

INTEGRITY AND ENTRUST SELF THROUGH COOPERATIVE EDUCATION

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Abstract— The paper considers the role of values and ethics education in empowering the emerging professional to shape and change their workplace. Building on this argument, the paper suggests foundational elements of an approach to professional ethics in cooperative education programs concluding with a suggested research path for further exploration of the content and nature of such an approach. Following the recent global financial crisis and the collapse of major organisations such as Lehman Brothers, and the earlier corporate failings of Enron and HIH, there has been a shift of focus towards the role of ethics education in the formation of business professionals. In other professional settings, such as policing and medicine, similar major crises have highlighted the significance of the early development of ethical practice in emerging professionals. This paper considers the nature of professional ethics for an emerging professional, arguing that professional ethics should be a key factor in cooperative education programs.

Keywords: professional ethics; value education; professionalism; critical moral agents

I. INTRODUCTION

Professional ethics education in pregraduate programs of study is not a new phenomenon (Lovat & Clement, 2008). However, in the last decade there has been a growing emphasis on the importance of this focus. Recent experience of the global financial crisis highlighted the importance of good ethical practice in business and the consequence when such is not present, for example the collapse of Lehman Brothers and the Madoff investment scandal.

The 'Dr Death' scandal at Bundaberg Hospital (Davies, 2005) and similar incidents in New South Wales have highlighted the importance of a strong values framework and professional. Itself eliminate unethical practice, but awareness of proper conduct and the empowerment of individuals to challenge practice are critical outcomes of a professional ethics educational program and contribute significantly to the ongoing maintenance of an ethical profession. A sound professional ethics education will enable the individual to be critically aware and analyse practices around them rather than merely being socialised and enculturated into existing practices and values.

Professional culture and attitudes are predominantly formed in the earlier interactions that an emerging professional has with their field. Within the first few years of practice, a practitioner has developed the core foundations of their future practice (Campbell, Herrington, & Verenikina, 2009).

Therefore, it is important that the development of an ethical practitioner occurs as early as possible. Cooperative education programs often provide the first interactions of the student with the professional workplace, thereby, through meaningful reflection and review, being of significance in their future development as a professional (Dressler & Keeling, 2011; Weisz & Smith, 2005). Such an experience in the workplace offers learning opportunities that cannot be afforded in classroom learning of ethics and professional behaviour. However, notably little work explores how professional identity and ethical understanding is enhanced by cooperative education experiences. There is considerable well-discussed literature on ethics in general, such the later works by Dewey as well as Bentham, Kant, and Mill, and around applied ethics and professionalism (cf. Kultgen, 1988), but the extension of this discussion to a cooperative education context is almost non-existent.

This paper argues that there is a role for cooperative education programs to explicitly educate about professional ethics, providing the strong foundations required for the development of the ethical practitioner and empowering the self. The paper will consider some elements that may constitute the foundation of such a professional ethics program suggesting directions for future research around the content and nature of such an approach, thereby providing a framework as a foundation stone in attempting to fill the gap of knowledge in this area of the relationship between cooperative education programs and professional ethics education.

II. IMPORTANCE OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS EDUCATION

A pattern across all of these examples is around the inability for those within the organisation to effect change, but also the compliance of those within the organisation in accepting "this is the way things are done around here". As Cripps acknowledged in his report on RailCorp, it is not a case of "a few bad apples ... the very structure of the organisation and the way it operates allows and encourages corruption"

(2008, p.5, Vol.8). The same was acknowledged by Cole's (2006) report into the AWB, Davies's (2005) report on practices in Queensland Health, and also both the Wood (1997) and Fitzgerald (1989) inquiries into policing. In each of these cases, though, not all members of the organisation were corrupt. These examples suggest that the ability for a professional to regulate their own conduct and ensure that they act ethically is critical in realising an ethical organisation. There is importance for a professional to respond to ethical issues and vocalise concern to effect change whilst simultaneously regulating their own behaviour.

Within the area of policing, in particular, the trend to greater emphasis on the importance of professional ethics emerged following significant investigations into police misconduct and corruption, such as the Wood Royal Commission in New South Wales (1997) and the Fitzgerald Inquiry in Queensland (1989). Both of these investigations uncovered social practices within policing organisations that stood contrary to their espoused roles in society. Following the Wood Royal Commission, in particular, much argument and discussion was had about the importance of ethical education with the adopted practice in the New South This trend towards codifying professional practices is a direct response to the dominant accountability discourse and the need to be seen to be ethical. However, simple codes do not equate to good ethical conduct, or good professional practice.

Professional ethics, and statements of such affect, serve several purposes in shaping the professional (Giddens, 1991). A code of ethics can provide a framework of conduct which is culturally favoured in an organisation, that is, the code either reflects that which is already occurring, or provide a tool for reprimand and regulation (Lichtenberg, 2002). A code of ethics, or statement of values, in the workplace, can also serve to empower the emerging professional to aspire towards a goal of conduct. However, a code is meaningless if it is not reinforced by the social and cultural dynamics of the workplace. Therefore, in addition to being able to recite a professional code, an emerging professional needs to be able to negotiate the workplace environment with ethical and moral courage to see its realisation. Furthermore, an emerging professional needs to be critically aware of how a code should be interpreted in certain professional situations, particularly when presented with situations where values appear to conflict. For example, a teacher may be compelled by their code of ethics to ensure privacy and confidentiality of students but simultaneously be legally and morally obliged to report any indicators of abuse.

III. RELATIONSHI BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AND COOPERATIVE EDUCATION

The first phase is the process of 'getting in' (i.e. recruitment and job preparation), the second phase is 'breaking in' (i.e. orientation, establishing relationships, etc.), with final phase being 'settling in'. Within the third phase,

Garavan and Murphy assert that the student undertakes personal change and 'personalisation and value acceptance' within the workplace. It is within this third phase that they argue the prior learning and experiences of the student come to the fore in the interpretation and understanding of the practices in the workplace. Other research (Billett, 2008; Billett&Pavlova, 2005; Campbell, 2009) suggests that the agency of the individual exists much earlier than Garavan and Murphy suggest. Levels of commitment to the profession and responding to the social suggestions of the workplace are just.

IV. ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS EDUCATION IN FORMING THE EMERGING PROFESSIONAL

Students emerging into professional fields need to understand and navigate the increasingly important ethical aspects of being a professional, transforming the workplace and themselves (Campbell & Zegwaard, 2011b). The student entering a workplace is limited in their professional knowledge and still forming their identity within the profession (Nystrom, 2009).

V. CHARACTERISTICS OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS EDUCATION IN COOPERATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

A claim, such as those made above, about the need to be vocal when faced with an ethical issue and for students to be critical agentic professionals, relies upon the capacity of those involved to explicitly realise and understand that an ethical issue is present. For a student to be aware that there is an ethical issue evident in their experiences of a practice setting, they need to have a level of awareness and ability to identify these within their profession (CorboCrehan & Campbell, 2007). To an extent this knowledge develops through engagement in cooperative education experiences and workplaces, but it is also something that can be facilitated by an educative process. One role of an ethics curriculum is to develop this level of awareness, but more so to develop the critical capacity of students to interrogate their settings and experiences identifying the issues that lie within and developing strategies and practices to respond to these (Bowden & Smythe, 2008; Reiss, 2010). It is naïve, though, to claim that a critical mind is all that is required from a student in the workplace. A comprehensive ethics curriculum targeted to cooperative education programs must also equip students with an understanding of the expectations and obligations inherent in their profession (professional values) and the development of the ability to make ethical and moral decisions (Zegwaard, 2009). Therefore, the emerging professional and graduate, should be able to both interrogate and transform professional and workplace values, as well as navigate and exist within predetermined and historical professional boundaries.

An effective ethics curriculum, which builds capacity for students to be critical moral agents within their profession, has to address both the idea of developing critical moral agency as

well as a sensibility about the workplace the student will be moving into. It is suggested, therefore, based on the work of Bowden and Smythe (2008), that there are five core elements to an effective professional ethics curriculum which responds to these ideas. These are:

1. Reflection on the relationship between personal and professional values and expectations
2. Interrogation of practices and case studies to develop a greater sense of ethical conduct and both personal and professional value systems
3. Development of decision-making capacities to manage ethical considerations within their practice
4. Development of skills to negotiate and respond, within the context of differing power and hierarchical positions, to ethical concerns and issues; and
5. Improved capacity for negotiating and persuasive abilities to advocate an ethical position and advance change.

These five elements, or underlying goals, provide a springboard to considerations of pedagogical implications. Core to this collection of ideals is a movement away from conceptualisations of cooperative education as being solely a process of socialisation, or enculturation, into a dominant value structure, towards students being equipped with a critical sense of mind, and moral agency, to better interpret and negotiate the workplace. An ethics education program should act as a support for the empowering of the emerging professional.

Within the first element, there is an opportunity for an analysis of personal aspirations, values and principles, in comparison to professional and workplace values. Such an analysis is suggested by Zegwaard and Campbell (2011b) to provide an interesting focus for research in this area. The pedagogical implication of this element, though, is the requirement for students to become aware of their histories and dispositions through a variety of tasks which require reflection and commitment.

Ultimately, it is important for [cooperative education] to include values education in the delivery of the placement programs because having [cooperative education] graduates well informed and rehearsed in making good ethical and morally sound decisions not only places these graduates in a position of high integrity, it would also make a positive contribution to the overall operation of their community of practice (2009, p.48).

The final two elements focus specifically on the key idea of the development of moral agency and a critical mind. These elements challenge professional ethics education to not merely be the training of students in espoused values and codes, but to develop in them the ability to transform and change the workplace and profession. These skills may well be developed in the classroom-based pedagogies of simulations, case studies and discussions, but more authentically they are grounded in the critical interrogation of cooperative education experiences. Hence, there is a valuable relationship afforded between professional ethics education and cooperative

education which shapes the whole student and equips them with the critical agency required of a true professional.

Central to the argument made in this paper, yet absent from this list of goals, is the need for students to enact ethical practice in cooperative education settings. Whilst it has been argued that a solid theoretical foundation in an ethics education program empowers students in making ethical decisions, this is still somewhat removed from the reality of the workplace and the various social pressures which can exist. As identified earlier, student performativity towards assessment, in its myriad of forms, can direct behaviour in particular directions. If a student aspires to demonstrate high productivity to impress the workplace supervisor, they may be inclined to undertake unethical means to achieve this goal. Therefore, simple provision of an ethics education is not adequate in ensuring ethical practice. There exists a role for an articulated relationship between espoused values within the discourses of the academic and workplace settings.

Research is needed across a variety of settings to better understand this relationship and how educational forms within universities and cooperative education can enable ethical practice in the workplace. Furthermore, some further exploration of the complex relations of power within cooperative education settings is an imperative in the development of an appropriate ethics education curriculum.

VI. CONCLUSION

Students, through cooperative education experiences, interact with the practice settings of their chosen profession, often for the first time. As emerging professionals they need to develop both technical abilities and characteristics and identities as professionals. At the core of a professional identity and practice, where an aspect of the profession is defined as having a moral purpose to serve the public good, must be critical ethical decision-making and professional values. However, these attributes need to be developed and made explicit through a conscious educative process. There is a role for the university in developing these attributes and developing the ability for students to critically respond to the practices of the workplace rather than being enculturated and socialized into cultures, which may or may not be inherently ethical. This paper has broadly avoided labeling particular values that may be considered within such a curriculum as it is more the practice of ethics than particular values that should be taught. The preparation for cooperative education programs needs to include education and training around professional ethics, of which a primary focus must be the development of a critical mind, with acknowledgement of the social and cultural contexts of the practice setting (Campbell & Zegwaard, 2011a). The above suggests some broad approaches to this process; however, there is a need to further explore this discussion and, in particular, examine in greater detail the underlying professional values which would underpin common workplaces these students are placed in,

with an aim of developing a generic framework dealing with multiple professions or perhaps specific for each profession. Likewise, approaches such as that put forward in this paper, require exploration and development of effective pedagogical strategies that can be specifically scaffolded into cooperative education programs. These need to be witnessed in practice, bearing in mind the challenge of positional power differences between the student and professionals in the workplace, and reviewed with respect to the goals of both cooperative education and professional ethics education.

VII. REFERENCES

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