

Contents lists available at [SciVerse ScienceDirect](#)

## The International Journal of Management Education

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/ijme](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/ijme)

## Helping students to see for themselves that ethics matters

Suzy Jagger<sup>a,\*</sup>, Richard Volkman<sup>b,1</sup><sup>a</sup> Roehampton University Business School, Southlands College, 80 Roehampton Lane, London SW15 5SL, UK<sup>b</sup> Department of Philosophy, Research Center on Computing and Society, Southern Connecticut State University, 501 Crescent Street, New Haven, CT 06515, USA

## ARTICLE INFO

*Article history:*

Received 27 July 2012

Received in revised form 1 November 2012

Accepted 11 April 2013

*Keywords:*

Business ethics

Moral sensitivity

Values and integrity

Virtue ethics

Teaching business ethics

Transformational learning

## ABSTRACT

Business ethics education is experiencing a renaissance as recurring corporate scandals and malpractice over the last decade have ensured that most universities now see the subject as an important and necessary component of any business degree course. As well as integrating professional ethics into their curriculum, Business Schools are also developing standalone ethics courses, showing that they take seriously their responsibility to help prepare the next generation of managers to improve business' track record of transparency, accountability and sustainable development. However what are the learning approaches that will help to bring about real improvements in business ethics learning at university? This paper argues that a holistic approach to ethics teaching is needed, in which students are encouraged to develop ethical knowledge and skills within their personal value systems. In this way ethics does not become something apart but integrated into one's terms of reference. The paper discusses a particular pedagogic approach designed to develop a student's 'critical consciousness' using a student-led learning method in which students actively engage with important concepts and discuss the issues amongst themselves within an environment where they can speak freely. Qualitative interviews with a selection of undergraduates on the compulsory first year professional ethics module provide insight into the impact of the method on attitudes and behaviours.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

The consequence of the recent spate of corporate scandals has been a crisis of confidence in the ethical performance of 'business' broadly defined (Wankel & Stachowicz-Stanusch, 2011) and now, as never before, universities are being called upon to 'prepare a cohort of students who will raise the ethical standards of the business world' (Kurpis, Beqiri, & Helgeson, 2008: 447). As a result of the economic downturn, business scholars and academics have supported the need for greater attention to be paid to the education of business students in professional ethics and a greater 'sense of responsibility toward the common good' (Blasco, 2012: 365). A 2009 report commissioned by the Association of MBAs confirmed that in response to this changing economic and technological environment, business schools have increased the number of standalone business ethics courses available at HE level but concluded that the challenge is how to deliver in 'an effective and engaging way' (Institute for Global Ethics UK Trust, 2011: 8). This begs the question as to how can educators ensure that ethics courses are 'effective and engaging'.

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +44 (0) 20 8392 3641.

E-mail addresses: [s.jagger@roehampton.ac.uk](mailto:s.jagger@roehampton.ac.uk) (S. Jagger), [volkmanr1@southernct.edu](mailto:volkmanr1@southernct.edu) (R. Volkman).<sup>1</sup> Tel.: +1 203 392 6780.

Sims (2002) provides a list from a variety of Business Ethics educators of considered learning outcomes for ethics courses. These include a range of desirable outcomes, which can be categorised under six broad headings. First, they seek to increase student awareness of the ethical, legal and social dimensions of business decision-making; second, the mainstreaming of ethical issues as a necessary aspect of business decision-making; third, courses seek to develop students' analytical skills for resolving ethical issues; fourth, and relatedly, the courses attempt to expose students to the complexity of ethical decision-making in business organizations; fifth, courses are intended to cultivate an attitude of moral obligation and personal responsibility in pursuing a career. Finally, and perhaps most aspirational, they seek to stimulate the moral imagination (p. 19–20). Taken together, these constitute a weighty set of objectives in comparison to other, typical sets of objectives for many business courses where the emphasis is often much more on the knowledge content. Business schools now widely acknowledge that greater emphasis is needed on ethics education (Evans & Weiss, 2008: 51). With a maturing of expectations and a new perspective on business ethics teaching fuelled by the economic crisis and global technological trends, learning objectives are emerging as more personally centred, grounded in the concept of human flourishing – with integrity as a key focus (Wankel & Stachowicz-Stanusch, 2011).

Blasco (2012) refers to the importance of the 'hidden curriculum' in the development of personal responsibility, integrity and values. This hidden curriculum is defined by Sambell and McDowell as, 'what is implicit and embedded in educational experiences in contrast with the formal statements about curricula and the surface features of educational interaction' (1998: 391). They suggest that the role of the institution, via its sets of structures, processes, routines and traditions, is to support ethics teaching by validating and giving credence to the importance of being ethical. An example is the issue of cheating, which has become more prevalent amongst business students in recent years: 'cheating in higher education is rampant ... and students of business are among the most dishonest,' (Levy & Rakovski, 2006: 736). Caldwell (2010: 9) avers that when academics turn a blind eye to dishonest practices, they are 'implicitly contributing to the cheating culture', such that students see a dissonance between what is taught as ethical and what is permitted in practice. In other words, we need to 'walk the talk' in terms of our institutional processes and cultures.

There is also increased emphasis on a 'multi-dimensional' learning environment as critical to ethics development. Espoused initially by Hafferty (1998), Blasco (2012) expands on this concept as consisting of: the formal curriculum, which signals what really matters to Business Schools, i.e. a compulsory ethics course and a course organisation that supports ethical content sends a particular signal to students; interpersonal interactions involving stories, anecdotes, and traditions that contribute to socialisation and challenge students' existing views and interactions and; that the institution is seen to be run democratically in which persons are respected as equals, with powerful role models who demonstrate alignment with perceived ethical goals. This multi-dimensional environment supports the view that teaching ethics should achieve more than just satisfying initial articulated outcomes.

This paper advances the concept that we need to look beyond teaching a set of rules and codes of conduct, to a capacity building model for moral development, which is transformative in the way that people think about ethics. It begins by placing the teaching of ethics within the context of Aristotelian principles, examining current use of moral decision making approaches and how these methods engage with a number of psychological paradigms such as the social intuitionist viewpoint, Rest's four component model (focussing specifically on the component of moral sensitivity) (Rest, 1984), and the relevance of empathy and affective engagement in the development of personal value systems and integrity. We then describe the teaching methods used on a first year undergraduate module, which utilizes a particular pedagogic approach to test the theory by praxis and finally evaluate the experiences of a group of nine respondents to determine the effect of this pedagogic approach in the development of moral sensitivity.

### 1.1. *Teaching business ethics*

With increasing pressure on universities to provide courses that are marketable, meet students' demands for satisfaction and ensure that graduates are employable it is easy to lose track of the intrinsic values that should be embedded within education, and our role as educators within it. Aristotelian principles imply that an educator's primary goal is to facilitate transformative education, changing lives, inspiring and enabling the good citizen. Or, as Aristotle instructs, to aid in the acquisition of virtues of the mind (intellectual virtues) and virtues in action (practical virtues) (Aristotle, 1998 [circa 350 BCE]). Virtues of the mind focus on thinking rationally with autonomy and understanding. Virtues in action mean living our lives in accordance with the pursuit of our and others well-being. Plato saw education as grounded in the concepts of coherence between what is truthful and what is good (Plato, 1992 [circa 380 BCE]) – that education should embody the intrinsic values of truth and knowledge. We argue that our teaching practice should reflect these values by encouraging students to learn and develop not just knowledge within a chosen discipline, but also virtues in action – to achieve their full potential both intellectually and personally. When teaching ethics, such objectives transcend the teaching of codes of conduct or how to analyse a problem effectively to a broader remit, the ideal being to achieve transformational learning through deep critical development and reflection with virtuous aspiration. One of the great challenges in devising and executing a pedagogy in ethics is the fact of reasonable pluralism. Not only are our students diverse in their cultural, ethnic, religious, and educational circumstances, but there is an equally manifest diversity among scholars, whose differences are found across disciplines and also across schools within particular disciplines. An ethics curriculum that proposes to educate with an eye to transformational learning instead of merely indoctrinating students into some or another parochial list of right and wrong will have to discover and leverage those elements of our ethical experience that can command the widest possible assent.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/357419>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/357419>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)