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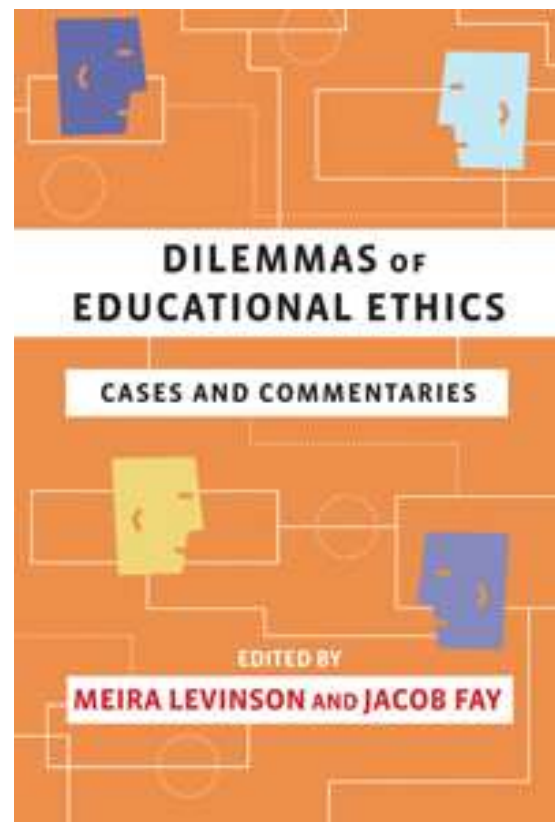
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*Dilemmas of Educational Ethics: Cases and Commentaries* is designed to facilitate ethical reflection and generate conversations among diverse stakeholders about contemporary ethical issues in education policy and practice. Editors Meira Levinson and Jacob Fay emphasize that ethical tensions arise daily for educators across all spectra of the U.S. education system – from classroom to district level, from rural to urban settings, from wealthy to low-income schools, and in all school configurations, including public and private schools, charters and magnets, parochial and independent, and regular district (3). Despite the everydayness of ethical dilemmas and subsequent need for thoughtful ethical decision-making capacities, however, many educators lack tools, practice, or support to effectively and collectively grapple with ethics in their work. *Dilemmas of Educational Ethics* offers an important resource to fill this need.



The book is organized around six cases – short stories or essays that develop a narrative around a complex ethical issue, or set of issues, and set up the reader to discuss or reflect on the case’s central dilemma(s): 1) Promotion or Retention; 2) Rocky Choices: Scientific Inquiry, Discipline, and Mental Illness at Rivers Elementary; 3) Stolen Trust: Cell Phone Theft in a Zero-Tolerance High School; 4) Inflated Expectations: How Should Teachers Assign Grades?; 5) Is Pandering Ethical Policy? Power, Privilege, and School Assignment; and 6) How, If At All, Should Charters Be Compared to Local Districts? The book concludes with a chapter outlining potential discussion configurations for classrooms and professional development settings.

To model deep ethical deliberation, each case features six different commentators presenting their distinctive interpretations, offering wide-ranging perspectives on the most pertinent questions to unpack, possible decisions case characters might make, and different scales and angles from which to tackle the dilemmas at hand. The commentators include education specialists, practitioners, social scientists, and philosophers, each with some degree of expertise – research, and/or experiential – related to the case material. The editors, Meira Levinson and Jacob Fay, are a professor-student team from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Levinson is a political theorist, former eighth-grade school teacher, and 2014 recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship. Fay is a current doctoral student, former co-chair of the editorial board for the *Harvard Educational Review*, former American History teacher, and 2016 recipient of a Spencer Dissertation Fellowship. They share research interests in educational policy, philosophy of education, and justice and equity in education.

As Levinson and Fay explain in their introduction, the combination of cases and commentaries in *Dilemmas in Educational Ethics* is intended to simulate and stimulate *phronetic*

method for grappling with ethical tensions in practice. That is, *phronesis* seeks ethical wisdom through the development of virtues in reflective practice. Rather than learning and applying an abstract set of ethical principles to fanciful situations, readers are encouraged to develop practices by engaging realistic, relatable, and context-specific cases and sustaining a dialogic process of debating theory and practice, “iterat[ing] repeatedly among field-based, data-oriented, and values-oriented expertise” (p. 4). The book concludes with suggestions for using the cases in education classrooms and professional development settings. The remainder of this review is organized around the book’s core contribution arenas (in bold) and stated aims (in italics).

### **Pedagogy & Professional Development**

*To provide support, and affirmation, to educators and policy makers who are already wrestling with these issues by strengthening their capacities to address ethical dilemmas in their own work. To help readers use phronetic approaches to test, generate, and learn how to seek insights into educational ethics that are rigorous, relevant, and actionable (pp. 3, 5).*

Taken together, the cases present an impressive diversity of school settings and scales of ethical dilemmas, underscoring the reach of educational ethics from classroom level interactions to district-wide policy, from individual moments of ethical decision-making to institutional and systemic change. This breadth is both a gift and a challenge for the reader. To be sure, educators and policy makers familiar with K-12 education in the United States will likely recognize many issues of relevance and resonance for their work – such as the difficult decision facing the eighth grade teachers in Case 1 as they debate whether to promote or retain Adahuaris, a student struggling both in and out of school. Likewise, readers will likely find dimensions of their own ethical stances, theoretical orientations, personal experiences and

expertise, or research reflected back to them in at least one of the case commentaries. A reader might find herself nodding along with one or another commentator, as I did when reading Brendan Randall and Jal Mehta's objections to reducing Adahuaris's case to a single moment of individual decision-making and their demands instead for critical analysis of systemic conditions Adahuaris and her teachers are facing. At the same time, a reader might find himself in disagreement with the same commentator's analysis, as I did when reading Mehta's suggestion that bioethics might serve as a model for educational ethics.

These affectively charged moments of recognition, resonance, and dissonance serve important pedagogical functions, as Levinson and Fay intend. By navigating these moments and paying careful attention to their own responses to the cases and commentaries, readers can engage in the phronetic approach to grappling with ethical tensions. In the process, they can cultivate something between a disposition, skill, and capacity to identify ethical issues in their own work. It must be noted, however, that readers must be prepared to translate case content, contexts, and commentaries to their own settings and institutional processes. This is not an insignificant task, and some additional question prompts or pedagogical exercises at the end of each case-commentary set may have offered readers more support as they gain practice; in the absence of case-commentary-specific questions, readers can rely on the case discussion protocol presented by the editors on page 217.

University instructors and professional development facilitators using this text may want to develop some reflection questions of their own to supplement and support the reader's learning process. One simple possibility is to ask readers to change key features of a case's context to reflect local conditions, opening discussion around how contextual details may differently shape ethical deliberations. This is especially important for readers who may recognize themselves in the

characters but do not recognize the characters' context as similar to their own, as Elizabeth Fieldstone Kanner's commentary on Ms. Brown's dilemma around supporting Kate and her fellow students: "[T]he case study implicitly pits Kate's needs against the needs of the whole class. This dynamic does not represent the context of most classrooms, where there can be three or four or even ten 'Kates,' each of whom often requires a specific accommodation at the same time" (p. 54).

While case-specific prompts are present in some instances, such as at the end of Case 6, the cases and commentaries are uneven in their explicit efforts to support readers' personal reflections, potentially missing out on some critical opportunities for application that thoughtful guidance would facilitate. Again, engaging with the case discussion protocol or otherwise shifting, removing, or augmenting the decisional prompts presented at the end of each case to reframe the ethical dilemmas at hand might also enrich the reader's experience. As commentator Brendan Randall notes in his reflection on the first case, "A facilitator's judicious use of other prompts could expand the discussion to other normative questions reflecting a more proactive rather than reactive stance" (p. 33). The relative paucity of explicitly expressed questions is especially notable given the editors' emphasis on the important role questioning plays in the phronetic method they're advocating: "More important than providing *answers* to a limited number of scenarios, they are effective means of surfacing the right kinds of *questions*, and at provoking searching, collaborative inquiry into the principles and values that guide ethical education policy and practice" (p. 5). As I continue to emphasize below, skillful facilitation and/or reflective resources would enhance this book's pedagogical impact toward strengthening readers' capacities to anticipate, identify, and respond to ethical tensions in their work.

## Policy Applications & Implications

*To enable a more open conversation among all stakeholders about what values and principles we should be trying to realize in education policy.* (p. 3)

Levinson and Fay state that they “organized each chapter to approximate a conversation among highly informed, and also highly diverse, interlocutors” (p. 7). This approximated conversation aims to initiate and guide collective inquiry among stakeholders, who Levinson and Fay identify as education scholars and empirical researchers, policy makers and practitioners, philosophers, activists, parents, students, and beyond, including business leaders, journalists, and citizens.

The book certainly provides ample material for these conversations. The cases alone offer opportunities to explore myriad ethical tensions, including promotion and retention decisions (Case 1); balancing the needs of children with learning challenges with their peers (Case 2); contending with mismatches between teacher decision-making and controversial administrative policies (Cases 2 and 3); enforcing zero tolerance policies amid growing awareness of the school-to-prison pipeline (Case 3); navigating the sometimes disparate ethical and pedagogical rationales of different grading systems in and between schools (Case 4); school choice processes and policies in relation to integrationist ideals and wealth disparities (Case 5); comparing attrition and demographic information between charter schools and local public school districts (Case 6); and many cross-cutting issues, as Levinson and Fay describe in their concluding chapter. Each case’s central dilemmas raise challenging questions related to principles and practice of justice and equity – issues that are amplified and thoughtfully analyzed in the commentary sections.

In addition to content material, the wide-ranging case commentaries also offer process models for complex ethical

deliberation and the cross-sector conversations Levinson and Fay hope to foster. The editors state in their introduction: “We believe that good ethical judgment about problems of practice inevitably draws upon a multiplicity of theoretical, empirical, and pragmatic perspective” (p. 5). This methodological claim is enacted within and across the case commentaries as commentators draw on theory, research, and practice to interpret the cases. Reading the commentaries together, then, enables the reader to experience the multiplicity of experiences and framings that can be brought to bear on each case. Commentators come from many different disciplinary backgrounds, bring distinctive areas of expertise, and draw from different theoretical traditions and methods for applying research findings to ethical decision-making. For example, the commentators for Case 4: Inflated Expectations – How Should Teachers Assign Grades, include an eighth grade humanities teacher (Rebecca E. Yacono); professors of political science (Rob Reich), African and African American Studies (Jennifer Hochschild), organizational leadership (Peter Demerath), and education (Doris Santoro); a graduate student in the Harvard Graduate School of Education (Deepa Sriya Vasudevan); many of these individuals have additional relevant experiences, such as Rob Reich’s former employment as a sixth grade teacher or Peter Demerath and Jennifer Hochschild’s interdisciplinary appointments in anthropology and government, respectively. This diversity of commentators for each case offers significant opportunities for reflecting on the role that positionality and experience might play in shaping ethical practice; more sustained critical reflexivity on the part of all commentators would have been appreciated toward this end.

Although the cases and commentaries offer rich content and the process of reading them does develop a reader’s phronetic skillset, I found it somewhat peculiar that the commentaries are presented as clusters of self-contained essays. The commentators respond

only to the cases, not to one another, with the resulting effect resembling a panel of bounded presentations at a conference versus a conversational roundtable. Again, the reader is tasked with some significant work – in this instance, making a dialogue out of six sometimes wildly divergent perspectives. In their concluding chapter, Levinson and Fay state, “[Y]ou may feel, in reading this book, as if we have spun you back and forth, twirled you around, and left you with more questions than answers . . . We assure you, however, such spinning and twirling is intentional” (p. 211) It is true that the intentional spinning and twirling will have pedagogical payoff for patient readers, but some additional facilitation and/or prompts might provide some grounding during the spin, as the editors acknowledge. Reading the last chapter first is highly recommended as it offers helpful overviews and suggestions for dissecting the cases and various angles, positions, and questions raised by the commentators.

Even with the helpful framings in the last chapter, readers are largely left on their own to find points of commonality and disagreement, assess how commentators’ reason through a case, and bring the commentaries together into a conversation. Levinson and Fay’s aim to approximate a discussion among highly informed interlocutors is therefore only partially achieved. This in turn may limit the pedagogical impact of the book’s aim to enable conversations among education stakeholders, especially policy makers who need more practice with dialogue with diverse constituencies. The individuation of the commentators and monologic presentations risk perpetuating ethical deliberation as an individual enterprise, rather than supporting dynamic processes of collective phronetic inquiry. Interactive facilitation in undergraduate and graduate education classrooms, professional development workshops, and communities of practice settings will therefore play an especially important role in animating the dialogic

possibilities of the book. For example, students or workshop participants could be assigned the role of a specific commentator and then tasked with asserting, defending, and/or revising their assigned commentator’s perspective in a discussion role-play.

Another writing or discussion assignment might direct students to parse out the disciplinary, theoretical, practical, and empirical dimensions of the collective commentary set for one of the cases. Students or workshop participants might also be encouraged to carefully read commentators’ brief biographies at the end of each commentary to reflect on how commentators’ distinctive combinations of experience, expertise, and theoretical orientations might shape distinctive interpretations and analyses of the case. This would also further underscore that complex ethical quandaries, like those presented in each case and in practice, rarely have a single clear solution, but rather multiple possible options for action and reframings that will develop through the prism of a practitioner’s pragmatic wisdom (see Joshua Wakeham’s commentary on Case 2 for a discussion about teachers exercising practical wisdom in their ethical decision-making). Ultimately, facilitation activities that foster reflexive and collective phronetic engagement might inspire readers to grapple more deeply with the potential barriers and possibilities they may experience in practice when attempting to engage in collective ethical inquiry in the future.

### **Scholarship & Theory Development.**

*To provoke philosophers to develop moral, political, and education theory that provide context-sensitive guidance to the education profession. To elevate educational ethics to a new level of urgency within U.S. and international reform movements and to enable scholars, policy makers, and practitioners to act on this urgency in productive and nuanced ways (pp. 3, 8).*

*Dilemmas of Educational Ethics* will likely be most impactful in facilitated education learning

spaces, but it also offers important lessons for policy making and theory development. Its greatest value to these realms is deceptively simple: repositioning major debates in education as situated ethical quandaries steeped in contexts of systemic injustice and inequity, rather than decontextualized puzzles that can be effectively addressed through technocratic maneuvering. Additionally, the book affirms that a more robust educational ethics will involve iterative processes of collective inquiry that combine theory, practice, and empirical research, as well as a critical understanding of and attention to systemic conditions that structure educational contexts.

The editors assert in their introduction that “ethical judgment must join *philosophical* insight and expertise with *social scientific* insight into empirical patterns and logics, and *pragmatic* expertise developed by educators and policy makers themselves” (p. 6). The editors call upon philosophers and theorists to generate principles and theory to better serve the needs for ethical guidance for the messy realities of the field, and they also note that the text might open opportunities for new avenues of social science research. The editors’ emphasis on collective inquiry might merge well with collaborative and community-based social scientific analysis. For example, ethnographers might consider collaborating with practitioners to mutually examine ethical dilemmas and deliberation processes, or perhaps work with an education department to trace how students develop their capacity to grapple with ethics in education. Conversely, many questions remain about the myriad ways in which empirical research is taken up in the service of ethics in policy and practice, as many commentators’ citations of various research findings demonstrate. In addition to their epistemological concern about the limits of grand moral theories for ethical practice, how else might Levinson and Fay, their contributors, and their readers envision the intersection of ethics and knowledge in the “new flowering of grounded scholarship and

practice in educational ethics” that they envision?

Scholars interested in contributing to this growing arena of scholarship might wish to know more about the editors’ and contributors’ methodological practice, as I did. Information about whether a case is fictional or factual is tucked away in footnotes, and there is little reflexive description (even in the last two pages of the text, which focus on constructing normative cases) about the process of developing the cases and commentaries, decisions about representation, or the selection of particular cases and commentators. For example, although the authors note that they do not claim these are “*the six most important dilemmas of educational ethics,*” they do not clarify why *these six*. Why focus on an instance of student theft to illuminate questions around zero-tolerance policies and the school-to-prison-pipeline if other narrative devices or topics may have been equally compelling? Why scrutinize charter schools’ attrition rates and demographic details, rather than deliberate about ethical tensions around mixing public and private funds for charter schools? Why focus only on U.S. schools and K-12 contexts? Why is there a preponderance of contributors from schools in the Midwest and on the East Coast?

Certainly the editors needed to make difficult decisions and they ultimately did select a dynamic range of dilemmas that evoke layered tensions; I only wish these decisions might be shared more directly with the reader. To push further, it would be interesting to learn more about why the cases were designed to end with a distinct set of options the case’s decision-makers face. Although the courses of action presented are rarely straightforward and no choice is “self-evident[ly] the right one to take,” the distillation of an ethical quandary to an actionable moment may perhaps limit the reader’s capacity to recognize ethical dilemmas or concerns that are not so neatly packaged into ethical decision-making event. The ethics-as-event narrative form imbues a sense of

pressing importance, mirroring the editors' goals of "elevating educational ethics to a new level of urgency" (p. 8), but I encourage readers to explore how this urgency relates to the always-slow work of ethical formation, of shaping a deep ethical praxis over time. This book offers some important tools readers can use to sustain the more open-ended, iterative, emergent, and decidedly-not-neat nature of ethical dilemmas and deliberation, especially if readers are attentive to the many commentaries that emphasize that working toward systemic levels of justice and equity are moral imperatives.

But what kind of justice? And why equity as a key frame? How do ethical efforts toward equity envisioned by the book's editors and commentators relate to other visions of liberation, such as decolonization or prison abolition? What kinds of discourses and political projects are mobilized when terms like democratic, citizen, and public are used alongside justice and equity? This book did not set its task to theorize justice or to weigh the merits of different orientations to imagining a more just future, but it may be useful for university instructors to pair this text with examples from critical theory and/or current social movements to facilitate reflection

around the intersections of ethics and political visioning and action. Meira Levinson's forthcoming book *Theorizing Educational Justice* may also work to address some of these questions and might be another complementary book to give more shape and contour to the characterizations of justice and equity in *Dilemmas of Educational Ethics*. Levinson's forthcoming book, alongside her past texts (including her award-winning book *No Citizen Left Behind*) and current work with the Civic and Moral Engagement Initiative, may also provide students with additional context around the debates underlying the cases, and how these debates get animated when engaged within the realm of the ethical.


*Dilemmas of Educational Ethics* ultimately offers accessible prose and a set of pedagogically robust tools to enhance ethical praxis in the field of education. It is well-positioned to make a major impact in and beyond the classroom, especially aiding policy makers and analysts as well as future educators to develop greater capacity for collective phronetic processes of ethical inquiry and action.

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## About the Reviewer

**Natalie JK Baloy** completed her PhD in cultural anthropology at the University of British Columbia. She is currently completing her postdoctoral fellowship with the Center for Collaborative Research for an Equitable California (CCREC) at UC Santa Cruz. Her research projects ask how ongoing expressions of settler colonialism and systemic racism shape everyday experiences and research engagements. At CCREC, Baloy is currently co-developing research ethics training materials and co-writing *Dwelling Within the Ethics of Research*, an interactive textbook designed to foster critical ethical praxis among collaborative research teams.



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