

Chapter XVII

Preparing Faculty to Integrate Ethics into Online Facilitation

Tina J. Parscal
Regis University, USA

Peter Bemski
Regis University, USA

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

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