

Moral imagination in student teachers' written stories on an ethical dilemma

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Moral imagination in student teachers' written stories on an ethical dilemma

This article explores how student teachers use moral imagination when writing about an ethical dilemma. Moral imagination refers to the ability to consider a situation from a distance and to understand different perspectives through imagination. An ethical dilemma was presented in the form of a framing story, which the participating Austrian and Finnish student teachers continued writing as they chose. Through positioning and narrative analyses, we uncovered how the students' moral imagination on the ethical dilemma centred on one or more of the following foci: 1) the pupil, 2) themselves as teachers or 3) other actors. This moral imagination manifested through different storylines. The implications of these results and the relevance of the method for teacher education are discussed.

Keywords: ethical dilemma; moral imagination; narrative research; student teachers; teacher education

Introduction

This article explores how student teachers use moral imagination when writing about an ethical dilemma. During their teacher education studies, students inevitably encounter dilemmas in teachers' work, for example, during classroom practice (Davies and Heyward 2019). Previous research has shown that ethical dilemmas occasionally require teachers to make difficult value-based choices between different interests and actors while maintaining awareness of how these choices can affect the situation (Hansen 1998; Kelchtermans 2017; Noddings 2001; Tirri and Husu 2002). Nevertheless, newly qualified teachers are not always aware of the decisions they have to make on a daily basis, and teachers in general often report that they are not adequately prepared to address ethical dilemmas in their work (e.g. Bullough 2011; Cook-Sather and Baker-Doyle 2017; Tirri 1999; Shapira-Lishchinsky 2011; Tirri and Husu 2002; Zembylas and McGlynn 2012).

It is widely acknowledged that approaching and understanding ethical dilemmas presuppose moral imagination (Arneback 2014; Johnson 1993; Joseph 2016). This may be defined as the ability to consider a situation from a distance and to understand the different perspectives of diverse actors through imagination (Johnson 1993; Werhane 1999). The awareness of ethical dilemmas in teachers' work demands an understanding of the nature of teaching as an inescapably moral practice, the connection between such dilemmas and the contingencies of their context (Davies and Heyward 2019; Hansen 1998). Existing research does not fully address how student teachers use moral imagination when approaching an ethical dilemma in practice. In order to address this gap, we applied the method of empathy-based stories (Wallin, Koro-Ljungberg, and Eskola 2019) and presented Austrian and Finnish student teachers with an ethical dilemma in the form of a framing story. We invited them to continue this story from a teacher's viewpoint and reflect on their thinking and actions through writing. Our research question is as follows: what kind of moral imagination do student teachers use when writing about an ethical dilemma?

We expect that the more knowledgeable we are about and understand student teachers' use of moral imagination, then teacher education programmes could be better planned to prepare student teachers to deal with ethical dilemmas in their future work.

Theoretical framework

While little is known about student teachers' views on ethical dilemmas, there is considerable research on the moral nature of teaching (e.g. Bullough 2011; Fenstermacher, Osguthorpe, and Sanger 2009; Hansen 1998; Noddings 2001; Rissanen et al. 2018; Sanger and Osguthorpe 2013) and, specifically, how teachers deal with ethical dilemmas in their work (e.g. Arneback 2014; Joseph 2016). Many researchers

use the concept of tension, whose meaning is similar to that of dilemma (see Lassila 2017). For example, Andô (2005, 8) defines tension in teachers' work as 'the teacher being unsure about what to emphasise in a situation where there are several possible justifiable courses for action'. Colnerud (1997) uses the concept of ethical conflict, noting that conflicts reported by teachers in their relations with pupils, parents and colleagues are categorised 'according to which norms and values are at stake and in conflict with each other' (630). In our study, we use ethical dilemma interchangeably with tension and ethical conflict, understanding that ethical dilemmas may require teachers to make value-based choices between disparate interests and actors.

A significant body of research has also considered how ethical dilemmas are and should be dealt with in teacher education (Chapman, Foster, and Buchanan 2013; Davies and Heyward 2019; Ehrich et al. 2011; Joseph 2003; Mahony 2009; Maxwell and Schwimmer 2016). Examining the moral nature of teachers' work may be an explicit part of the curriculum in some teacher education programmes (e.g. Johnson, Vare, and Evers 2013; see also Fenstermacher, Osguthorpe, and Sanger 2009). Mahony (2009), however, argues that teacher education does not pay sufficient attention to ethical understanding, a claim supported by the tendency for teachers to be troubled primarily by ethical dilemmas that are closely related to the relational nature of their work (e.g. McCormack and Thomas, 2003).

Two of the few studies on the ethical dilemmas experienced by student teachers are those of Davies and Heyward (2019) and Lilach (2020), which studied ethical dilemmas arising during classroom practice. According to these studies, ethical dilemmas often emerge in the relations between student teachers and their supervisors, in connection with expectations placed on student teachers and within the dynamics of these relationships. In contrast with our method, these studies do not address how

student teachers might approach ethical dilemmas through moral imagination. Davies and Heyward (2019), however, highlight that most of these dilemmas are highly contextual and rooted in the socio-cultural background. Lilach (2020) supports this idea and adds that ethical dilemmas reflect not only tensions experienced by the individual student teachers but ‘rather the wider space’ (7) in which these tensions emerge.

It is acknowledged that a teacher’s capacity to understand and act in ethical dilemmas presupposes his/her moral imagination and entails the capacity to imagine morally significant conditions and possibilities (Chapman, Foster, and Buchanan 2013; Johnson 1993; Werhane 1999). As teachers encounter such dilemmas, moral imagination can enhance their ability to deal with these issues (Chapman, Foster, and Buchanan 2013). Moral imagination is continuously shaped and influenced by the media as well as by cultural, historical and political conditions (e.g. Furlong 2013). According to Arneback (2014), ‘by using moral imagination to reflect different possible actions and consequences in relation to the actual situation, teachers could then choose actions in a way that takes the contextual elements into account’ (278). Bullough (2011) argues that teachers’ responses to ethical dilemmas are based on a combination of their life experiences and moral and ethical sensitivity and understanding.

Moral imagination bears similarities with critical reflection. Referring to Ryan and Ryan’s (2015, 15) definition of reflection as ‘making sense of experience’ and ‘reimagining future experience’, Gouthro and Holloway (2018, 134) assert that reflection not only helps us understand prior experiences but also informs future actions. While acknowledging the role of imagination and emotion, definitions of critical reflection tend to emphasise its cognitive and rational aspects, seeing it as an individual psychological process (Gouthro and Holloway 2018). In terms of moral imagination, however, emotion and relationships with others are seen as defining elements (Joseph

2003). Furthermore, moral imagination calls for empathy and the adoption of a caring approach towards a given situation (Johnson 1993; Noddings 1993).

Conducting the research

Narrativity

To study student teachers' moral imagination, we drew on a narrative approach. Ontologically and epistemologically, stories do not simply describe or reflect social reality; they are constructed in the process of telling (Spector-Mersel 2010). We understand stories as a fundamental way of knowing: people interpret themselves and the world around them through stories (Bruner 1986; Clandinin and Connelly 2000; Elbaz-Luwisch 2005). We consider student teachers' written stories to be products of their life experience, of their experiences in teacher education thus far and of the wider cultural context. We also recognise that their writings on ethical dilemmas reflect their different cultural backgrounds and the stories to which they have been exposed (Davies and Heyward 2019). Moreover, as Goldie (2012) highlights, narration and narrative thinking always involve an imaginary element. Therefore, through their stories, student teachers can enable us to apprehend how they use moral imagination in approaching an ethical dilemma.

Data collection

This article is based on stories produced during the spring of 2018 by 25 first-year student teachers, 16 from Austria and 9 from Finland, all of whom were enrolled in university-based primary education programmes. We decided to collect data in both countries as we were eager to develop our approach to teaching about the moral nature of teachers' work and had suitable upcoming courses. Although our aim was not to

compare the two national contexts, we were mindful of their influence on the moral imagination depicted in the written stories (Lahelma and Gordon 2010). With stories from two contexts, we could access variation in moral imagination as a phenomenon and examine how the student teachers imagined contextually relevant contingencies related to the ethical dilemma.

Applying the method of empathy-based stories (Wallin, Koro-Ljungberg, and Eskola 2019), we presented the student teachers with an ethical dilemma in the form of a framing story, which they continued to write. They had about 30 minutes to do their writing during one lesson of a course on ethical and philosophical issues in education. The stories were approximately one page in length. We followed the ethical guidelines of both countries (e.g. ÖFEB, TENK) in terms of data collection. Participation in the research was voluntary, and separate permission was sought from the student teachers to use their stories for research purposes.

The method of empathy-based stories (Eskola, Mäenpää, and Wallin 2017) prompts the moral imagination, as it is open ended (e.g. Johnson 1993), and often presents an evocative dilemma for participants. It helps render visible the thinking and reasoning of student teachers, thus facilitating an examination of the moral imagination. Furthermore, writing is one way of deliberating on ethical considerations that pave the way to a new understanding (Nussbaum 1990). We provided the student teachers with the following framing story as an introductory script in their native language of either Finnish or German:

You are the teacher in charge of supervising an outdoor recess, when a pupil comes and starts talking to you. This pupil is not from your own class but seems to think of you as an approachable and safe adult to talk to. The pupil comes along every now and then in similar situations to talk to you about recent happenings. However,

one day, the pupil starts telling you about the worrying situation at home and how it makes her/him feel really bad.

The student teachers were invited to continue the story, to imagine themselves as a teacher in this situation and to reflect on their thoughts and actions. The framing story originates from a Finnish teacher's research interview, with certain details omitted to make it more universal and allow room for imagination. It invited the student teachers to make their thoughts, attitudes and values explicit. In addition, the student teachers' extension of the story enabled them to understand the positions in which they described themselves and others in the context of the ethical dilemma. It is notable that the framing story mentions only the pupil and teacher, with no reference to other actors. Likewise, there is only an implicit link between the ethical dilemma and conflicting expectations and values. We presented the characters in the framing story without gender references. Because the same story was used in two cultural contexts, we also tried to avoid concepts that did not translate well. The original language versions were used as much as possible in the data analysis and were consulted even after the translation into English. In the results section, we refer to the student teachers as A1–A16 (Austria) and F1–F9 (Finland).

Analysis

The analysis of the stories was inductive and involved three phases. While these phases were not ordered chronologically, there was partial overlap (see Clandinin and Connelly 2000, 132–135). The analysis focused on how the student teachers used moral imagination when writing about the ethical dilemma. The phases were as follows:

(1) First, we read the Austrian and Finnish data sets separately and discussed our observations. Being fluent in both German and Finnish, as well as intimately familiar

with both contexts, the first author was central to the analysis process. For the other, non-German speaking researchers, the Austrian stories were translated into English.

(2) As we read the individual stories, we noticed the different ways in which the student teachers described their thoughts and actions. We then read the stories, with a focus on how the storyline proceeded, i.e. how the student teachers would proceed in the situation. Two storyline categories were identified: a) *the straightforward storyline*, in which some student teachers narrated a highly linear sequence of events, as in the following example: ‘I would allow the pupil to tell about the stressful situation [...] Seeking to make contact with the parents is appropriate in this case’ (A2), and b) *the ‘if-then’ storyline*, in which some student teachers described different choices/actions depending on variations in the imagined situation, such as the pupil’s wishes regarding how to proceed, or the seriousness of the pupil’s situation, as in the following example: ‘If you know what it [the situation] is, you have to consider whether to inform the parents’ (A4). Some stories contained both storylines.

(3) Simultaneous with the storyline analysis, we conducted a positioning analysis, first examining who were identified as key actors in the stories and then focusing on the positions that the student teachers attributed to different actors (see Bamberg 1997, 2004; Davies and Harré 1990). This positioning analysis was discerned through close attention to word choices, rhetorical devices and discursive hints (Bamberg 1997, 2004). For example: ‘I would also **suggest** to the pupil that **I could** reserve an appointment with the school counsellor for him/her’. The word choices, here bolded, illustrate how the student teacher could position him/herself as a supportive actor while also empowering the pupil to make a choice. The positioning analysis revealed the dynamics within and between relationships, including ideas on who should take responsibility in the situation, as imagined by the student teachers.

Based on the three phases of analysis, we identified that the student teachers' use of moral imagination centred on one or more of the following foci:

- (1) Focus on the pupil
- (2) Focus on themselves as teachers
- (3) Focus on other actors

These foci were quite evenly present in the stories. While these foci were not mutually exclusive, in the following section, we clarify each one separately, along with examples from the student teachers' stories.

Findings

Focus on the pupil

The findings illustrate that one of the ways in which the student teachers used moral imagination in their stories was to focus on the pupil. The following story by an Austrian student teacher illustrates this focus:

I am grateful and honoured that the pupil entrusts this situation to me. First, I listen to everything and do not ask questions. I listen well and attentively. Then, I say to the pupil that it is very good that he/she entrusts this to me. It's right to talk about it and not keep it a secret. I praise this behaviour! Then, I ask if there is anyone else in the area, if there are other trustworthy people in the environment. I make it clear that I will support the child and help them. I encourage them and try to assess whether the child is 'at risk' or whether I can let them go home after the conversation. I look for another trustworthy colleague and ask for his/her view on the situation. Are we of the same opinion? Can he/she give me tips of institutions I can turn to? I ask the child if I should have a personal conversation with the parents. Here, I follow the decision of the child. I emphasise once again that he/she can always come to me, and together, we will seek a solution – and we will find one! (A14)

As in this example, when the focus was on the pupil, the student teachers' description of teaching was similar to that of Noddings (1992, 2001), that is, as a caring profession; they felt responsible for their pupils and acted with their best interests at heart. The relationship with the pupil was seen as personal, with the motivation to act based on moral considerations rather than legal responsibilities or accountability towards other stakeholders, such as parents (Nias 1999). The idea of 'being there for the pupil' encapsulates what was at the heart of this focus. This was clear in statements such as 'I want to give the pupil my full attention' (A5), 'It is important to know how to really be present for the pupil' (F1), and 'I listen well and attentively' (A14). One student teacher summed up her/his goal as a teacher as one of making the child feel safe and protected through personal connectedness: 'I give the child the feeling of being in good hands, listen actively to him/her and want to be able to fully digest how he/she feels, what feelings he/she has' (A12).

In the pupil-focused stories, the pupil was positioned as having a voice that needed to be taken seriously, a perspective which must be considered when deciding how to proceed. Mutual trust was seen as the goal of the respective positioning of the pupil and student teachers. Alongside the active pupil, the teacher was most often positioned as an active listener who enabled the situation to move forward, though not necessarily solving it. In this focus, the teacher could also be positioned as a helper or protector, presupposing a more passive role for the pupil, though not shifting the focus away from the pupil. Still, in the stories with this focus, the teacher did not come across as a strong actor.

In the pupil-focused stories, student teachers placed the highest priority on the pupil's safety. In some stories, this was apparent in the teacher actively seeking to improve the situation and maintain a supportive atmosphere, using expressions such as

‘encourage the pupil to continue to think positively’ (A1), ‘make sure that the child is well and that everything is fine’ (A5), and ‘the pupil should feel he/she is being taken seriously and accepted. Together with the class teacher, we would discuss the next steps’ (A15). Some of the student teachers who invoked safety referred to themselves as the ‘safe adult for the pupil’ (F3, F9). Their focus on the pupil came close to a caring attitude, signalling a desire for a possible future or an ideal self as a teacher.

This focus can be summed up as ‘going the extra mile’ for the pupil, beyond what is expected of a teacher in terms of official responsibilities. The scope of teachers’ involvement would go beyond the immediate case at hand: ‘I would keep asking, likely for a long time, how the pupil is doing and would like to know how the situation is progressing, even though it is not my pupil’ (F7). The student teachers described their intention to contact others whom they felt were best able to help the child. However, they typically did not want to ‘pass on the responsibility to someone else but to value the fact that they had been chosen as a confidant.’ (F9). In stories where the pupil was placed in the care of other actors, for example, the pupil’s own teacher, the focus remained on the pupil: ‘It is important for the child to get help on how to talk about ‘feeling bad’, for example, with the school psychologist. It is crucial that the child is not left alone in the situation’ (F7). The student teachers with this focus were noticeably more willing to use both the words ‘child’ and ‘pupil’. This terminology illustrates the use of moral imagination as the student teachers elaborated on the position of the pupil in the framing story, opting for a more care-centred word.

The above-quoted story (A14) involved a straightforward storyline: the student teacher seemed to act according to a clear plan. However, many stories with this focus also employed an ‘if-then’ storyline, meaning that the student teachers first imagined different severities regarding the pupil’s situation and followed up with what they

deemed to be appropriate solutions. Here, the student teachers used their moral imagination by not making simple decisions but, instead, leaving options open according to the situation.

Focus on themselves as teachers

Another way in which the student teachers used moral imagination in their stories was by focusing on themselves as teachers. A story by a Finnish student teacher illustrates the distinctive features of this focus:

I am not the pupil's own teacher, so I am not, in a strict sense, the one responsible for the situation. However, in one sense, I am because I am possibly the only one who knows about the situation, and therefore, it is my responsibility to take the issue forward and ensure that the pupil's rights and well-being are taken care of. Therefore, I need to report the situation to someone who can do something about it [...] I would not want to proceed with dealing with the situation without the consent of the pupil as it involves his/her private issues [...] Even if he/she did not agree, I would still have to contact the pupil's own teacher, before the situation gets any worse. (F8)

At the beginning of the above story, the teacher was negatively positioned – ‘not the student's own teacher’, ‘not [...] responsible’. Thereafter, the position relative to other actors was explained by connecting moral concepts to action (Johnson 1993), such as ‘responsibility to take the issue forward’, ‘ensure the pupil's rights’, and ‘need to report’ (F8). Here, the focus was on the student teachers themselves as teachers, and their relationship with the pupil tended to be de-emphasised.

The situation was approached from a perspective that could be considered professionally distant, whereby the teacher fulfilled obligations by contacting different actors, such as the pupil's own teacher, to ensure progress in the child's case. The use of moral imagination suggests that the student teachers' imagined actions were heavily

influenced by legal and ethical responsibilities and accountability concerning the situation. One is left with the impression that the imagined actions were intended to avoid exposure to criticism or legal problems while leaving the teacher with a clear conscience. Adhering strictly to approved patterns of conduct in an attempt to reduce the possibility of negative consequences can be seen as self-protective. From the perspective of moral imagination, justifying actions mainly through obligation could be considered overly restrictive (Johnson 1993).

Several student teachers wondered why the pupil had chosen to talk to them; for example, 'I would find out why the student did not tell her [the pupil's own teacher]' (A7), and 'I wonder why the pupil is coming to me with this situation right now?' (A8). These expressions may suggest that a pupil has acted contrary to the student teachers' expectations of ideal practice, with the view that a pupil's own teacher is responsible for his/her pupils and that the pupil should go to his/her own teacher. However, they also suggest concern on the part of the student teachers regarding the relationship between the pupil and her/his own teacher. In this interpretation, the moral imagination would expand beyond the student teachers themselves. The possibility of multiple interpretations of the same expression illustrates that individual phrases are multi-voiced and amenable to various readings. This is a feature of conditions that are ideal for the development of moral imagination (Johnson 1993).

In focusing on themselves as teachers, the student teachers portrayed themselves as being unable to handle the situation independently: 'It is the adults' responsibility to step in [...] My task is to make sure that the child gets the right kind of help because I don't think I can help enough on my own' (F4). However, student teachers can be attuned to expectations for teachers to share responsibility and avoid making independent decisions in ethical dilemmas. Many student teachers described going

directly to the student's own teacher to inform him/her about the situation and to ask for more details, taking a seemingly assertive position. However, this can also represent an attempt to make the limits of their own official responsibility clear; for example, 'I feel it is my duty to listen, even if I did not involve myself in the matter much further' (F5).

The storyline was straightforward in the stories where the focus was on the student teachers themselves as teachers. The student teachers used moral imagination by taking responsibility in solving the situation. They did not look for alternative ways of proceeding in the situation as a teacher, instead approaching the situation in a clear-cut manner.

Focus on other actors

Some student teachers used moral imagination by focusing on other actors in their stories, a focus based on their understanding of teachers' work. In addition to the pupil and teacher mentioned in the framing story, the most frequently imagined actor was the pupil's own teacher. Other stories also involved the principal, the pupils' parents or members of the multi-professional network of experts (e.g. student counsellors, psychologists and child service workers) who attend to the well-being and safety of pupils in schools.

The following story by an Austrian student teacher illustrates the differential emphasis when the focus is on other actors:

I would talk to the pupil about the situation, as he obviously wants to get away from it. I would try to get as many details as possible to get the best possible picture of the situation. I would also try to find out the pupil's class. I would then talk to the teacher in his/her class but would not say anything about the pupil telling me about a stressful situation. First, I would like to know what the pupil's own teacher knows, if there is any reason why the pupil talked to me about it and not with him/her. If the teacher knows about the situation, I would ask him/her to

find a solution together. If she does not know, I would try again to find out why the pupil did not tell him/her. [...] Maybe even talk to the principal about it. Depending on the case, consulting the school doctor or maybe contacting a counselling centre [...] The principal has to decide on whether to have a conversation with the parents, etc. (A7)

Here, the imagined situation was resolved by asking the pupil about it, then discussing it with other adult actors. In this focus, the teacher was actively positioned – he/she asked and solved the problem; ‘I would try to get as many details as possible ... I would try to find a solution’ (A7). In contrast, the pupil was positioned as a passive actor who was helped to break free from a ‘stressful’ situation. The student teachers’ moral imagination involved making choices depending on their knowledge of the situation, possibly entailing discussions with other adult actors – in the story above, with colleagues, experts and parents.

Similar to the focus of student teachers on themselves as teachers, a focus on others can also be interpreted as self-directed, since the teacher’s own actions are emphasised. This was illustrated by expressions such as ‘I would’. Simultaneously, the focus was on other actors with whom the teacher was exploring solutions. Through activities such as talking, saying, asking, consulting, contacting and conversing, the teacher was positioned to find a solution that allowed the pupil to break free from the dilemma (A7). As in the above story, colleagues were contacted in hierarchal order, with the pupil’s own teacher first, then the principal who, being in the most senior position in Austrian schools, decided on the level of parental involvement in the situation.

In some stories, the student teachers considered it important to inform the pupil’s own teacher about the situation, reasoning that they were chosen as a reliable person by the pupil: ‘I will let him/her [the pupil’s own teacher] know that a pupil in

his/her class has come to me with a problem and has chosen me as a confidant' (A6). In the story above, the student teacher also considered it important to clarify why the pupil told him/her about the situation rather than the pupil's own teacher (A7). In the stories with a focus on other actors, the importance of maintaining good relationships with colleagues and parents was emphasised in the student teachers' moral imagination: 'The difficulty here is that you have to be cautious when handling it so as not to blame the parents' (A13).

In these stories, the student teachers' moral imagination creates a place for actions and discussions between the teacher and other actors, framed within an existing hierarchy. The teachers' concentration on their own actions and maintaining good (harmonious) relationships with other actors may shift their attention from the pupil's problem and well-being towards established practices and acceptance by colleagues and parents. According to Colnerud (1997), 'teachers sometimes seem to be ready to abandon the value of caring for children due to the respect of adults' (627). As in the story above, after an initial conversation, the pupil was no longer referred to directly.

In this focus on other actors, the student teachers' moral imagination followed 'if-then' storylines with alternative solutions. Acting with other actors required that teachers took into account the other actors' viewpoints. This meant that optional solutions for solving the situation increased. These optional solutions could be linked to the hierarchies within the wider society and culture and the way in which they are negotiated in relationships between teachers and other school-related actors (e.g. Lassila 2017).

Discussion

This article explores how student teachers use moral imagination when writing about an

ethical dilemma. The findings illustrate three ways in which the student teachers used moral imagination: focusing on the pupil, on themselves as teachers or on other actors. These three foci describe the student teachers' understanding of relevant relationships and what they prioritise in a situation that requires them to grapple with the conflicting expectations placed upon them.

These foci correspond well to what Chapman, Foster, and Buchanan (2013) see as important realities in education that call for moral imagination: seeing pupils as vulnerable stakeholders, pressure on teachers to act to maintain collegial harmony and maintaining trust in the profession (142). In the student teachers' stories, there was a need to have trust not only in the relationship with the pupil but also with colleagues, especially with the pupil's own teacher. By acting without the approval of colleagues, the student teachers might have transgressed a silent rule – a norm – that might have made them seem less reliable or trustworthy (Avila de Lima 2001).

The student teachers aimed to solve the situation by considering the possible alternatives through different storylines. Some student teachers proceeded in a more straightforward manner, while others provided several ways of solving the situation. The ability to go beyond the initial situation to consider the various perspectives of the pupil and other actors signifies that the student teachers approached the situation from multiple angles in terms of moral imagination. This is in agreement with suggestions from other studies that student teachers understand teaching as a moral endeavour (see Sanger and Osguthorpe 2011), tend to see respect and caring as important values (Campbell 2003; Noddings 2001) and have an understanding of teaching as being embedded in socially complex collegial settings (Kelchtermans and Ballet 2002).

The student teachers' stories illustrate the ability to take into account important contextual elements, such as the severity of the pupil's situation and possible collegial

and organisational expectations. The student teachers also imagined alternative solutions and a corresponding need to adjust their actions accordingly (see Arneback 2014). This kind of imagination appeared richest when the focus was on the pupil, perhaps because a focus on themselves as teachers or on other actors would introduce more limitations in the form of ethical commitments and rules. We recognise, however, that no one focus is superior to others; all are necessary in successfully conducting teachers' work within a network of relationships in ever-changing educational contexts and moral situations.

The framing story discussed a pupil from another teacher's class, which raises important viewpoints regarding student teachers' moral imagination. It also suggests a shift in present-day education: a concern for the pupil beyond official responsibilities shows that student teachers see all pupils as equally important and that the current culture can support the idea that the upbringing of pupils is a commitment shared by the whole school community. Frequent references to other members of the multi-professional network, such as student counsellors, psychologists and child service workers, imply that the student teachers understood the new reality of schools; teachers do not work in isolation; they are part of a multi-professional network.

In their stories, the student teachers referred to certain expectations placed on teachers encountering pupils in distress and to the laws and policies that govern their actions. For example, if a teacher suspects that there is a need for child protection services, the laws are unambiguous; the issue must be reported. In such situations, the aim of the actions seems much closer to performing a duty, with the focus being on themselves as teachers, even if somewhat indirectly. However, this could also be read as prioritising the pupil's well-being, as the focus is on the pupil. This reminds us of how the identified foci overlapped and how the teachers' solutions to the dilemma could be

beneficial for all actors involved. Furthermore, dilemmas and tensions may be better seen as occasions for the negotiation of differing interests and expectations rather than for choosing between mutually exclusive options (see Lassila 2017).

Stories are always tied to the contexts in which they are told, and those told here reflect ideal teacher types stemming from wider narratives in Austrian or Finnish cultures. One trend that seemed stronger in the Austrian stories was the importance placed on maintaining relationships with all members of the extended network of actors. Conversely, the focus of the Finnish stories was more strongly connected to maintaining a good relationship with the pupil and, to a certain extent, the pupil's own teacher. Exploring data produced in two countries suggests common elements in student teachers' moral imagination, thereby revealing a significant dimension of the teaching profession, one that goes beyond cultural and national contexts. For example, in the stories from both contexts, there was a strong emphasis on the well-being of the pupil and adopting a caring approach.

Conclusions

Previous research has strongly promoted the nurturing of student teachers' moral imagination to prepare them for the relational and moral complexities of their future work (Arneback 2014; Joseph 2016). The findings of this article show that from the beginning of their studies in teacher education, student teachers are able to use moral imagination to approach ethical dilemmas from a variety of perspectives. As there is a need for critically reflective learning activities, teacher educators need to consider how they can cultivate student teachers' moral imagination. Student teachers may often wish for clear-cut instructions or universally applicable rules to be provided in their education (e.g. Campbell 2001). However, the situations teachers encounter in their

work are complicated and context-bound, with no single right answer or solution. Therefore, a nuanced understanding of the specific context and moral imagination are required before acting in any given ethical dilemma (Johnson 1993; Nussbaum 1990). In place of ready-made answers, teacher educators can use open-ended writing tasks to create time and space for student teachers to contemplate the multitude of available paths. This can lead student teachers to new discoveries, make their reflections on moral situations more explicit and cultivate their moral imagination, as called for in previous research (e.g. Chapman, Foster, and Buchanan 2013; Joseph 2016). To support student teachers in developing moral imagination, teacher educators must themselves adopt an open-minded approach towards dealing with ethical questions with student teachers (see Boler 1999).

The method of empathy-based stories, or other narrative pedagogies (Hyry-Beihammer, Lassila, and Uitto in press) with open-ended problems or open cases, can engage student teachers in moral imagination. These pedagogies help reveal student teachers' thinking, both to themselves and teacher educators. For example, in the framing story used in this research, the ambiguous recess space and the position of not being the pupil's own teacher functioned as boundary experiences, presenting an opportunity for the student teachers to challenge their modes of thought and action in order to gain new perspectives through moral imagination (Mesker et al. 2018). We see the potential of empathy-based stories, combined with reflective discussions – centred around, for example, different work situations, personal histories, cultural narratives, norms and well-established (teaching) practices – in setting student teachers' moral imagination in motion. Still, more in-depth research is needed on the use of empathy-based stories in teacher education.

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