

Chapter 21

Using Authentic Case Studies to Teach Ethics Collaboratively to School Librarians in Distance Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explains how case studies can be used successfully in distance education to provide an authentic, interactive way to teach ethical behavior through critical analysis and decision-making while addressing ethical standards and theories. The creation and choice of case studies are key for optimum learning, and can reflect both the instructor's and students' knowledge base. The process for using this approach is explained, and examples are provided. As a result of such practice, students support each other as they come to a deeper, co-constructed understanding of ethical behavior, and they make more links between coursework and professional lives. The instructor reviews the students' work to determine the degree of understanding and internalization of ethical concepts/applications, and to identify areas that need further instruction.

INTRODUCTION

As professionals, librarians are expected to behave ethically. Learning what ethical issues are encountered in school librarianship, and knowing how to address them, constitutes a core knowledge set. Case studies provide a grounded theory means to investigate authentic situations in order to ascertain ethical ways to deal with them.

ETHICS IN SCHOOL LIBRARIANSHIP

The library profession encounters ethical issues daily: providing accurate information, observing intellectual property rights, dealing with privacy issues, maintaining confidential relationship with clientele. While ethics has played a role in librarianship for a long time, the first comprehensive study was done in 1998 by Robert Hauptman, who founded *The Journal of Information Ethics*

in 1992. Another library ethics pioneer is Rafael Capurro, who directs the International Center for Information Ethics.

The American Library Association began talking about an ethical code in the early twentieth century, with the first code being adopted in 1938. Their core operational definition of ethics posits an “essential set of core values which define, inform, and guide our professional practice” (ALA, 2004). This Code of Ethics, which was most recently revised in 2008, provides a framework to guide ethical decision-making. It includes statements about excellence in service, intellectual property and freedom, collegiality, conflict of interest, and professional growth. In a slighter earlier mapping of library and information science ethical principles and values, Koehler (2003) included the same elements as ALA but also explicitly added access and client rights.

In framing information ethics for 21st century librarians, Fallis (2007) asserted that codes of ethics were not sufficient. Explicit education is needed, tied to ethical theories, so that librarians will do the right thing for the right reason. Fallis also stated that librarians need to both model and teach their clientele ethical behavior, especially in light of technology-based information use.

In 2008 the Information Ethics Special Interest Group (SIG) of the Association of Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) developed a position statement on information ethics in library and information science education, which was approved by ALISE in 2008. Building on the premises of the UNESCO University Declaration of Human Rights, the association asserted that is their responsibility to discuss information ethics critically. They further state that information ethics should inform teaching, research, scholarship, and service, particularly as they instruct pre-service librarians. Focusing on library and information science curriculum, the position statement states that students should be able to:

- Identify professional ethical conflicts
- Reflect ethically
- Link ethical theories and concepts to daily practice
- Internalize a sense of ethical responsibility.

While the SIG encourages offering a separate course in professional ethics, a strong case may be made that ethical considerations be integrated – and explicitly addressed throughout the curriculum. In this manner, students realize that each function within librarianship involves ethical decision-making. Caplan (1980) asserted that teaching ethics: stimulated the moral imagination, developed analytic skills, and helped students to accept and reduce conflict and ambiguity.

With the advent of the Internet, ethical questions abound. In their 2007 set of standards of 21st century learners, the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) includes ethics as a common belief: “In this increasingly global world of information, students must be taught to seek diverse perspectives, gather and use information ethically, and use social tools responsibly and safely” (p. 2). Of the four main standards, the third is “sharing knowledge and participate ethically” (p. 4), and all standards include student responsibilities. In K-12 school settings, which serves as *loco parentis*, the legal and ethical responsibilities of the school librarian (SL) surpass the comparable work of librarians in other settings. Dealing with minors adds another layer of legal issues, and implies an additional need to model ethical behavior so children will experience and integrate such values. For instance, SLs need to make sure that students do not access pornographic websites. For that reason, school libraries need to provide telecommunications filters if they wish to accept federal funding. On a more pro-active level, SLs try to teach students how to be socially responsible in terms of information literacy (AASL, 2007).

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