so that's that hypothetical resaoning that Piaget talked about emerging after 11 years.
P-Yeah, exactly
P-The hypothetical is what would have happened if the Europeans didn't come to Australia or if the French got here first?
I-Hmm. OK.
P- What would have happened? That's hypothetical although they then need the specific event to hypothesize about.

I- I am also just wondering maybe there is something to do with perspective taking. I am surprised it is that late. It is probably cognitively complex to have that perspective on the past. I don't know how that emerges, your sense of time...

P- I think that is definitely with abstract thought that you need to be able to take the thought of, well if I were in that situation, how would I feel about my land being invaded?

I- So if you can do that you could also do, "How would I feel if someone hit me?". So you take up another perspective, I think, whether you do that for moral reasoning or historical reasoning, you have a kind of empathy.

P-And that's why the Board of curriculum has linked it. The historical curriculum has that perspective taking.

P- It's history. It's all a story. It all depends on who wrote it.

I-The narrator's point of view.

P- Yes, I think that is a very history specific thing. History is very unique in the cognitive requirement because it does require so much perspective taking. Make sure it is more generalized to start with and then as abstract Skills increase with age you can be more specific about what do you think would have happened if the situation were different.

I-OK. Alright.

(21:46)

I-Could we maybe backup and talk about the role that social interaction plays in moral development?

P- Well I would have to think about the ethics classroom, my practical for history teaching is this time next year.

I- That is alright we are moving back and forth between your history and your ethics teaching.

P-.. Social interaction I mentioned that .....they are comfortable enough when you ask them to sit next to someone, a new person, each week.

Some of the reasons for that are so that they get to know the other kids which is always a benefit to get to know someone that you don't normally associate with

with as another friendly face in the playground. But also from the ethics class discussion point of view you can't guess what that person is going to say. Occasionally we have to work in pairs in the class. And so it is interesting to see that they are surprised that they have the same opinion as someone that they didn't know, and how did they come to that opinion and why did they have that opinion and I can see them getting a lot out of that—the juiciness of that.

I-Peer learning?

P-I didn't know you but we have got the same idea. Or I didn't know you and you think totally differently to me. Both ways, I think they enjoy that.

Again the class room management is having that self-control to respect each other, that's social development for them too. A maturing process. They need to give each other a turn.

I- Turn taking. Also managing power relations, I suppose, between teacher and student, and among the students themselves?...

P-Yeah, for sure.

I- I think we kind of went over this, but could we just revisit this idea of differences in moral development and behaviour? We have had two different age groups. Two different classes. I think it is a fairly multicultural school.

P- It is very interesting the themes we've had in ethics that have anything to do with consumerism and what it takes to have a good life. The kids that say it is good to be rich are very much in the minority. The ones that say you need money to be happy. It would be you know, I don't know, one or two in a class of 23.

I-And do they have a different class background?

P-...I don't know. It definitely makes me think: Are they from a higher one, or do they need money? They are well dressed. So it's difficult to tell, the families that I know...**I've taught an older brother and younger brother who I know are from a lower SES background, they have had more of a learning curve.** I think that they really enjoyed the ethics classes because they were given the opportunity to be heard talking about these kinds of you know contemporary issues of whatever the theme of the day happened to be that I don't think they got the opportunity to at home.

I- Probably mum and dad are too busy working or?

P- That's totally a generalization, because I don't know the background of every child, but I do know a lot of their mums and dads. **The ones I know from more struggling families I think the kids enjoy the ethics classes all the more.** They have that chance to enjoy attention, whatever their classroom relationships are I am not aware of, the ones that I know are from the lower SES enjoy it all the more. The higher SES families that I am aware are more comfortable, I think it's more of the same. They actually get that kind of experience at ahome. They still enjoy it. They enjoy reflecting on the morals of different things, like you know, graffiti and vandalism that the other kids might come across more, perhaps even the care of their own things. I was going to say they they had more care for their possessions? But that wasn't necessarily the case.

I-Did you notice differences in terms of kinds of reasoning? If they said 'graffiti is wrong', some of them might say, "Oh it's against the law", or 'Well, we don't want to deface our property, we have to keep it nice for everyone'?

P-Others would say sometimes it could be a council sponsored work of art.

I- That's kind of unconventional. I don't know if that is the post-conventional stage if you go back to Kohlberg. It's not just what the law tells them.

P-That's why the ethics themes are great, it is still age appropriate but challenging them to think about you know, the idea of stealing, Heinz with his sick wife and should he still the medicine to make it better and is that illegal because his wife is ill. They loved that one.

I-And that is Kohlberg's actual example. Did you notice any of them rising to that high level of reasoning, that you know they ought to save the life and...

P-Most of them thought it was the most important thing to save the life. Some of them questioned that it was against the law and you shouldn't do it, stealing.

I-What age was this? years 5 and 6?
P-Yeah.
I-Some adults never reach that level. They think it is just a matter of obeying the law.

P- I am so impressed. Last week we had "Inferring/figuring things out". There was a scenario where Lisa, a little girl, was asked by a teacher why Matthew wasn't playing handball games in the playground. Kids were saying she could say she doesn't know why, she could say he was an excellent player and the other kids were not of his standard. Maybe he has physical health issues and he couldn't join in. Maybe he had mental issues and couldn't join in. And I said, what do you mean mental health issues? And they said maybe he just doesn't understand how to approach someone to ask could they join in the game. All those little kinds of seeds were planted in people's minds to explain why someone might be an *outcast* in the classroom. It could be for any reason, but because we didn't know what the reason was, everyone agreed at the end that the most accurate answer we could give was that she (Lisa) didn't know because she didn't ask them. **They need knew you needed to ask more questions.**

P-Don't leap to conclusions, which I think is very mature for 3rd and 4th graders.

I- That is mature.

I- This might be going over some of the same ground. Social factors that you believe influence students moral behavior in and out of the classroom?

P-If they are of a quiet nature, they are more reticent in participating.

I-Temperament.

P-This is a generalization... The ones I know that are higher SES families do seem to be more confident kids. They are used to having this kind of debate, juicy discussion over the dinner table.

I- There have been studies that show the kinds of talk that goes on at home do vary by class.

P_Parents are educated so they are used to that vocabulary as well. There is one litle girl in my class who is a third grader who hasn't said a word. But I can see from her expression that she's following everything so she's enjoying it but she hasn't participated verbally unless it has been kind of like drawing teeth. But when we do the pair work, she's fine actually writing stuff down.

I-So she is not as confident in speaking in front of the whole class about this kinds of topics.
P-She is cooperative in pair work, so she is still contributing, but not as a public speaker. P- There is just one other thing, not so much social but physically. There is one little boy in my class who is in fourth grade who has some kind of growth problem. And he-I don't know if it is the same as in his normal classroom-and he definitely plays up-plays class clown in order to win friends and influence people. I think that is making up for his size. I-Napoleon?

P-Yes. I think so. Although he is a fourth grader, his size is 2nd grader.
I-Right
P-So he's very small.
What he says is good stuff, always on topic but it is just not as controlled as the others. I think he does that in order to be the kind of you know big personality if he's not a big person. So he's compensating.
I-Compensating for size with dramatic personality.
P-That is an interesting social thing to see as well.

I-Can you comment on any connection you might see between students' emotional development and moral development?

P-Even the boys have been moved by Heinz with his sick wife. It was interesting to see about...you know...what do they call it? Intensive egg farming, you know, the chickens in cages…

I-Cage, battery hens

P-The boys were just as emotional about animal welfare as the girls. So it is totally an individual thing for emotional development which was nice to see.

I-Did they seem to go in tandem, so if they were moved by it were they more likely to, I don't know, to reason morally about it?

P-There was one boy I remember who was saying that, you know, it was some kind of insignificant animal in his opinion so it didn't matter how they were...they weren't necessarily worthy of humane ...it didn't matter how you killed them they were kind of unworthy. His general attitude was a lot more immature as well.

I-OK, so that was clustering together....

P-Social immaturity with lack of emotional maturity definitely. Social immaturity with emotional maturity.

I-And maybe moral as
well? P-Yeah.

P-He was the one example I could think of. The other kids were much more the same.

I-Is there anything else you'd like to mention?

P-Yesterday, this week Wednesday I had another mum come in to observe the class with a view to possibly take it on next year. As we began the class I introduced her, let's go round and tell the lady what ethics is about from the students' point of view. They all had their hands up. Not one had anything bad to say about it. They were saying that they enjoyed it,…it was fun. What do you mean by fun? They said it is fun to discuss these kinds of topics, to be exposed to other people's ideas, they liked actually doing something rather than sitting in non-scripture. They really considered it a constructive lesson, they all felt that they learned something by the end of the lesson. They were inspired to think more deeply about more things, it might not be something they ever considered before...So I really think that these philosophical discussions are very important they do get it, you know, they do totally understand if you give them the opportunity. Like we said at the start if the kids are exposed to that, they definitely... It's like " If you build it they will come". **The beauty of it is that they are learning from themselves, from their own input.**Which is fantastic.

And to think that we are all volunteers, it is something to be really proud of. It is becoming so popular across the state. That shows something was really missing. It creates a more thoughtful society, and that can only be a good thing.

 I-   Well, SK, thank you very much.

P-   I hope it was useful.

I-   It will be I am sure.

Appendix: Expanded Table of Codes Used for Analysing Interview with relevant references to the literature

Code	Quotes	Relevant Literature
1. Perspective taking, empathy; links between cognitive and moral development	P- I think that is definitely with abstract thought that you need to be able to take the thought of, well if I were in that situation, how would I feel about my land being invaded. I- So if you can do that you could also do, how would I feel if someone hit me. So you take up another perspective, I think, whether you do that for moral reasoning or historical reasoning, you have a kind of empathy. P-And that's why the Board of curriculum has linked it. The historical curriculum often has that perspective taking.	Board of Studies History Document NSW K-10. Collingwood (1946) Selman (1976) Bee (2000) Krause et. al. (2010) Day (1991)
2. History and cognitive development: development of hypothetical reasoning; abstraction	P-With history research has shown that they need much more generalised themes up til early adolescence and then from year 9 ish onwards (from middle of year 8 on, from then on) early adolescence year 9 on it could be more concrete [sic: specific] events.. P- So, a younger child would be able to say well Henry VIII had six wives. But an older child would be able to analyse well what were the consequences of each whife and when and why he chose to move onto the next wife and that sort of thing. So it is a kind of a deeper analysis comes with their age, so the deeper analysis is the cognitive development.	Wadsworth for overview of Piaget on formal operations. Piaget, Board of Studies History Document NSW K-10. Kleenman (2009).
3. SES and class and willingness to engage in moral discourse	So it's difficult to tell, The families that I know...I've taught an older brother and younger brother who I know are from a lower SES	Lareau (2011), Langford (1995) Kohlberg (1969)

	background, they have had more of a learning curve, I think. I think that they really enjoyed the ethics classes because they were given the opportunity to be heard talking about these kinds of you know contemporary issues of whatever the theme of the day happened to be that I don't think they got the opportunity to at home. The ones I know from more struggling families I think the kids enjoy the ethics classes all the more. They have that chance to enjoy attention, whatever their classroom relationships are I am not aware of, but the ones that I know are from the lower SES I think actually enjoy it all the more. The higher SES families that I am aware are more comfortable, I think it's more of the same. They actually get that kind of experience at home. They still enjoy it. Reference 2: P-This is a generalization... The ones I know that are Higher SES families do seem to be more confident kids. They are used to having this kind of debate, juicy discussion over the dinner table.	
4. Emotional and moral development, empathy	P-The boys were just as emotional about animal welfare as the girls.So it is totally an individual thing for emotional development which was nice to see. I-Did they seem to go in tandem, so if they were moved by it were they more likely to, I don't know, to reason morally about it? P-There was one boy I remember who was saying that, you know, it was some kind of insignificant animal in his opinion so it didn't matter how they were...they weren't	Selman (1976); Hoffmann (2000); Gilligan (1982)

	necessarily worthy of humane ...it didn't matter how you killed them they were kind of unworthy. His general attitude was a lot more immature as well. I-OK, so that was clustering together.... P-social immaturity with lack of emotional maturity definitely. Social immaturity with emotional maturity. I-And maybe moral as well? P-Yeah.	
Improving moral reasoning through discussion, philosophy, peer learning	"So I really think that these philosophical discussions are very important they do get it, you know, they do totally understand if you give them the opportunity. Like we said at the start if the kids are exposed to that, they definitely. It's like if you build it they will come.The beauty of it is that they are learning from themselves, from their own input."	Millett & Tapper (2011), Blatt and Kohlberg (1969), Leming (1985), Turiel (1966), Kohlberg (1966),