Chapter XVII
Preparing Faculty to Integrate Ethics into Online Facilitation

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study was designed to determine the extent to which a framework for exploring ethical principles for online facilitation is integrated into an online training course for faculty preparing to teach online. Specifically, this study examined the extent to which the principles of ethical teaching are addressed in an asynchronous faculty training course where participants complete learning activities designed to promote comprehension, application, and synthesis of ethical principles for teaching. Content analysis was performed on archived discussion forum transcripts from 18 randomly selected faculty members over a 12-month period. This chapter summarizes the ethical themes that emerged through content analysis.

INTRODUCTION

While training courses for new online faculty have become more common, they often address only the technical aspects of online teaching, which are certainly important but not sufficient. To properly prepare faculty to address student learning online a discussion of the ethics involved must be included in their preparation.

Recent perspectives on the importance of ethics in teaching are exemplified by Paulo Freire in Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage (1998), to the effect that unless ethical principals are a part of a teacher's approach,

education will be no more than content. Other examples of this increased focus of the importance of ethics in teaching include The National Education Association (n.d.) publication of a brief code of ethics statement for primary and secondary educators that focuses on teachers' commitment to students and the profession and Murray, Gillese, Lennon, Mercer, and Robinson's (1996) set of nine basic ethical principles intended to define the professional responsibilities of university professors in their role as teachers.

Concurrently, there is a rise in the number of education programs offered online. Research indicates that online learning requires a shift in the role for educators, moving from the central role of distributing information to a role of facilitator (Harasim, Hiltz, Teles, & Turoff, 1996; Kearsley, 2000; Knowlton, 2000; Palloff & Pratt, 1999). The convergence of this heightened awareness of ethical professional practice for educators and the new roles for educators teaching online has led to the need for online educators to consider ethical principles to guide our practice in the virtual environment. Educators in such areas as nursing (Fulton & Kellinger, 2004), engineering (Chachra, 2005), and information technology (Gearhart, 2001) have called for the inclusion of ethical principles within their distance learning curriculum.

In alignment with the university's mission and consistent with these trends, Bemski and Parscal introduced a focus on ethics into the online Teaching Online Preparation Course (TOP) in 2004. "People welcome the conversation about ethics" (Lorenzetti, 2006, p. 8). Modeling and exploring ethical principles within the online learning environment have been identified by faculty among best practices for online learning (Parscal, 2007).

Participants in the TOP course complete learning activities designed to promote comprehension, application, and ultimately, synthesis of ethical principles. A qualitative study using content analysis examined the success of this approach. The results inform the importance of the topic as well as the success of this approach and lead the authors to believe that introducing ethics as part of an online teacher preparation course increases the likelihood that teachers will integrate ethical principals into their applied pedagogical activities in the online classroom.

BACKGROUND

The comprehension, application, and synthesis framework for teaching ethical principles for online facilitation was added to the online Teaching Online Preparation (TOP) course for online faculty at a private western, Jesuit university in the United States. The TOP course is a 2-week, asynchronous online course that is facilitated by one of the researchers. The TOP course utilizes the cognitive apprenticeship framework which underscores the importance of modeling strategies and reflection (Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1989). The course is offered every 8 weeks and is preceded by an assessment process to screen potential candidates. In the assessment course, participants are asked to read the mission of the university and write an essay that addresses their perspective on the ethical principles put forward in the university mission.

Candidates who move on to the TOP course are introduced to the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education's nine principles for ethical teaching. They are asked to reflect and consider these principles beginning at the cognitive level of comprehension and working their way to analysis and synthesis. Figure 1 outlines the learning activities used to present and reinforce learning about ethical principles for online facilitation.

In the first week of the TOP course, participants are asked to read the principles and reflect on them as they relate to teaching online. In the

Figure 1. Cognitive levels for learning activities that support ethical principles for online facilitation

Cognitive Level	Learning Activity That Support Ethical Principles
Comprehension	Each participant is asked to read the principles and reflect on them as they relate to teaching online. In the discussion forum, participants discuss how each of these principles applies to online learning; how they may need to be adjusted for online teaching, and whether online teaching requires additional principles.
Application	In pairs, participants are asked to use the principles of ethical teaching in university online courses as the foundation for practicing strategies for initiating discussion questions and providing formative feedback.
Analysis and synthesis	Each participant is asked to initiate, manage, and close a forum discussion thread related to building online communities and the ethical principles of teaching in the online environment. All participants engage in reflective discourse on topics posed by their colleagues related to ethical principles of teaching and learning online.

discussion forum, they are asked to discuss how each of these principles applies to online learning. They are also asked to comment on how these principles may need to be adjusted to be appropriate for online teachers and if any additional principles need to be developed specifically for online teachers.

The discussion of the ethical principles is followed by an application activity in which participants are matched into pairs and assigned one or two of the ethical principles. For each assigned ethical principle, the participants are asked to craft two engaging discussion questions that support two different cognitive levels of learning. Then, each of the participants is asked to provide feedback to their partner's questions. This activity is scaffolded with resources on writing robust discussion levels, writing learning assignments that support particular cognitive levels, and strategies for providing formative feedback.

In the second week of the course, participants are asked to deepen their understanding of ethical principles by facilitating their own discussion thread related to ethical teaching. In addition to facilitating their own threads, each participant is asked to reflectively contribute to the threads launched by their colleagues.

Ethical topics such as plagiarism, intellectual property, academic freedom, etiquette, privacy, and tolerance for diverse cultures and perspectives as they relate to online teaching and learning are also presented and discussed throughout the course.

RESEARCH METHODS

In order to examine the extent to which principles of ethical teaching are addressed in the course for online faculty, content analysis took the place of archived discussion transcripts from randomly selected participants. The textual content from the compiled forum transcripts was segmented, open coded using QSR International's Nivo7, and analyzed to identify and describe themes. Coding was performed by the researchers. The

ethical principles introduced in the course were used for categorization as well other items that arose from the data.

Participants

The population of this study consisted of 18 faculty members who participated in the TOP course in 2005 and 2006. Transcripts of online discussions from three faculty participants were randomly selected from among the participants in six sections of the TOP course over a period of 1 year. Participants included 11 females and 7 males.

Data Analysis

Compiled messages from the discussion forums were retrieved from course archives. The data from the surveys and self-evaluations were imported into NVivo7 for analysis by two researchers. Initial coding focused on the STLHE's nine ethical principles of teaching and additional ethical principles for teaching online as identified by participants. Those dominate themes were segmented and coded for topical subnodes. Cognitive levels of consideration of ethical issues were also examined.

FINDINGS

Nine Ethical Principles

In a message board assignment requiring the discussion of the STLHE's nine ethical principles of teaching, participants described each of the nine principles and how they relate to online learning. Participants also identified ethical principles that were not included in STLHE's nine ethical principles, but should be added.

Participants discussed the nine ethical principles within the forum discussions of the TOP course. Instances of discussion related to: (1)

content competence; (2) pedagogical competence; (3) dealing with sensitive topics; (4) student development (5) dual relationships with students; (6) confidentiality; (7) respect for colleagues; (8) valid assessments of students; and (9) respect for institutions. For each of these principles, several themes emerged from the participants.

Content competence for online facilitators was a topic of much discussion in all sections of the training. Participants most frequently mentioned the importance of teachers to remain current in the research and best practices within their respective disciplines. However, some participants argued that online facilitators have the advantage of asynchronicity and are not "put on the spot" like a classroom teacher. For online facilitators "there is always additional time to respond giving you a chance to research before responding. On ground [traditional classroom], you don't always have that luxury. You might attempt a response to a question with out being fully prepared." Other participants argued that online teachers need to have a deeper level of expertise than their classroom counterparts because of the importance of the ability for online facilitators to accurately and succinctly communication content information in written form as much of the online discussions occurs in writing. Further, along with the advantage of asynchronicity for reflection and composition of feedback and responses comes the responsibility of being very familiar with the trusted sources within one's discipline and the ability to direct students to online or library resources germane to the inquiry.

Utilizing varied instructional strategies that are appropriate for online learning was the most commonly mentioned items for the ethical principles of **pedagogical competence**. Facilitators in both online and classroom settings should consider the learning objectives of the course, the affordances of the technology and media, and the learning styles of the students. One participant stated, "I consider it essential for facilitators to use a variety of instructional methods. The reason for this is

that research has shown that there are a variety of learning styles that students have."

Effective communication strategies were also frequently identified as a component of pedagogical competence. One participant stated that "knowledge of techniques of communication and knowledge about the student are an ethical obligation [for] the facilitator." Timeliness and accuracy of communication in the online environment was also reported to be important as indicated in the following quote.

The instructor also does not have the advantage of being able to look into the eyes of the class as a gauge whether or not the instructions for an assignment make sense. If they don't, the instructor can immediately adjust. In the virtual environment, the instructor is slower to respond oftentimes and the process is more dependent on the instructor getting it right the first time.

Given that the participants in this study were preparing to teach adult students, there was also much discussion about the "need to substitute pedagogical (traditional, teacher-directed) competency with andragogical (facilitated, self-directed) competency."

Participants expressed that setting clear expectations for privacy, confidentiality, mutual respect and caring was a crucial first step in **dealing with sensitive topics** online. Through communication strategies, online facilitators can set the tone and ground rules for mutual respect and a climate of caring. As one participant noted:

Especially in an online environment, the teacher should insist that students discuss course material that might be controversial in respectful and polite manner. Written words on the message board can easily be misconstrued or misinterpreted, especially when the writer is using sarcasm or humor. Therefore, students should be encouraged to forego both while on the message board.

Given the lack of nonverbal cues and because emotion is more difficult to convey online, the online environment "demands an additional degree of awareness on the part of the facilitator to spot potential issues, either between students or between student and professor, and the best means of communication for dealing with problems."

Student development was considered to involve student intellectual development, but also fostering the development of the student as a whole person. Several references were made to the Jesuit commitment to *cura personalis* such as the following excerpt in which the participant align cura personalis to several of the ethical principles.

We as instructors must allow the characteristics of Jesuit education, especially cura personalis, to inform all that we do online. Cura personalis means that we respect and appreciate each person in our online course as an individual, with a unique and precious set of talents, gifts, hopes, and dreams. How can we not build community if we treat people this way? If we encourage this ethic on the message board, we will most assuredly build community. If we embrace this ethic, of course we will respect our colleagues. If we embrace this ethic, of course we will avoid favoritism in the classroom. If we embrace this ethic, of course we will be honest and forthright in assessing student work.

Participants also discussed the importance of cultivating life-long learning as part of the educational experience of students online and in the classroom.

Participants observed the parallels between student development and the ethical principle of **dual relationships with students**. Facilitators, whether online or in the classroom, breach the trust between student and educator and ultimately violate the student as a whole person when entering into dual relationships with students.

In the classroom and online, **confidentiality** is paramount in the student-teacher relationship. Participants referred to United States privacy laws related to student information. They also discussed the permanence of the course transcripts that exist in online learning as well as the importance of providing summative feedback to students privately rather than in the public discussion forum.

Participants discussed the importance of collegiality in their discussion on **respect for colleagues**. This included discussions on academic freedom and the importance of never critiquing a colleague's instructional strategies or teaching to a student.

The ethical principle related to the **valid assessment of students** in the online environment often produced rich discussions on the nature of assessing and evaluating student work. These discussions were dominated by a conversation related to plagiarism. While some participants assumed a policing stature on the topic, others addressed it from an ethical standpoint, as evidenced in this quote.

While I believe we should be on the look out for aspects of plagiarism, we must not forget our role as educators. If we can instill morals and ethics through our teaching and correctly assess that our students are indeed learning; plagiarism will be less wide-spread. Prevention is always better than cure.

Participants also invested much time discussing the importance of aligning assessments with learning objectives as the training introduced Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of educational objectives.

The mission and standards of the university was a dominate theme in the discussion related to **respect for the institution**. Participants discussed ways in which online facilitators should support the goals and objectives of the university. The following excerpt illustrated that commitment.

Jesuits use the term "Magis" which literally translated from Latin means the "more," the "greater," the "better." The discussion specifically states this doesn't mean working more hours etc.... but instead it speaks to our hopes and aspirations that our students will find the "the Magis" in the curriculum and their experiences at Regis University. That whatever the reasons they decided to attend Regis University, they will find "more" in challenging reflections on ethics, spirituality, justice and service. After reviewing the Ethical Principles I believe the "more" is implied in Ethical Principle number nine Respect for Institution.

Additional Principles

Participants also identified several missing or additional principles of ethical teaching. Participants recognized the **respect for the student** was not explicitly stated as one of the ethical principles for teaching. One participant commented that he found the absence of respect for the student surprising particularly in the adult learning environment. "A university teacher should respect the expertise and opinions that the students bring to the learning environment."

Class management was identified as a recommended additional ethical principle.

A facilitator is aware of the unique dynamics of online facilitation and creates an environment conducive to learning and creativity, an environment free of communication challenges or content blocks. A facilitator helps students understand the unique online dynamics and leads them by example…. [Joe] offered that we may extend this thinking to "teaching environment," where the facilitator is also responsible for creating an environment conducive for the student learning. This could include being available, checking in regularly, doing things to create dialogue, and so forth.

Timely feedback to students was also noted as a missing ethical principle and this was observed to be critical in online learning. Other principles mentioned at least once included netiquette technology acumen and respect for diversity.

Cognitive Levels

Participants primarily demonstrated comprehension in their discussion related to the description of the ethical principles. However, there were some instances of synthesis when participants drew parallels among the ethical principles, for example, respect for colleagues and respect for institution or confidentiality and sensitive topics. Participants also demonstrated application through discussion on how these ethical principles have surfaced in their teaching or professional experiences.

In the activity in which participants are asked to craft discussion questions and provide feedback to their assigned colleague, most participants demonstrated both comprehension and application. For example, a participant posted the following discussion question written for the evaluation cognitive level and related to the ethical principle of respect for colleagues.

Based upon your experience with online adult learners, what changes or revisions to Bloom's taxonomy might you suggest? Please examine the due process provisions in the University of Virginia's Honor System, and suggest ways in which its provisions might be incorporated in the Regis' policy with regard to plagiarism? What policy recommendation would you make so as to ensure that grade inflation does not begin to undermine the validity and value of a degree from Regis University?

By aligning the reading about crafting online discussion questions and cognitive levels, participants proposed discussion questions for peer review. In this activity, participants applied their learning about ethical principles as well as pedagogical skills. Participants were also asked to evaluate the quality of their peers' questions and practice writing feedback in response to their colleagues' submission. This is another way in which participants applied their learning related to the ethical principles.

When it occurred, synthesis primarily occurred when participants facilitated their own discussion threads. This involved weaving together multiple ethical principles for teaching or synthesizing ethical principles with other lessons in the training course.

DISCUSSION

The exploration of ethical principles was intentionally a central component of the TOP course and participants were engaged in ethical thinking at various cognitive levels throughout the training. Sims and Felton (2006) suggested six learning environment features that support and promote learning about ethics. These include: (a) fostering reciprocity among students and the faculty member; (b) making the learning experiential; (c) emphasizing the personal application of ethical thinking; (d) providing individualized and self-directed; (e) promoting collaborative and cooperative learning; and (f) providing learners opportunities for testing hypotheses. Many of these strategies were utilized in the online TOP course. Faculty reported that the activities related to the ethical principles of teaching online could be made more engaging and experiential. Parscal (2007) recommended that using a simulation could make this exploring ethical principles of teaching at a distance more engaging and experiential.

Through collaborative online interaction, participants explored and discussed the role of ethics in teaching and learning in the online environment. However, there was little discussion about the ethical uses of technology and in fact, there seemed to be an underlying assumption on the behalf of the participants that distance learning

tools and technology are ethically neutral. Sale (1995) contends that "Technologies are never neutral and some are hurtful." He goes on to argue that they are culturally loaded as well as dependent upon the user for ethical nature. Sussman (1997) contended that technology is not produced accidentally nor created for the common good. Stoll (1995) questions the systemic implications of the every increasing use of technology and the contribution that does or does not make to our quality of life. Sumner (2000) argued that distance learning technologies serve the dominant paradigm and distance educators must make "value choices" to serve the status quo or work toward the common good because both options are open to distance and online educators. By engaging in dialogue regarding ethical considerations in online learning, faculty may begin to consider these value choices. By becoming reflective practitioners, which involves techniques utilized in the TOP course, faculty members can "refute the idea that distance education is just a set of value-free techniques" (Atthill, 2001, p. 87). However, additional activities would need to be added to the TOP course to prompt faculty to reflect on the underlying assumptions about technology and ethics. Indiana Wesleyan University utilizes team-based learning to help students and faculty become what they term as "World Changers" (Gaide, 2004). Chachra (2005, p. 461) suggested that conducting ongoing discussions of ethical issues, through such medium as asynchronous discussion forums, may work toward "correcting the misapprehension… that technical knowledge is intrinsically value-neutral."

There are cases online that encourage ethical analysis, yet few pose questions of ethics. Those involving plagiarism, a subject familiar to most of us, are readily available and lend themselves to this. Rather than create new cases, it is our suggestion that one take any of these cases and include in the analysis questions such as:

- What might the professor have done initially to avoid this situation?
- Are there cultural biases at play here?
- Is all plagiarism created equal?
- Does our institution address this issue well?
- Will my solution help prevent this issue in the future?
- Will my solution lead to student growth?

Indeed, any case will profit from first asking what ethical perspectives might be present and then asking how to frame questions about them.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This study described the extent to which faculty addressed the principles of ethical teaching within a faculty training course. Future study is needed to examine the extent to which faculty who were introduced to the ethical principles of teaching apply these principles to their teaching practice within their respective disciplines and in various learning environments (classroom, online, and blended or hybrid learning). There is also a need to examine the impact of such integration of ethical principles has on student learning and program outcomes.

The increasing popularity of virtual worlds such as Second Life will also require research into the ethical considerations of using such tools for teaching and learning. For example, to what extent do synchronous virtual worlds require the reexamination of ethical behavior within education and distance learning in particular?

Additional research is also needed to address the deeper integration of social networking and Web 2.0 technologies within distance learning. Do the deeper integration of social networking software and other Web 2.0 technologies into distance education amplify the importance of preparing faculty to engage in conversations about ethics

and values in teaching and learning specifically those involving the definition of scholarship and the definition of valid academic work?

These are a few future directions for research in the examination of ethical principles in distance learning. By inviting new faculty into a conversation about ethical principles of teaching in online and distance learning environments may foster research within these areas of faculty development and scholarship.

CONCLUSION

One might assume that as a Jesuit university, Regis is more likely to attract faculty candidates predisposed to embrace the discussion of ethical principles. Certainly, those in the TOP course have done so. However, the authors' experience, gained through discussion with colleagues as well as through presenting on this topic in a variety of settings, suggests that faculties elsewhere are also likely to embrace it. The fact that proposals by the authors to present on this topic are most often accepted further leads one to believe that the need to include ethics in the discussion of online learning is widely accepted.

While participants felt that these principles are relevant in both classroom and online settings, there was consistent recognition of the distinct nature of online learning and the ways in which it plays a part in many of the principles mentioned. These include the advantage of a more measured asynchronous response, the importance of technological facility, and the need for clarity in postings. Because of the dynamic and rapid changes that will undoubtedly take place in the technology available to universities and faculty, it becomes important to monitor, on an ongoing basis, the changes in the online experience for students. Design and implementation of straightforward, nonthreatening, informative and concise approaches to going about this will be an ongoing challenge.

If we believe that education is in part an effort to help students to become all that they can be, ethical principles can and should be built into online courses, and must also be modeled and proactively made a part of the course by faculty. The integration of social networking software and Web 2.0 technologies does not only have the potential to change the way in which we offer distance and online courses, it also shapes the dialogue on ethics in online and distance learning. Within Web 2.0, faculty and learners become co-creators of e-learning and thus, our concept of "scholarship" may be redefined. As the origin and aggregation of distance and online course content shift, so must the conversation about ethics in this domain. Privacy, intellectual property, academic integrity, and all of the STLHE's nine principles for ethical teaching will need to be considered vis-à-vis Web 2.0. Therefore, it is imperative to invite educators into this dialogue now while these trends are emerging.

For future study, the authors suggest an examination of the degree to which ethical development takes place in online courses taught by faculty who have taken part in the faculty training. Another rich approach would involve self-reflection on the part of faculty and structured opportunities to revisit the topic. This should both deepen it and broaden the research presented in this chapter. The effectiveness of a multimedia ethical dilemma presented in a simulation could be evaluated as well as the role of social networking software in the consideration of ethics.

This study indicates that the study and reflection of ethical teaching practices is not only relevant to teaching in all modalities, but is also embraced by faculty committed to honing their teaching and learning skills. It is the authors' belief that intentionally engaging faculty in a discussion of ethical principles in an orientation process such as this one both deepens their awareness of the principles and increases the likelihood that they will apply them. In teaching online, a tension is occasionally seen between professionalism and

ethics. It is our belief that the former does not exist without the latter. Appropriate teacher orientation includes attention to both together.

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