Can ethics be tought

Sociology, Ethics

The notion that ethics is a process ofcommunicationthat gives way to new understandings and commitments to our social fife has been utilized herein to explore several questions. Should ethics teaching be via standalone modules or embedded in ethics discussion within curricula? Clearly both have merit yet we argue that authentic ethics discussions should pervade curriculum, be conceptualized and multifaceted. This attention to implementation and the notion of a possible ethics framework to structure student experiences was explored.

Key Words : Ethics, Teaching, Curriculum, Instruction Introduction Ethics is often presented in classes by well meaning educators as a moralphilosophyhat infuses critically assumed beliefs which are used to search for a good" human life. To most this is a classical understanding, however if we were to suggest ethics could be inherent in the duties humans owe to each other we would be touching upon a modern understanding. Educators and students confronted with these understandings may frequently face a predicament.

The educator may discover or currently know that they cannot teach ethics because of religious (spiritual) and cultural disagreements linked to what should be taught (curriculum). Many students draw upon background pre-understandings and are perplexed when confronted with ethical understandings of both peers and professors (Emerson & Convoy, 2004). To choose to not discuss ethics may be a safer path yet avoidance sends messages that this topic is a private matter and not suitable for discussion.

It is not a private matter yet avoiding discussion of ethics at all levels ofeducationmay only fuel mystification and/or ignorance. Discussing ethics should not be a private matter it should be within educational programs and rightly so, according to the many business school deans who rank ethics among the top five learninggoalsfor their programs (Martial & Cauldron, 2005). Herein, we could consider ethics as, the general study of goodness and the general study of right action … [which] constitute the main business of ethics.

Its principal substantive questions are what ends we ought, as fully rational human beings, to choose and pursue and what moral principles should govern our choices and pursuits. (Audio, 1995, p. 3) This study of right action could be viewed as a system of rules or principles rooted in the legal system however ethics can also be understood as a set of skills (acts) yet this understanding has limitations. Ultimately, we can view ethics as a process of life. Our argument is that we should discuss ethics in educational programs order to develop our understandings and enrich our lives.

Our present day society is reeling from ethical wrongdoing (crime) and challenges (bad decisions) reported in the media yet these ethically challenged people behind these scandals share a common experience, school. O Centre for Promoting Ideas, USA www. Subsistent. Com Perhaps, each person attended school until the law no longer required them to attend or until the person attending deemed they were ready to leave school. Many complete only secondary school and work their way into executive positions;

some go Arthur and deeper in post-secondary stepping directly into professional roles.

The path we examine is of importance herein since the following words address and illuminate the teaching of ethics at the post-secondary level within the subject area of business over the past thirty years and we ask: Can ethics be taught? Secondly, if it is to be taught, than how should it be taught? 1. 0 Curriculum: Can ethics be taught? Current research and the researchers behind this research were searching to discover the root causes of well reported ethical problems, dilemmas and challenges in all areas of society (Frank, Bookie, & Garnished, 2010).

The investigation of unethical activity may lead back to a common experience point for the people within the scandal and that often is school. Herein we launch into a cursory inspection (due to page limitations) of the construction and delivery of curricula within business at the post-secondary level over the past thirty years. We illuminate the issues and discover if there is or was a linkage between what is, or is not taught, and the causes of unethical behavior which has inspired many researchers to take an even closer look at how texts are written and how professors teach within business courses.

Stark (1993) indicated that the unethical behavior is not the result of an absence of business ethics curriculum since, " over 500 business-ethics courses are currently taught on American campuses; fully 90% of the nation" s business schools now provide some kind of training in the area" (p. 38). Perhaps the problem lies not in the sheer number of ethics courses offered,

but possibly the ethics courses are not being taken seriously (Emerson & Convoy, 2004; Stephens & Stephens, 2008).

Alternatively, it could be that professors, who hold questionable ethical philosophies, inadvertently rejecting this onto their students or it could be a dearth of real life" application in textbook case studies (Wittier, 2004). The reason for our current predicament is puzzling. There exists an argument as to whether or not ethics should be taught in a post-secondaryenvironment(Ritter, 2006). Dodo (1997) explains that, "... The primary reason for discussing ethical issues in the business classroom is for the students to develop a process which considers the ethical implications of business decisions" (p. 96). Weber (1990) reviewed four studies and found that three of the four indicated a costive shift in ethical reasoning as a result of ethics education. Boyd (1981) indicated an increase in moral reasoning and Stead & Miller (1988) saw an increase to students" awareness and sensitivity towards social issues following ethics coursework. Burton, Johnston and Wilson (1991) also showed an increase of ethical awareness when compared to a control group within their research.

Even though published research has indicated that ethics education improves ethical attitude, there are others that have shown a negative relationship (Cohen & Bennie, 2006; Stephens & Stephens, 2008). Crag (1997) argued that ethics cannot be taught and a study conducted by Bishop (1992) further supported this assertion. Bishop (1992) concluded, that " another interesting criticism of ethics is that as long as we have laws that dictate what is permissible; we do not need courses in ethics" (p. 294).

Pavement (1991) found that" ... There are serious flaws in the very foundation of the business ethics course - [and] ethical theory itself" (p. 92) because most of what is provided in business ethics texts does not involve ethical dilemmas and many instructors place too much emphasis on ethical situations dealing with policy Pavement, 1991). Crag (1997) and Ritter (2006) unidentified other groups, such as, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (CABS international) who have questioned this dilemma. Ritter (2006) suggested, " academics concerned about including ethical decommissioning strategies or other content in their classroom are hard pressed to find simple answers in either the theoretical or empirical research" (p. 153).

Perhaps this situation arises due to the fact that within Goldberg" s Theoretical Model on Moral Development, " character development has already occurred by the time an individual reaches college age" (Ritter, 2006, p. 154). McCabe et al. (1994) supported this perspective while researching MBA students utilizing the Research Terminal Values Scale as a means to gauge the ethical predisposition of respondents; similar to what was done in the 1994 study conducted by Skull and Costa. This longitudinal study used the same sample of respondents over a two year period, yielding no significant changes in their ethical attitude.

Areola and Lurch (1983) also conducted a similar study where respondents were contacted years after administration of the original study, indicating a deterioration of ethical attitude. 45 1. 1 Morals and Ethics. Churchill (1992) believed that there was a misconception behind whether or not ethics can be

trained because many who attempted to answer this question often confused the terms " ethics" and " morals" suggesting they shared a similar meaning. He defined morals as the behaviors of a human and ethics as a "... Systematic rational reflection upon that behavior" (p. 297).

Crag (1997) noted a similar distinction between moral standards and ethics when he stated: I do not want to teach moral standards; I want to teach a method of moral reasoning wrought complex ethical issues so that the students can apply the moral standards they have in his view, the primary function is to teach ethical systems of analysis, not moral standards of behavior. (p. 19) Being able to teach ethics within a program requires instructors to be able to grasp the process of moral reasoning to a point where this can be taught as a necessary route to arrive at ethically sound outcomes.

Instructors therefore need to have an understanding of the moral relationship with ethics, something that may take a great deal of experience with the unique curricula o fully grasp. Gunderson, Capitol and Raja (2008) supported the development and implementation of ethics curriculum suggesting " individuals should become more ethical as they increase their educational accomplishments because of increasing exposure in both receiving and administering ethics curricula" (p. 315). Hence, the ethics course advances along with the instructor" s understanding of the ethics curricula and related instructional theory. . 2 Teaching ethics: Goal establishment. Regardless of the method of instruction utilized to deliver business ethics; strategic Laos and objectives must be first identified within

the curricula. Weber (1990) believed that ethics instruction must achieve some goal or set of goals before integrating it into the curricula. For instance, Belton and Sims (2005) highlighted several goals when teaching business ethics at the undergraduate level, stating, 1 . Assist student in the formation of their personal values and moral ideas, 2. Introduce them to the broad range of moral problems facing their society and world, 3.

Provide them contact with important ethical theories and moral traditions and 4. Give them he opportunity to wrestle with problems of applied business ethics, whether personal or professional. (p. 388) Bishop (1992) also reported a set of ethical curriculum objectives created by The College of Business. Similar to the objectives outlined by the Belton and Sims (2005) study, The College of Business wanted to help guide and plan the implementation of ethics curriculum. Belton and Sims (2005) suggested that it is also vitally important to know the backgrounds of each of the students.

Some cohorts of students might have a mixture of backgrounds, while in another cohort students might be composed of tauter students coming directly from industry for retraining. In order to achieve goals or objectives, approaches to curriculum might be based on the backgrounds of the students in the classroom. Belton and Sims (2005) explain: Students, especially those with little exposure to the larger world, often bring to the classroom values that they have adopted from their parents, church affiliations, peer groups, or similar persons or forces of influence.

The students in their thinking and actions simply reflect the values of their reference groups without having examined or evaluated them. P. 389)

Business ethics education is about helping the student bring to consciousness their own set of values, but also, recognize how their values may conflict with the values of the business world (Belton and Sims, 2005). Ritter (2006) agreed and concluded that ethics education must be relevant to the student in order for it to transfer once they have graduated and are out working. 1. Coursework: The stand-alone ethics course. Offering business ethics as a stand-alone course or integrating it across the curriculum has sparked much debate. Henderson (1988) believed that by offering rouses solely devoted to business ethics " .. Sends a powerful message: A top priority at this school is for all students to know and follow the generally accepted rules of business" (p. 53). Weber (1990) identified, in a national survey of graduate and undergraduate students, that fifty three percent of students prefer to have a separate course in ethics.

More recently, the CABS" s Ethics Education Task Force (2004) put forward this position: Business schools must encourage students to develop a deep understanding of the myriad challenges surrounding corporateresponsibilityand corporate governance; revive them with tools for recognizing and responding to ethical issues, both personally and organizationally; and engage them at an individual level through analyses of both positive and negative examples of everyday conduct in business (p. 9).

What is certain is that ethical dilemmas occur, and within a context that is not always reproducible in coursework. Understanding and applying rules is but one half of the equation within anethical dilemmabecause " the typical approach to ethical dilemmas is a two-step process: we locate a rule, and

then we assume or Judge that it applies to our situation" (Labeled, 1985, p. 5). It is the ability to Judge or evaluate, which is a higher order thinking skill, which challenges us to do the right thing" within a situation. 1. 4 Embedding ethics curriculum.

Researchers such as Ritter (2006); Ukuleles (1988) and Dodo (1997) argue that stand- alone courses are disconnected from real-world application and that ethics must be integrated throughout the curriculum. Wynn and Meager (1989) conducted a study only to discover no significant changes in ethical decision making took place as a result of taking a course in ethics. Saul (1981) suggested that in order for business ethics to succeed, ethical considerations must be woven into every aspect of the " decision making repertoire as economic ones" (p. 273).

Belton and Sims (2005) further supports this by stating " ethics is embedded in all business decision-making. A given decision may be described as marketing, production, or financial decision, but ethical dimensions are intertwined in the decision" (p. 381). Even if ethical decision making is integrated into business curriculum, Sims (2002) argued that the success of this approach would materialize only if the entire faculty and administration were in agreement. Alternatively, Stephens and Stephens, (2008) concluded: Ethics courses may be resulting in better ethical decision making.

Perhaps alerting students to ethical violations is making them more aware of their decisions in the workplace. The results indicate that requiring an ethics course does make an immediate (albeit perhaps short term) difference in ethical decision making or in assessing potential ethical/unethical behavior.

(p. 54) The variety of opinion is easy to find within the last few years hence the problematic nature of our question Should we (can we) teach ethics in classes?

If yes, then how must it be done to achieve desired outcomes? 1. 5 Effective implementation. Ritter makes mention in her 2006 study that "... Most theorists suggest that given the proper implementation, an ethics curriculum can be designed for effective learning" (p. 154). A study conducted by David, Anderson and Lawrence (1990) reported that only 24% of the respondents indicated that ethical issues were emphasized throughout their program.

Surprisingly this study concluded, Fully 92% of respondents indicated they never attended a business ethics seminar in college; 80% never had a course in business ethics; 92% never wrote a business ethics term paper; 75% never heard a faculty lecture on ethics; and 56% never participated in acase studywith ethics issues. (p. 29) The results of this study can be linked to a current study that concluded " professors are ill prepared or uncertain about how best to teach accounting ethics" (Frank, Bookie & Garnished, 2010).

Alternatively, perhaps, it is not that ethics cannot be taught, but rather, how ethics education is delivered which might be the reason for poor ethical attitude amongst students and recent graduates. Ritter (2006) identified a multitude of perspectives throughout the iterate, and determined three common questions surfaced frequently which asked: " how [should we] teach ethics in business school, what to teach, and even if [we should] teach it at

all" (p. 153). Burton et al. (1991) indicated that students preferred discussing ethical business scenarios instead of a lecture that is philosophical in nature.

Researchers Pizzicato and Evil (1996) discovered that only 10% of the students preferred lectures, and yet this approach had been used 68% of the time. Students did, however, express their preference for class discussions when learning about business ethics (Pizzicato & Evil, 1996). More recently, Pettifog, Stay and Opaque (2000) conducted two-day workshops on ethics inpsychologyand after the workshop, the different teaching approaches used throughout (lectures, questions and answers, group discussions, videotapes, recommended readings, problem-solving, essays and exams) were rated by the participants.

Ethical discussions for the workshop were divided into several categories: philosophy and theories of ethics, codes of ethics and guidelines, ethical decision-making, ethical sensitivity, legal issues, disciplinary issues and selfsameness. Preferred teaching approaches varied depending on the topic. 7 For example, when discussing philosophy and theories of ethics, respondents preferred lecturing and answering questions, whereas, students preferred discussing vignettes when reviewing codes of ethics, ethical dilemma decision making and sensitivity to ethical issues.

When learning about legal aspects of ethics and disciplinary matters, respondents preferred video (visual). Pettifog et al. (2000) identified a unanimous rejection of the traditional approaches to learning: writing essays and studying for exams, but it was noted that essays or exams were not used throughout the workshops. Most intriguing, Pettifog et al. 2000)

explained that the most effective teaching approach, not only depends on the student" s learning styles, but also depends on what is being taught (content). Preceding this research, Burton et al. 1991) also supported these findings, indicating a strong preference for in-class discussions of hypothetical scenarios versus philosophical lectures on ethics. This 1991 study also indicated that gender and teaching method did not produce any results of significance (Burton et al.). Earlier research conducted by Webber (1990) indicated that 50% percent of participant students felt as though ethics was not tresses enough and 53% felt as though a separate ethics course should be offered. 1. 6 Normative theory: A framework. Bishop (1992) defined a philosophically-oriented approach to ethics as ". Rigorous in terms of theory, logical foundations, and abstract conceptualizations of business ethics problems" (p. 293). Later in the decade Dodo (1997) investigated students at a particular school who were required to complete an undergraduate degree with courses in philosophy and religion. It was these philosophy courses where utilitarian theories, deontological theories, theories of Justice and theories of rights were explored. The ethics content was infused in the curricula and yet the courses lacked practical application depending predominately on theory.

This imperfection within curriculum is commonplace and can be traced back toacademicvaluing of theory within course content over authentic societal issues, problems and dilemmas. Bringing the daily news and event s into the classroom is a start but threading this authentic content into curricula is a goal however; is this proper way to teach ethics? It may be a popular more with students but professors may not value this approach. Doing what is

right and acting within a context calls upon each person" s understanding and perception, it is " not simply a matter of following rules or calculating consequences.

It is a matter of discerning which rule are called into play in a situation " (Labeled, 1985, p. 29). Your values, morals and philosophical orientation among other variables come into play as your very perception filters the events. This fact can change the manner in which we teach a course in ethics as we need to discuss how one can make a distinction from what is important to that which is less so. 1. Issues: Students and Curricula Pavement (1991) contended, " what may be clear to the trained philosopher is not at all clear to the student.

Philosophers have had extensive training in logical analysis and argumentation" (Pavement, 1991, p. 387). In many instances, students who register for an ethics class, are usually at the very introductory stages of learning philosophy and are not able to apply these abstract and sometimes contradicting philosophies to business scenarios (Pavement, 1991; Tuneless, 2008). Pavement (1991) goes on to say "... The texts" lack of specificity of method for applying theory, ND the lack of resolution in dealing with competing theories, is compounded by the professor teaching the course" (p. 387).

For instance, even the Normative values framework is quite expansive and based upon several theoretical frameworks, for example: Egoism (hedonistic or otherwise), consequentialness utilitarian and non-, act or rule utilitarianism, moral sense theories, a veritable menagerie of deontological

theories of varying stringiness, constitutionalism, natural law theories, etc. , are all in hot contention for the exclusive franchise on the Good and the Right. (Miller, 1991, p. 397) To expect a student entering an ethics course to have a grasp of these theoretical frameworks seems somewhat unfair to the student.

It now becomes a challenge to identify a starting point in any ethics course. We need to know from the onset of the course, the level of preparedness of each student. Failing this, the course could literally miss its mark as the content could be too advanced. Historically researchers such as Farman (1990) explained that using a principle- based approach to learning ethics, assumes students are functioning at Goldberg" s autonomous stage, but it was through Farman" s experience she concluded that most dents have difficulties breaking free from ethical relativism.

Interestingly, Pavement (1991) analyzed two hundred syllabi and was able to identify an examination question that created confusion and influenced students to think in a relativistic or subjective way. 48 Pavement (1991) stated, " this typical question asks the student to analyze and discuss a particular business situation using " either" utilitarian or deontological theory ... The professor thinks that the use of either one is K" (p. 388).

Farman (1990) added that poor ethical attitude " cannot be remedied in the course of a ten-week ethics lass; a reflection of myfailureas ateacher; or, more significantly, a measure of the impracticality of teaching ethics in this way? ' (p. 32). Dodo (1997) explained that philosophy courses are usually offered in a department separate from the business department. These

courses offer very little practical application that usually results in a weak transfer of ethical reasoning in a business context (Dodo, 1997).

Offering a course from within the business department provides students with an opportunity to consider ethical decision making as it relates to everyday business activities. Business ethics provides a link from what is learnt in a philosophy course to what students are faced with once they get out into the work world. Dodo (1997) explains that there must be cooperation between the philosophy department and the business department to ensure students receive a balance between theoretical reasoning and their application into today" s world.

Robertson (1993) defined normative research as " .. The values, norms, or rules of conduct which govern ethical behavior and which are presented as an ideal" and argued that much of the research in business ethics lacked validity because searchers did not incorporate these theories into their studies" (p. 586). Some studies in the area of business ethics are grounded in normative theory while others are not. For example, Warner (1988) conducted a study on the rights of individuals and responsibilities of shareholders during a merger and acquisition.