

Chapter XVI

Using Real Case Studies to Teach Ethics Collaboratively to Library Media Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Case studies provide an authentic way to teach ethical behavior through critical analysis and decision-making because it reveals nuanced factors in complex situations and stimulates productive discussion. Case studies also address the affective domain of learning. The creation and choice of case studies is key for optimum learning, and can reflect both the instructor's and students' knowledge base. Case studies are used successfully in distance education as students share their perspectives and respond to their peers' comments. As a result of this approach, students support each other as they come to a deeper, co-constructed understanding of ethical behavior, and they link coursework and professional lives. The instructor reviews the writing 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.

BACKGROUND

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. The autumn 1991 theme of *Library*

Trends was “Ethics and the Dissemination of Information.” With the advent of the Internet, ethical questions abound. Because school libraries have a *loco parentis* status, they are more apt than other library settings to deal with ethical dilemmas (Hannabuss, 1996).

The American Library Association began talking about an ethical code in the early twentieth century, with the first code being adopted in 1938 (Rubin, 2000). 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 1995, 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.

The Information Ethics Special Interest Group (SIG) of the Association of Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) developed a position on information ethics in library and information science education. Building on the premises of the UNESCO University Declaration of Human Rights, the SIG asserts that it 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 preservice librarians. Focusing on library and information science curriculum, the SIG states that students should be able to:

- identify professional ethical conflicts;
- reflect ethically;
- link ethical theories and concepts to daily practice; and
- internalize a sense of ethical responsibility (Association of Library and Information Science Educators, 2006).

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.

In their set of information literacy standards (1998), the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) explicitly address ethical behavior, stating that “the student who contributes positively to the learning community and to society is information literate and practices ethical behavior in regard to information and information technology” (p. 6). In K-12 school settings, which serve as *loco parentis*, the legal and ethical responsibilities of the library media teacher (LMT) 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, LMTs need to make sure that students do not access pornographic Web sites. For that reason, school libraries need to provide telecommunications filters if they wish to accept federal funding. On a more pro-active level, LMTs try to teach students how to be socially responsible in terms of information literacy (AASL & AECT, 1998).

Bloom’s Affective Domain and the Development of Ethical Practice

Professional ethical behavior focuses on individuals and organizational behavior, as much as it does on the specific issue at hand. Policies created by the LMT’s school or district reflect the ethical values of decision-makers, be it in response to plagiarism or facility use. Because the library program should support the organization, LMTs need to support the associated policies. Library profession policies and ethical codes also exist, some of which concern matters that might be encountered at school, such as access to information and selection policies. When the policies of those two entities conflict or when no policy ex-

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