



Can ethics be learned?

Results from a three-year action-research project

Can ethics
be learned?

Lyse Langlois and Claire Lapointe
Université Laval, Québec, Canada

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Abstract

Purpose – In response to the growing need for educational leaders who possess ethical, critical and reflective qualities, a training program was developed based on ethics as a reflective critical capacity and on Starratt's three-dimensional model. This paper aims to describe the impact of the program on ethical decision making and on educational leaders' ethical competencies.

Design/methodology/approach – A three-year action-research study was conducted with three groups of educational administrators, totalling 30 participants. Mixed methods were used for data collection: a pre- and post-training questionnaire, individual semi-structured interviews and group interviews. The questionnaire data were analyzed using SPSS software and interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Findings – Results from the pre-test indicate that, prior to the training program, participants rarely possessed all three ethical dimensions. Post-test results show how participants experience a significant readjustment process characterized by three different stages which have been called the transformative cycle. Qualitative results show the impact of the training program on improved ethical awareness, judgement structuring, a sense of responsibility, and overall professional conduct. No significant difference is observed between male and female participants but statistically significant differences are found according to number of years of experience and to work situation.

Practical implications – Developing sound ethical expertise appears to be promising in training future educational administrators and in improving their leadership skills.

Originality/value – This study is original in many aspects. Theoretically, it is based on a self-regulated rather than hetero-regulated approach to ethics and calls for descriptive rather than normative foundations to ethical leadership. With regard to its methodology, it used mixed methods adapted to action research as well as original data collection instruments.

Keywords Ethics, Decision making, Leadership, Training, Action research, Canada

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

University programs and curricula in educational administration and leadership are increasingly influenced by ethics. In organizations ethics tend to be institutionalized by way of values often entrenched in the educational mission by a code of conduct or by an ethics committee. No longer limited to individuals, today's ethical interventions are now being used in order to change organizational structures and cultures, as observed in terms such as ethical governance, ethical organization and ethical school. As stated

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by Canto-Sperber (2001), the question now is “To be or not to be . . . ethical”. Why this marked interest in ethics within organizations?

Biotechnological developments and corruption in business have, of course, contributed to popularizing ethics by promoting an awareness of the challenges of biomedical advances and the effects of deviant behaviour on organizations. Aside from these factors which have propelled ethics to the forefront is a profound concern regarding how we interact with one another. Godbout (2007) recently showed the existence, in modern society, of human relations that are exclusively based on a logic of interest, the nature of which is influenced by the socioeconomic context of Western societies, and that individualism, market economy and technical rationality affect how we interact with others. Furthermore, with social relations becoming increasingly entangled in legal wrangling, our conduct is under greater scrutiny than ever before, and the issues related to the notions of right and wrong are more tangible following the many changes occurring since the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Nevertheless, it would be dangerous to limit ourselves solely to this binary, right and wrong perception of the world. The reality is far too complex, with grey areas that are not easily identifiable. It is our belief that ethics question these complex relations and suggest that we review the notions of legitimacy and acceptability. This ethic of the complex provides us with a challenge, as a community, particularly when we reflect on improving our coexistence and establishing greater social justice.

The educational setting is an ideal place in which to practise and integrate ethics on a daily basis, as this environment helps build tomorrow’s society. However, despite the normative and legal aspects surrounding this setting, questions remain as to the conduct of decision-makers who deal every day with changes in societal values. How do they prepare and equip themselves to face each new challenge? Can they handle the complexity involved? How do they deal with the omnipresent search for meaning within a constantly evolving sector such as education and, more importantly, how can they integrate ethical leadership within their pedagogical, administrative or political practices?

These questions have led us to examine the daily practices of school administrators (Langlois, 1997, 2004; Langlois and Starratt, 2001). We discovered that certain situations were increasingly challenging for them in terms of how they justified their decisions and in the difficulty they experienced in understanding the ethical issues within their practice. Principalship preparation programs apparently did not adequately prepare them to deal with current, more complex problems and ethical issues. Our observations led us to theorize whether it was possible to teach someone how to be ethical. From this, we developed and evaluated a training program based entirely on ethics as a reflective critical capacity.

This paper documents the conceptual framework used to develop a particular training program – Trajectory: Ethics, Responsibility and Authority (TERA). The methodology used for data collection and analysis during the experimentation is presented and the major findings obtained thus far are discussed.

Problem statement and purpose

Since the 1990s an increasing number of researchers have become interested in understanding the ethical dimensions of educational practice (Beck, 1992; Begley, 2007;

Begley and Stefkovich, 2004; Campbell, 1999; Cranston *et al.*, 2006; Duignan, 2008; Langlois, 1997, 2004; Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2001; Starratt, 1991, 2004; Strike *et al.*, 1998). Several theoretical foundations exist, as found in the work of Noddings (1984), Duignan and Bhindi (1997), Strike *et al.* (1998), Kimbrough (1985), Sergiovanni (1992, 2000) and Starratt (1991, 2004). Nash (2002) attempts an eclectic mix of theoretical perspectives in his advocacy of three ethical “language” approaches to dealing with ethical challenges, though he fails to indicate what a larger synthesis of these languages would be. Studies by Crowson (1987) and Greenfield (1987) are also of interest. Some of these studies mainly concern behaviour control via professional codes of practice which supposedly leads to a higher level of professionalism.

It is important to note that these authors are closer to the culture of law (Kant) than to the basic premise of what are ethics. Law, ethics, and codes of ethics all share a common denominator which is values. Each one also promotes a form of social regulation, although this regulation does not have the same finality, depending on the concept involved. Justice exerts an external control over conduct by means of laws, rules and jurisprudence. In this context, when we fail to respect the legal and judicial system, our conduct is sanctioned and there are consequences. Codes of ethics contain legalities that impose an external form of control over conduct and operate similarly to the heteroregulation found in the logic of action. In this manner, when individuals violate an article of their value statement, they are sanctioned by their professional organization.

In ethics, the logic differs in that it consists of an internal deliberation over our own personal values, which brings about a sense of responsibility toward our actions. Ethics are therefore an autoregulatory process to ultimately find the necessary axiological justifications to what gives meaning to our decisions. Autoregulation signifies that the regulation comes from within us in our choices and actions and calls for personal effort (Langlois, 2008). Ethics call for self-control and the ability to act freely and responsibly. In this perspective we define our actions by considering our own ideal of personal well-being, that of others, and our own well-being in relation to others. As perceived here, ethics are the reflective capacity that precedes action and enables us to better determine the impact and the consequences of future decisions.

Despite the scarcity of theoretical reflection and empirical studies on the subject, this emerging trend in ethics is also applied in a reflection on ethical leadership. Three pitfalls must be avoided at the epistemological level, however: First, the concept of ethical leadership is often presented as a hodgepodge of disciplinary viewpoints without any genuine integrating element. The second pitfall is that research has not fully addressed the impact of the workplace on school administrators’ ethical responses to highly challenging situations. The third pitfall concerns the professional development of ethical leaders which is mostly viewed from a deontological perspective, as we have explained above.

In response to the growing need for leaders who possess ethical, critical and reflective qualities, we developed a training program called TERA – for Trajectory: Ethics, Responsibility and Authenticity. The aim of the TERA training program is to develop greater ethical sensitivity, judgement, and awareness among educational administrators of the moral dimensions of their decision-making processes and to the impact of their decisions on people, their organization, and their community.

A dual conceptual framework

The TERA model consists of a dual conceptual framework that is based on a process of knowledge, volition, and action (Langlois, 2005) and grounded in a reflective, action-training approach to professional development (see Figure 1).

The process of knowledge, volition, and action

Knowledge

Learning the basic principles of ethics constitutes the first stage in the process of knowledge, volition, and action. This is where we define our ethical sensitivity and ability to perceive the moral dimensions of a given situation. What is our ethical perspective? Does this perspective emanate from our analysis of the ethics of justice, of care, of critique, or of others? According to Starratt (1991), these three dimensions are not only present but are interrelated within ethical leadership. Original empirical research conducted since 1992 by Langlois (1997, 2004) in various cultural and linguistic settings has enabled us to verify Starratt's theoretical model. In constructing a typology to help us identify and comprehend the moral actions associated with each of the three dimensions, these studies confirm the presence of an ethical leadership based on these dimensions.

The knowledge aspect is there to help us put a name on our own personal ethical perspective. It also enables us to develop a plural ethical awareness that integrates care, justice, and critique. Knowledge is a key component that shows a person's ethical sensitivity but also generates awareness with regard to the various ethical perspectives and their respective challenges. Ethical reflection is undertaken in order to fully grasp

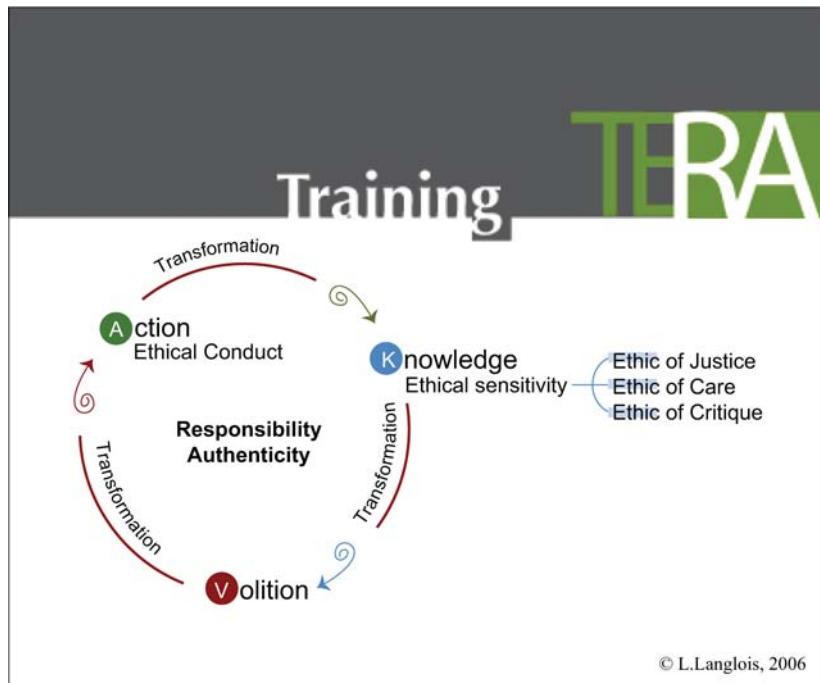


Figure 1.
The TERA model: a dual conceptual framework

the moral dimension of the situation. Am I conscious of the ethics applied in my analysis? Am I aware of the ethics conveyed within my organization? Am I able to identify situations of injustice, inequity or inhumanity? These questions help us move to the next level of this transformation process: volition.

Volition

Volition, the second stage of the process, highlights the axiological dimensions, beliefs, principles and standards to which we adhere and our level of awareness of these dimensions. It defines the level of compliance to our own values and the degree of volition to use these values as an internal guide. This stage also focuses on the use of free will in dealing with the many stresses and influences in our life. On this basis we may then explore the necessary elements with which to understand, identify and choose which value to prioritize in a given situation. This position enables us to determine to what extent we are ready to defend our point-of-view, depending on the principles we put forth. It also establishes whether we are motivated to do something to resolve our issue by facing the challenges that occur throughout the problem situation. From this volition, for some, emerges the necessary courage to take positive action.

Action

This final phase constitutes the actual testing of a complete ethical process. In fact, despite being motivated, we may decide at the last minute not to act. Undue stress may occur, along with a hesitation with regard to our capacity to affirm our position, which results in not taking action. The junction between volition and action occurs when there is a display of authenticity during the process. Comte-Sponville (1995) stated that being authentic signifies acting out of good faith, meaning that our actions and words are in line with what we feel inside. In terms of ethics, this does not simply imply good intentions and the desire to “do something”, but actually taking action (Canto-Sperber, 2001). This going into action demonstrates a sense of responsibility: that we engage in our actions. According to Jonas (1984, 1990), the notion of responsibility goes beyond the Kantian imperative to which we are so accustomed; the fact of being responsible means taking into consideration all of the possible negative and positive consequences in a decision-making process.

During the training program in the present study, these three stages are presented to participants (steps 2, 3 and 4) to ensure that their experience follows a trajectory that is ethical, responsible and authentic (see Figure 2).

The TERA program consists of a series of six meetings, about one every three months. As shown in Figure 2, the TERA program begins with an introduction and planning meeting during which the pre-test questionnaire is distributed (step 1), followed by a day of training (step 2), then meetings for group practice analyzes which take place every three months over a two-year period (step 3). Individual interviews on decision-making processes in dealing with ethical dilemmas take place during step 3. Step 4 concludes the training part of the TERA program with a group reflective plenary session, a post-test questionnaire, and an individual reflection on an ethical legacy. Step 5 concludes the data collection part of the program through semi-conducted interviews on the transformation of the organizational culture through the teaching of ethical learning. Finally, the overall results are presented to each of the participating groups.

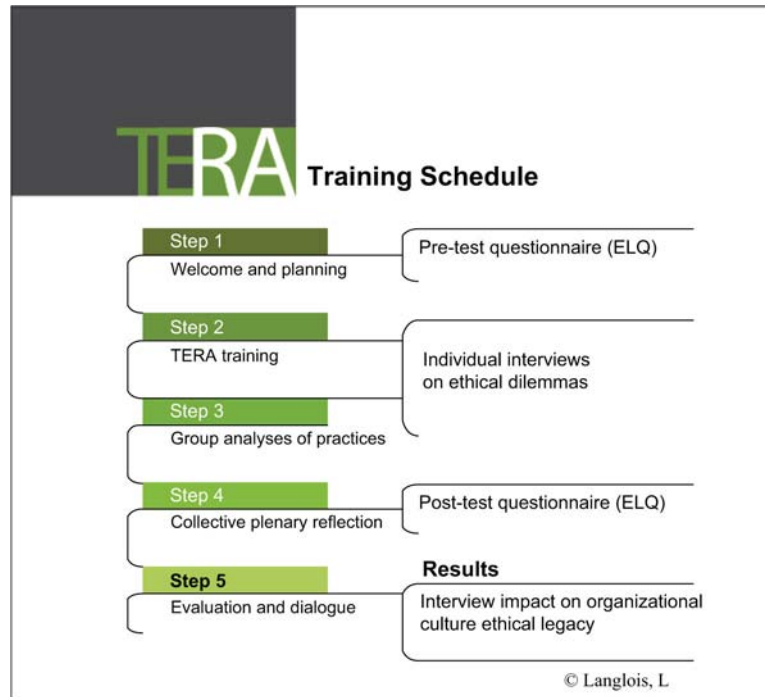


Figure 2.
The TERA training
schedule

Research questions

Before we started the training program, the research team asked the following research questions:

- RQ1. What is the impact of the TERA program on our ethical decision making?
- RQ2. What is the impact of the TERA program on educational leaders' competencies?

Methodology

Participants

Between 1998 and 2005 the TERA training was offered to several groups of educational administrators thus making it possible to refine and perfect the program. An initial formal evaluation was conducted in 2005, resulting in a formalized training program. In 2005 three groups of educational administrators were invited to participate in a three-year research project. One group consisted of educational leaders working in the same school district in the province of Québec, Canada (group 1). Two other groups were composed of educational leaders who belonged to the same professional association in the province of Ontario, Canada (groups 2 and 3).

Data from group 1 were collected between September 2005 and May 2006. A total of 12 French-speaking[1] educational leaders participated in the training project – five secondary school principals, five school board officials (a director of human resources, two coordinators, a director of material and technological services, and a finance

director), and one school superintendent. Participants in group 1 did not belong to any registered professional organization. For groups 2 and 3 data collection began in March 2007 and concluded in May 2008. Group 2 was composed of 12[2] English-speaking participants including four teachers, five school principals, one vice-principal, one person from the Department of Education, and one department head. Group 3 was composed of 13[3] French-speaking participants including seven school principals, two superintendents and four teacher leaders. A total of 30 participants took part in the complete TERA training program.

Research techniques and data analysis

The methodology for this study combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Prior to the first session and during the last meeting (step 5), participants answered a questionnaire designed to assess the presence of ethical leadership (ELQ, Langlois, 2005). The questionnaire data were analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics, such as frequency and mean scores for ethical dimensions, as well as standard deviations were calculated both for the pre- and post-test. Considering our specific goal of providing participants with individual feedback and also for the general purposes of the study, statistical diagrams of individual scores were produced. The following demographic variables were considered in the general analysis of the results: gender, age, number of years of experience in teaching, number of years of experience in educational administration, language, and membership in a professional association.

As a complement to the questionnaire we used Langlois' (1997) guide on the decision-making process in a moral dilemma situation to conduct interviews with the participants. In order to document participant learning as well as the transformation in their administrative practice, qualitative data were collected throughout the training period using group interviews and subgroup interviews. Data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Results

Qualitative results

Learning about ethical leadership. The qualitative results show the impact of the TERA program on ethical decision-making processes. After the first year, the data indicate that Group 1 participants were more able to analyze a situation, that the delineation of their judgement was enriched by the integrated perspective of the three ethics (Starratt, 1991; Langlois, 1997), and that they were better equipped to assess the consequences of their decisions.

After the training program on the three ethics I was able to understand which one I tended to use mostly and which other two I neglected. I realized that by using only one ethic, my analysis of a dilemma was truncated (Group 1, French-speaking female participant).

Knowing the three ethics allowed me to see the main issues linked to each ethical dimension. Now that I am aware of the ethic I naturally tend to use in my decision-making process, I have a better grasp of the impact my decisions have (Group 1, French-speaking male participant).

The development of a professional identity, a form of applied ethics, appeared to follow a process resembling a peer co-constructive approach. Practice analysis meetings offered both time and an opportunity to exchange and engage in an important dialogue

that addressed the norms and criteria which should be prioritized in dealing with difficult ethical situations. For groups 2 and 3, the preliminary results indicate that this moment enabled participants to engage in a deeper discussion of their own values via their value statement (professional standards). The ultimate goals of the regulation were much better understood and a certain consistency in their decision-making process appeared to emerge.

Knowing the three ethics helps me to better articulate my judgement; I now use the right words when justifying my decisions (Group 1, English-speaking female participant).

I now realize the importance of establishing this process; knowing the differences between ethics, law, and deontological code helps me to better understand which behavior I should adopt (Group 2, English-speaking male participant).

Now I have a tool with TERA model, I no longer see things the same way. My analysis of situations is now much more refined (Group 3, French-speaking female participant).

Analysis shows how ethical issues were refined as participants focused on the enhancement of their ethical autonomy and professionalism at work. For group 1 this collective movement of co-construction differed from the usual hetero-regulated approaches often put forward by the adoption of professional codes of ethics. Groups 2 and 3 showed an improved understanding of the role of their professional association, the form of regulation favored (i.e. a mixed approach between auto- and heteroregulation) and its underlying values.

By being better able at distinguishing between deontology and ethics, I can better understand what is expected according to each perspective. We have no training on these notions and there is a lot of confusion between ethics and deontology. I now understand that ethics calls for self-control (Group 2, French-speaking male participant).

I realize that ethics requires internal strength and control as well as clarity about one's personal and professional values (Group 1, French-speaking female participant).

Participants also mentioned that they made better sense of their decisions once they saw the ultimate consequences. For these two cohorts we observed that a realignment process of values such as the educational mission and children's security and well-being appeared to have an influence on their professional conduct.

Each ethic allows me to better grasp the aim at the end. It is very important in education because we must always keep in mind what our mission is, our *raison d'être*. We don't run factories; we help people build their knowledge (Group 1, French-speaking female participant).

The results indicate that the TERA program generated a better understanding of the notion of responsibility. Through group practice analysis the participants redefined and clarified the boundaries of their responsibility by going beyond naive administrative procedures to consider the possible impact of their decisions on the people around them.

Ethical competency. Data analysis shows that the mastery of new knowledge and skills became more obvious from one co-development session to the next. In sharing their thoughts and experiences, the participants' words were more precise and meaningful and were connected to the vocabulary and concepts presented on the training day (see Figure 2). For instance, at the beginning of the training program,

participants did not understand the concept of ethical competency. The concept gradually became more meaningful to them through small group discussions during which they talked about real ethical dilemmas they experienced at work.

How many times I've sat around with my colleagues and I just noticed a bit of awkwardness. People don't want to share their situations. They don't want to talk about an ethical situation. They don't want you to say that it's happening. I don't understand why. We should be sharing all these things, we should be talking about this because of all the collective energy, collective intelligence. So that might be something we should want to go and create as well (Group 3, English language co-development session).

It's the ethical framework that we need . . . we have to create in our communities awareness with the vocabulary and this has to become internalized by our teachers and our students, and by our communities. Once that is established, and we have an idea of where we want to go, there has to be receptivity, a readiness for these concepts. This is what we have to do, as teachers and as administrators (Group 3, English language co-development session).

Many of the group members frequently referred to the "yellow card", a cue card for the multi-dimensional ethical analysis model given to all participants on the first training day, which they used to guide their progress when encountering problem situations. As far as understanding the three ethical dimensions, their complementarity and characteristics, the data indicate that, after the second co-development session, the majority of participants were on their way to mastering the concepts.

I have that square thing on my desk (with the words knowledge, volition, ethics and action) and it will always be there and I love it. Is there any way we could extend that plaque to provide a little more definition . . . something we can readily share with people who come into our lives, even if it's only for a moment, something that would help extend the web of people using this framework, and integrate it with the decision-making model? (Group 3, English language co-development session).

Knowledge of the vulnerability associated with the various ethics generated much discussion. In general, the participants appropriated new knowledge essential to the development of their ethical competency. As far as understanding the three ethical dimensions was concerned, the data indicate that after the second co-development session the majority of participants were on their way to mastering the concepts. In general, the participants appropriated new knowledge and meaning essential to the development of their ethical competency (Le Boterf, 2001).

It's understanding what we value. When we look at care, trust, respect, and integrity, and those are huge words with varying definitions. When you look at those definitions, I think there is that interpretation of what that means. I guess it's "how deeply you want to dive" (Group 3, English language co-development session).

In light of this initial result with regard to ethical competency, we observed that the participants defined themselves as being competent in this area when they showed their ability to analyze and to rapidly identify problem situations by integrating the three ethics (care, justice, and critique) into their decision-making process. A person who is ethically competent not only demonstrates an ability to discuss and to deal with these situations within the organization, but is also able to use the necessary arguments to better grasp the possible consequences and what they entail. We also noticed that the development of ethical competency is part of a process whereby ethical

notions are mobilized and reinvested in one's professional practice. We believe that this mobilization and reinvestment constitute key factors in developing ethical competency. This competency is demonstrated dialogically while retaining one's own authenticity and integrity.

Presence of ethical dilemmas. During the interviews each participant declared having to deal with complex ethical dilemmas which at times created doubts as to the appropriate action to be taken as well as important personal, professional or organizational value conflicts. The support provided during the co-development sessions enabled participants not only to put these problem situations into perspective but also to better understand them through the ethical approach in analyzing their dilemmas. Both dialogue and discussion were key to providing a sounding board to guide their reflection and exercise their judgement.

Ethical dilemmas primarily involved the following dimensions: human resources management, standards and guidelines, image of the profession, and professional judgment. Human resources dilemmas usually involve dealing with dysfunctional employees (lack of competence, substance abuse, etc.). Ethical dilemmas imply a number of complexity levels resulting in difficult decision making.

There was a teacher who had drug problems. I heard he had taken drugs during his break. I decided to go talk to him, ask him if it was true. Of course, he denied it. I then checked his filing cabinet and found the satchel. I had two options: call the police and he would lose his job, or try to help him solve his addiction problem by putting him on sick leave. I had the feeling he needed a second chance, that he had it hard at the time. On the other hand, the students could see in what state he was. I was also concerned with them (Group 3, English-speaking male participant).

Dilemmas related to the image of the profession were mostly associated with Ontario participants where a College of Teachers was created by means of provincial legislation in 1997. Some individuals may express concern over colleagues whose conduct, they believe, tarnishes the reputation of the profession. Deviant behaviors deeply affect those who wish to show professionalism with regard to the services teachers provide.

There is a teacher in my school who is a drunk. Late at night he walks in the streets of our small town. He even sometimes sleeps in the park, and the next day, he comes to school to give his class. I know people see him. What impact does it have on our profession? It's terrible. I can't tolerate it. My ethical dilemma is: should I fire him or should I help him solve his alcoholism, when I know very well that a number of support measures have already been tried. The image of our profession is tarnished by his conduct, we lose our credibility (Group 3, English-speaking female participant).

Finally, for some, situations involving professional judgement represent significant ethical dilemmas. Using independent judgement appears less evident in contexts where numerous and complex administrative procedures prevail. Personal and professional values often contradict organizational norms dictated by administration.

I had to hire a resource person. According to the procedure and tradition in our school, the position was supposed to go to the most experienced person. Those who applied for the job were close to retiring and lacked initiative and interest in the students. I thought of another person but she didn't have the certification. She was very interested in the position but could not apply. I knew she was the right person, she had all the skills we needed, but I was trapped

by the rules and tradition. It looked like I could not use my professional judgment. But finally, I based my decision on the greatest good for the long-term. Short-term would have been easy. Long-term is for the greatest good. In this situation, the most important was the long-term (Group 3, English-speaking female participant).

There was a particularly needy student who had a lot of issues. His family had requested that he go to another high school. But I advised the student and his parents that even though the kid was taking up a lot of my time, he still was better served by the programs we offered in our school and which were not offered in the other school. But the parents still wanted him to go to the other school. I knew that it probably was not the right thing for him. So I delayed processing the request. And the kid stayed in my school for another year during which time the parents realized that he was in fact better off in my school. We sometimes have to use our professional judgement and do what's best for the kid despite what the parents' wishes are (Group 3, English-speaking male participant).

Results from the ethical leadership questionnaire before and after the training program

Results from the pre-test indicate that, prior to the training program, participants possessed two, rarely three of the ethical dimensions. Our hypothesis was that, through the training program, participants would become aware of the three ethics and of their role in an ethical decision-making process. They would therefore demonstrate an increase in all three ethics in their post-test profiles, particularly with regard to the ethics which were less developed in their pre-test profiles. Post-test results show a different phenomenon where participants experience a significant readjustment process characterized by three different stages. We called this process the transformative cycle (see Figure 3).

The three-stage transformative cycle describes the impact of the training program on participants. In most cases the scores for the pre-test dominating ethic(s) diminishes

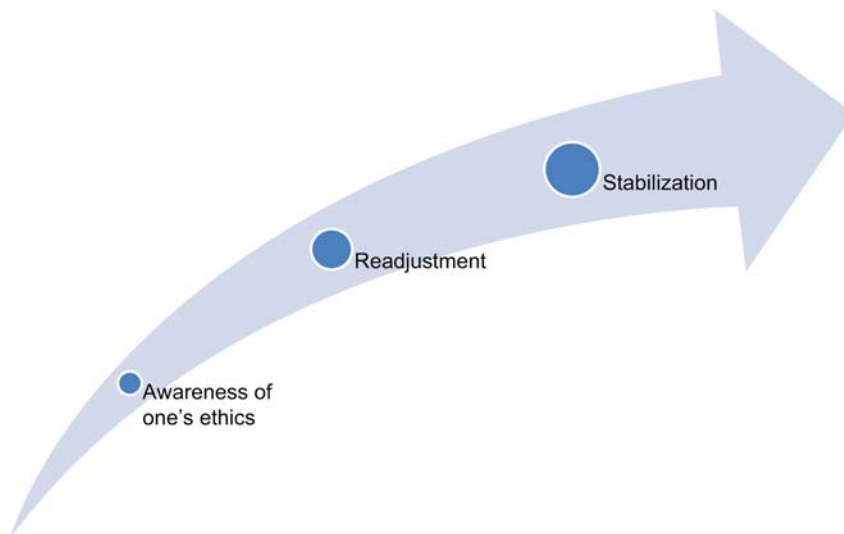


Figure 3.
The transformative cycle

whereas the scores for the other ethic(s) increase, resulting in a more balanced profile. We explain this phenomenon in the following way. Upon receiving their pre-test leadership profile participants identified the ethics which they had already developed together with those which were either not developed or were in the process of being developed. This step was extremely important because it allowed participants to become aware of the extent to which these dimensions contributed to their leadership. In fact, it represented a triggering event in the process leading to an awakening in participant ethical awareness. The second stage, evidenced through the post-test analysis, involved an important process of readjustment with regard to the ethics of justice, of care, and of critique[4]. This would explain the decrease observed in the post-test results as illustrated in Figure 4.

The third stage, to be confirmed at a later point, suggests an increase in the presence of each ethical dimension and a period of stabilization of the ethical dimensions.

It may be noted that the data indicate no difference between the male and female participants in their ethical profiles (see Figure 5).

Differences and similarities between English-speaking and French-speaking groups

We found a number of differences between the Ontario English-speaking and French-speaking and Quebec French-speaking cohorts. First, the nature of ethical dilemmas differs – Ontario participants in general being more concerned with the public image of the teaching profession than are Quebec participants. We believe that this is due to the existence of a professional association in Ontario and its value statement which regulates teacher and educational administrator behavior. Table I presents the compiled results for the pre- and post-tests for the three cohorts.

With regard to the results from the ELQ post-test, English-speaking and French-speaking participants scored differently. For the French-speaking participants of both provinces, we saw a lower score for the ethic of care whereas for the English-speaking group the ethic of justice scored higher. Furthermore, results indicate that only the third group (Ontario English-speaking) experienced an increase in the development of all three ethics, particularly with regard to the ethics of justice and critique. For groups 1 and 2 (Quebec and Ontario French-speaking), only the ethic of critique increased whereas the other two ethics slightly decreased. Post-test scores highlighted two other important results:

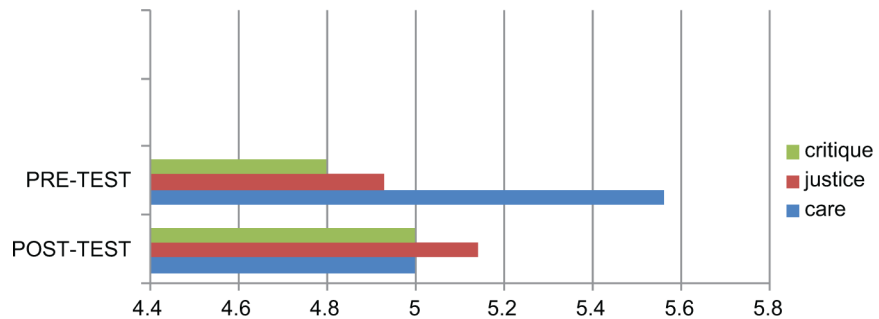


Figure 4.
Participant X, ethical leadership profile (female group 3)

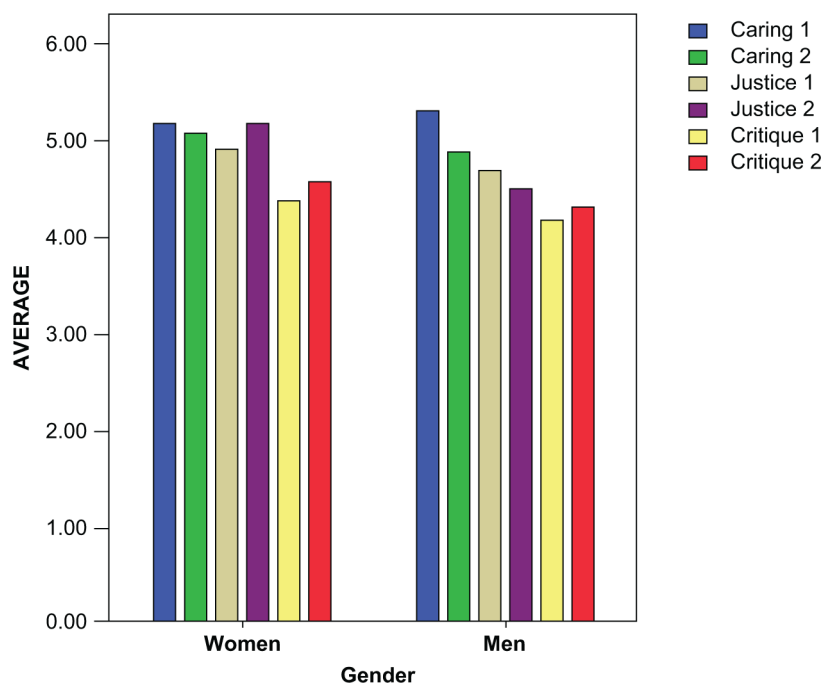


Figure 5.
Leadership profile
according to gender

Groups	Ethic of care		Ethic of justice		Ethic of critique		
	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test	
Group1 (Quebec, French-speaking)	5.26	4.95	4.79	4.75	4.25	4.41	
Groups 2 & 3 (Ontario)	French-speaking	5.00	4.92	4.57	4.50	4.37	4.70
	English-speaking	5.26	5.34	4.75	5.21	4.79	5.10

Table I.
Group results on pre- and
post-tests according to
language

- (1) for the three groups, ethical awareness increased significantly in all three ethics, which indicates that it is possible to develop a multidimensional ethical awareness; and
- (2) when comparing the three groups, we observed a rebalancing process of the three ethics.

Discussion and conclusion

This study is illustrative of a descriptive rather than a normative ethics process. The perceptible moral intensity is confirmed in the questionnaire results and in the group meeting qualitative results. Moral intensity manifests itself in improved ethical awareness, judgement structuring, a sense of responsibility, and overall professional conduct. The fact that no difference was observed between male and female participants confirms research by Langlois (1997, 2004), Hunter (2002), Fleishman and

Valentine (2003), and Héon *et al.* (2007). The findings are also in agreement with those of Loe *et al.* (2000), Héon *et al.* (2007), and Langlois (2004), in that the differences between the profiles and leadership practices were, statistically speaking, more related to the number of years of experience and to the work situation than to gender.

Another issue for which our study offers partial clarification is that involving the influence of a value statement on leadership practices (Begley and Stefkovich, 2004). At this point, our findings suggest that such a statement has positive effects on the development of professional ethics and that the way in which it is constructed plays an important role in terms of whether participants really adhere to it or not. In fact, we believe the way in which a value statement is created and adopted constitutes a central component of the process by which members will take ownership and honour the norms and values inscribed in the statement. The Ontario College of Teachers value statement was constructed according to a hybrid approach, that is, through heteroregulation as well as autoregulation. This confirms the findings of McDevitt and Hise's (2002) study of professions that have adopted a code of ethics.

The TERA training program allowed us to better understand issues inherent in a code of ethics and the integration of its underlying values. As Duignan *et al.* (2003, p. 2) have said:

[...] while authentic leadership focuses on ethics and morality in actions and interactions, it also must promote and support the core values of schooling, that is, educative and authentic teaching and learning.

The title of our paper raises the question of whether or not ethics can be developed through a training program. Our findings confirm that ethical dimensions were already present in the leadership of individuals participating in our research project. The TERA program, however, led to a readjustment of certain of these ethical dimensions. Specifically, it enabled participants to develop an enhanced understanding of the ethical stakes involved in their leadership practices and to increase their ethical awareness. Developing sound ethical expertise therefore appears to be promising in training future administrators and in improving their leadership skills.

Notes

1. One participant withdrew after the training program; it was the superintendent.
2. For this cohort, four participants were withdrawn after the training program.
3. For the last cohort, two participants were withdrawn before the training program.
4. Original findings from this research indicate that the ethic of critique appears to be the predicting variable to the presence of an ethical sensitivity. These results will appear in a forthcoming paper.

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Corresponding author

Lyse Langlois can be contacted at: lyse.langlois@rlt.ulaval.ca

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