

Teaching Teachers Ethics: An Analysis of Instructional Methods, Key Concepts and Effects on Teachers

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In June 2007, a workshop for teachers in alternative education secondary schools was offered through a partnership of Miami Dade County Schools and the Youth Ethics Initiative with funding from the Children's Trust. The purpose was to offer teachers curriculum and instructional approaches to teaching ethics that are respectful of learners and within their courses of study and the district requirements for character education. In evaluating the workshop, the following questions were addressed through discourse analysis of the workshop sessions and analysis of the lessons developed by the teachers in attendance as a result of the workshop.

What are the instructional methods instructors used and/or model for teachers in ethics?

The instructional methods used by instructors in the workshop varied from the highly student-centered session on the ethical reasoning protocol which used a constructivist approach to the predominantly lecture approach used in introducing ethics and character education. Cases were used consistently to look at how to teach ethics and ethical reasoning. The different approaches in some ways reflected the teaching styles and values of the instructors about instruction, as much as the purpose and topics of the session. One wonders if the topics and instructors had been assigned differently if the pedagogy would have varied. It may be that the variety of instructors was necessary for the participants to see and experience different instructional methods.

What are the key concepts instructors addressed in their sessions on ethics?

The analysis showed that the concepts were addressed and readdressed through different content using the different instructional methods described in the previous section. Several sessions addressed the relationship of character education to ethics. A key idea was the importance of treating students respectfully in any discussion of values, rather than just stating the values or attempting to enforce them. This is important for several reasons: 1) values cannot be enforced; 2) students are not valueless, but may have unexamined values; 3) students need to develop ethical reasoning skills to have the confidence to do what they think is right; 4) respect creates the interaction needed to have students examine their beliefs and commit to behavior that supports civil society as good for themselves and others.

A variety of strategies for integrating ethics into the curriculum were modeled or suggested, including the Banks and Banks (2004) model of adding concepts, transforming the curriculum by changing the structure to focus on ethics, to having students apply ethics in social action projects. Other ideas for connecting ethics to the curriculum were to connect to student interests such as music or literature and to identify ethical issues in the curriculum.

For teaching ethics, two of the instructors talked about how philosophy and ethics are conducted. Philosophy was discussed as propositional knowledge with ethics as a normative discourse devoted to creating cooperation in groups and institutions. Ethical justifications are consequences, virtue, contract/commitment, core ethics and existential ethics. Ethics helps people deal with challenges to the social order in a way that allows people to step up to do their moral duty. Given the opportunity to think it through, discuss it and consider the alternatives, most people will make ethical decisions.

For teaching ethical reasoning, at least four ideas were presented: 1) Develop a community of learners so students feel safe expressing their ideas, learn to acknowledge and explore different perspectives; 2) Do creative ethical analysis based on correct information, reframing the issue, getting help through discussions with others and exploring opportunities; 3) Use a process in which students define the issue, connect to historical examples, examine the moral justification for and against, identify reasons and look at the social system addresses the issue; 4) Use a constructivist approach with guiding questions for what is known, not known, what could be done and what should be done.

What do teachers intend to use from their workshop experience?

As part of the requirement of the in-service course, teachers created lesson-plans to apply what they learned. These were analyzed for the concepts and strategies the participants incorporated into their lessons. The first table shows the ethical concepts by lesson. The second table shows the instructional methods by lesson. The findings are discussed after each table.

The teachers incorporated a number of different curriculum integration ideas into their lessons. Three of the 11 lessons used literature, such as using *The Skin I'm In* by Sharon Flake and *Make Me Want to Holler*. Eight of the 11 lessons were transformative of the curriculum, restructuring the content around ethical issues, such as considering moral issues in decision-making about pre-marital sex, understanding the ethical issues in civil disobedience, and creating scenarios with ethical issues. At least one lesson included exploring the differences between rules and reasons. Another lesson guided students to focus on consequences to engage them in ethical reasoning.

Several lessons asked students to write poetry, rap or scenarios, or to describe what happened, or what could be done differently. At least three lessons built on student interests such as using music, James Brown's song "I'm Black and I'm Proud" or having student work with a local business to understand partnerships, or comparing different families incorporate values. A couple of lessons built on the community of learners idea, trying to develop student self-confidence in reasoning, and teaching them the difference between listening and hearing.

The teachers used a variety of instructional methods in their lessons. Five of the 11 lessons analyzed had plans to use the questions in the ethical reasoning process. Five of the 11 planned to use cases or scenarios, such as NJ vs. Paterson, or forming a Limited

Liability Partnership or considering situations in their own lives to apply peer mediation. Two planned to use roles to involve students, such as "businessman, poor farmer, runaway slave and minister" for the abolition lesson. All the lessons sought to create dialog and interaction among students to elicit their ideas and help them to consider the options and consequences of their decisions.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In this analysis we have seen how the instructors with different instructional methods addressed the key concepts of the project: the relationship of core values to ethics, ethics in the curriculum, how to teach ethics and how to teach ethical reasoning. While using different degrees of involvement, they all emphasized the need to begin with what students believe around issues of interest to them, engage them in considering others' viewpoints, reconsidering or reframing the issues through historical, social or different stakeholder perspectives, and finally considering the consequences for their decisions on themselves and others. Most of the participants picked up ideas for engaging students in discussion in ways that might help them consider, express and then reconsider what they think, although only five of them were specific in how they would do this. The instructors used cases to stimulate thinking or discussion, and almost half of the participants used cases in their lessons and encouraged the use of questioning for determining why you believe what you believe to develop support for their ideas and reasoning. About a third of the participants explicitly used cases in their lessons.

Several of the instructors focused on how to create a community of learners, norms for discourse, or a safe environment for discussion. Some of them modeled this. While the participants' lessons did not all reflect this idea, they returned to this idea throughout the week, wondering aloud about the relationship between self-confidence, a sense of belonging and ethical behavior. As a group of teachers committed to working in alternative education environments, a number of them expressed their commitment and passion about getting through" to their students, to getting them to stop and think about their actions, make different choices and ultimately develop positive successful lives.

Overall the key concepts were addressed throughout the different sessions. It is not clear how the diversity of approaches affected the participants' ability to integrate ethics into their curriculum and teaching practice. It is recommended that the project continue to focus on the key concepts of the relationship of core values to ethics, ethics in the curriculum, how to teach ethics, and how to teach ethical reasoning and to increase the effect on teachers and more explicitly tie the outcomes to the individual sessions. Participants would benefit from an agenda with objectives for each session related to the key concepts, and a facilitator who is present for the entire workshop who could support segues and reflection between sessions. Since the workshop instructors each provided different approaches, the sessions should perhaps be in two parts to facilitate more integration of the ideas into teachers' practice: 1) instructor presents background such as modeling the approach, introducing ethics, or putting ethics in context and, 2) participants apply what they have learned, thinking about how they would use it, and discussing their ideas with the instructor and getting feedback.

To increase the effects over time, it is also recommended that school teams attend the workshop together so they can support each other throughout the year as well as plan for more school wide implementation. The issues the teachers raised often involved the school community, including the immediate school community and local neighborhood community, and they spoke often about the complexity of their students' lives.

As one of the philosophy professors put it,

If you don't care, your life is not going to be as rich as the person sitting next to you who does care. Create a group movement so students are mentally and physically present in class. Send them the message, just be here with us if you can.

Understanding ethics has the potential to help students care about themselves and others, to feel that they can reason their way into understanding what is right, and deciding what they can commit to for themselves and others to create the kind of society they want to live in.

For more information, please contact the lead author at the University of Miami Ethics program, hilarie@techforlearning.org

References

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