

Joint HLST/BMAF Enhancing Series

*Enhancing the graduate impact in business, management, hospitality, leisure, sport, tourism
This abstract provides a synopsis of the proposed chapter; including headings, structure and
indicative examples of content*

**Developing ethical thinking with undergraduates in sport and exercise science
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Summary

This Chapter describes the development of ethical thinking within sport and exercise at the University of Leeds; in it we consider some of the ways in which this has been enhanced by the innovative work of Inter-Disciplinary Ethics Applied (IDEA CETL).

We set out the main features of CETL's approach, assess its merit and the challenges it presents. Discussions with staff and students inform our reflection on the teaching and learning experience as well as the recommendations we make to colleagues interested in developing the ethical thinking of their students.

Introduction

Barnett (2000) describes a world of 'super-complexity' into which graduates enter; a world of ambiguity, uncertainty and change and in the context of undergraduate education we prepare students for futures not yet known. In this challenging context where the capacity for graduates to be able to contribute to, rather than simply, consume knowledge, it is important that students develop the appropriate cognitive skills for making sound (ethical) judgements; enabling them to be competent, responsible yet creative agents of change. Graduates, for example, in the world of sport, as coaches, teachers, health professionals, managers, administrators or more obviously as performers, will be faced with ever-changing contexts where the previously accepted and known frameworks in which they operate are contested. This according to Barnett (2000) will require an increased individual response to particular actions.

Further endorsement lies within the HLST subject area's bench marking statements which state that undergraduate students should be able to recognise and respond to moral, ethical and safety issues which directly pertain to the subject domain including relevant legislation and professional codes of conduct.

The role of the IDEA CETL in developing ethical thinking in undergraduates

The overarching aim of the IDEA CETL is to help students, (and also professionals and employees) to identify, analyse and respond to the ethical issues they encounter in their subject disciplines and

their working lives. Their activities seek to raise the profile of ethics, not just at the University of Leeds but also throughout higher education and professional life.

The Centre works with disciplines from across the university including Biological Sciences, Business, Computing, Dentistry, Engineering, Environment, Geography and Transport, Medicine, Media and Communications, Nanotechnology. In Sport and Exercise Sciences, like elsewhere, the centre worked in partnership with academics and other experts to develop content and methodologies to embed sports ethics within the undergraduate sport and exercise programme. In Sport and Exercise Science, this work began in September 2006.

The distinctive and effective features of this method are genuine inter-disciplinarity and thorough-going integration. The Centre works in partnership with colleagues from the host discipline to ensure that teaching is both properly grounded in subject practice and properly informed by the dialectical and conceptual skills required for engagement in ethics. It is neither philosophers preaching theory to professionals, nor professionals merely focusing on code compliance.

The content produced consists of relevant, subject-specific teaching resources built around case studies, vignettes and contemporary readings (See IDEA CETL; 2008 –present)

Concurrently, generic resources were also developed to support those teaching ethics for the first time (see Athanassoulis; 2006).

Enabling aspects of the learning and teaching experience

Team-teaching / Co-delivery

A key enabling feature of the learning and teaching experience at Leeds is the use of Team teaching whereby a lecturer/tutor from the host discipline works with an ethicist from the IDEA CETL, to deliver a session. There are three main reasons for this.

Credibility: If tutors from the host discipline participate in the 'ethics components' of the module the students can see that ethics is important to the discipline/profession as well as to ethicists.

Connectedness and proper integration: The tutor from the host discipline will be able to connect the ethics components to other parts of the module/curriculum and thus ensure the ethical issues are appropriately integrated into their module and/or programme.

Relevant skills: An ethics tutor teaching alone may be unable to answer discipline-specific questions raised, conversely, a tutor from the host discipline with little or no experience of ethics may be unable to probe ethical issues or respond more deeply.

The involvement of an ethicist

In general, ethical thinking is done much more clearly and carefully when a philosopher/ethicist is involved. This is precisely because of their awareness of what has been covered in the philosophical tradition of ethics. Sometimes this is a matter of greater caution in endorsing over-ambitious ethical conclusions. Sometimes this is a matter of seeing how progress can be made on an issue that seems intractable to non-philosophers.

Philosophers address these ethical issues from a different perspective. Students are likely to benefit more broadly from learning to think in different ways.

The use of case studies and vignettes

Despite the theoretical grounding of their tutors the IDEA CETL's approach to ethics does not typically involve teaching students ethical theories. Instead they approach ethical issues through case studies and vignettes, which ground issues in the study and practice of the host discipline.

The use of case studies encourages students to consider ethical issues as part of a holistic assessment of a particular situation. For example in their first year students at Leeds are asked: "Should we hothouse children from an early age, to improve our chances of international sporting success?"

In order to address this issue they are asked to consider the case of Dominique Moceanu, a child gymnast who sued for legal emancipation from her parents in 1998. The students addressing this case are required to consider a range of empirical questions such as: How does intense training affect a child's body? Are children more prone to injury than adults? How do children cope with the psychological stress of intense training?

But alongside these questions the students are encouraged to draw out relevant philosophical questions, for example: Why is winning valuable?; Who should make decisions for children?; Are children competent to consent to participate in these programmes?; is hot-housing abusive?

Students who explore ethical issues in this way are better equipped to identify, analyse and respond to ethical issues where they arise in the real world.

Independent learning

One of the central skills of philosophical ethics is thinking through an issue for one's self, not having the answer given to you by a tutor or book. In Sport and Exercise Science, students explore ethical issues using small group discussions supported by focused study questions. The Tutor's role is to facilitate independent thought by:

- Asking and inviting *further questions*
- Identifying, forming and inviting students to form *hypotheses*
- Asking for *reasons*
- Asking for (and providing) *examples and counter examples*
- Identifying (and sometimes making) *distinctions*
- Identifying (and sometimes making) *connections*
- Exploring implications; asking for (and sometimes providing) *criteria*
- Asking for *consistency* and exposing *inconsistency*
- Introducing *additional considerations*

Tutors make it clear to students that they expect them to arrive at justified, defensible conclusions. All students can benefit from learning to think for themselves.

The Context of the Learning and Teaching Experience

Context of sport ethics at Leeds

Sport and Exercise Science students at Leeds cover four curriculum areas during their programme of study; biomechanics, physiology, psychology, and motor control. Graduates from the programme pursue a range of careers; some directly related to sport and exercise science such as physiotherapy, sports psychology and P.E. teaching) and others not such as the police; fire services and the armed forces. The materials taught at level one were designed to complement the curriculum content and remain broadly relevant to a range of future sport-related careers.

Design of the integrated applied ethics components of this course began in 2005 with the formation of a Sport and Exercise Science Ethics Theme Teams. The SES Ethics theme Team is one of a network of steering groups comprised of academic staff from the host discipline (including enthusiasts and decision makers); student representatives; ethicists from the IDEA CETL; a representative of another ethics theme team and an administrator from the IDEA CETL. This team met in various forms up to six times a year and informed all aspects of curriculum development, delivery and evaluation.

The teaching of sport ethics

Teaching of sport ethics at Leeds began in September 2006 with four pilot seminars in the SPSC1211 Study Skills module, covering an introduction to ethics. The module explored the ethics of hazing (initiation ceremonies) to coincide with the student's first weeks at university, ethics of plagiarism, ethics of teamwork and the ethics of coaching children. These seminars were complemented by an Introduction to ethics lecture and a summary lecture. The sessions were team-taught by the module leader, a SES lecturer and an ethicist; 150 level one students were taught in groups of thirty on a carousel model

In 2007 teaching began at level two where students undertook seminars in research ethics in anticipation of their final year dissertation as part of the module; SPSC2212: Research Design, Implementation and Analysis. The areas of research ethics were in the areas of confidentiality and informed consent.

Curriculum content

"Ethics of initiations"

Students' first experience of ethics concerned issues surrounding sport-related initiations and pranks. This session was timed to coincide fresher's week – a time when some students may encounter these issues as part of their memberships of teams and sports clubs.

The session introduced some of the arguments used to defend these practices and some of the arguments used to condemn them prompting discussion of risk, harm, consent and responsibility. Students explored these issues through small group discussion around a series of case studies; whilst also drawing on their own experiences or those of their peers using video examples from YouTube as a stimulus for discussion.

"Ethics of Plagiarism"

The next in the seminar series considered issues round academic integrity delivered in conjunction with practical guidance about presentation and referencing of academic work. This seminar involved a conceptual analysis of plagiarism which highlighted distinctive features which explained why it might be considered unethical; namely its unfairness; the dishonesty involved and its contrariness to the purpose of academic study. Risk to institutional integrity if not taken seriously by a university was a further emerging issue for discussion. Parallels were made during this session to cheating in

sport drawing on the similarities with academic cheating and plagiarism; in terms of possible threats to the 'spirit of sport'. A consequence of this interrogation was to contest particular assessment strategies which lent themselves more readily to acts of plagiarism and a discussion of alternative but equally rigorous modes of assessment less likely to encourage such acts.

"Ethics of Teamwork"

Using a collection of hypothetical vignettes and discussion questions, the third session in the series considered individual and collective responsibility, shared aims, team discipline and the problem of free riders; loyalty and faithfulness and collective praise and blame. Sporting examples were used to demonstrate key themes; for example, hypothetical scenarios, students' own experiences of individual and team activities as well as higher profile cases in sport, for example, Roy Keane (Football) in relation to team discipline and Kevin Pietersen (Cricket) in relation to team loyalty

"Ethics of Coaching Children"

The final seminar at level one considered intense training and elitism in sport. The seminar was based around case studies from contemporary news reports; the first of which concerned a young gymnast; Dominique Moceanu who sued for legal emancipation from her parents in 1998. A problem-based learning model was adopted in this seminar with students encouraged to generate empirical and philosophical questions about the case. Their questions formed the basis of their subsequent discussions, supported by study questions.

Assessment

Initially the ethical components at Leeds were not assessed; the course requirements of students were simply attendance and reasonable levels of participation during discussions. In 2008 we trialled assessments designed to mimic the format of existing level one study skills assessments; multiple choice questions and short written responses and extended essay questions. While much of the philosophical curriculum content did not lend itself to a multiple-choice format aspects of the course such as best practice when obtaining informed consent did.

In 2008, students were assessed in this way on a number of factors including; appropriate disclosure of information; appropriate means of communication and indicators of competence

For example:

*Q1. Which of the following factors could justify your judgement that an individual is **not competent** to give informed consent? (tick all that apply)*

- ***The individual is five years old***
- *The individual is over 60*
- ***The individual seems agitated or upset***
- *The individual is devoutly religious*
- *The individual seems arrogant*
- ***The individual has dementia***
- ***The individual has been drinking***
- *The individual has a history of mild depression*
- ***You suspect the individual has not understood the information given***
- *The individual is under 18*

Extended essay questions focused on case studies; students were asked to assume the perspective of a range of individuals in positions of responsibility within a sport-related context. For example the Director of an exercise physiology laboratory that services exercise testing of people following a heart attack or the Senior Coach for the Leeds Junior Swimming Club. Students were assessed on their ability to identify relevant ethical issues that might face such a person, explain the significance of such issues and comment on their relation to other ethical considerations. Finally they were invited to suggest 'best practice'.

From 2009, these case studies became the main focus for student assessment. Essays were replaced by group research projects and in-class presentations. This allowed students to further develop range of study skills whilst exploring an issue in an open-ended, dialectic manner better suited to the complexity of the issues.

The barriers and challenges to effective learning

Introducing Ethics

Often students are unfamiliar with the term 'ethics' or with ethical issues from their discipline or the wider world. Asking a class what they understand by 'ethics' and 'morality' was sometimes a good place to start.

Motivating Students' Learning in Ethics

Occasionally tutors of ethics have encountered resistance among students (and occasionally staff) to the inclusion of ethics in their programme of study. Individuals in the host discipline may have mixed feelings about our involvement as 'outsiders'. Some students may consider ethical decision making to be a personal matter or simply a matter of common sense. Some students may suspect that ethics tutors are there to admonish them or tell them how to behave. Some students will be sceptical about the relevance of ethics to their discipline.

In anticipation of these issues, IDEA CETL's tutors found it helpful to begin sessions with some introductory remarks on the role of an ethics tutor and the nature of applied ethics in their discipline. Sometimes students were encouraged to suggest areas of ethical enquiry within their discipline.

Encouraging Debate

In some classes students made up their minds very quickly and having done so felt as though they had dealt with an issue and were ready to move on. In other classes students came quickly to a consensus on an issue and as a result, seemed reluctant to consider opposing views. In situations like these, discussion can dry up.

One approach to such situations is to assume the 'devil's advocate' position yourself bringing in further considerations and asking students to defend their views in light of what you have said. While this can be very effective, tutors at the IDEA CETL have emphasised the importance of uncovering genuine disagreement *within the group* and placing the onus on the students to critically engage with one another's views. During the ethics teaching at Leeds this has been achieved by identifying points of difference, or inconsistencies between students' contributions. For example,

some students may agree on a point but for different reasons or may agree broadly but differ on the detail.

Where there appears to be little genuine disagreement between members of the group we often simply asked: what would someone who disagreed with you say?

Ethics and Law

A key objective for our tutors was to support students in recognising the difference between ethics and the law. In initial sessions we typically found that some students would seek clarification of the legal basis for certain actions before condemning the illegal and condoning the legal. Case studies were particularly useful in such instances; particularly the case of Muhammad Ali's 1967 conscientious objection to his conscription in 1967 (a case of ethical law breaking?) and the 1996 case in which an Indian associate of the British American Tobacco group sponsored the Indian World Cup Cricket (a case of legal, yet unethical behaviour?)

Ethicists were careful to point out to students that they were not experts in the legal aspects of cases; non-the-less students did sometime seek guidance on the law. Where this was the case, and students appreciated the distinction between the legal and ethical; some further guidance did enhance teaching.

The Student Experience

Evidence of the effectiveness and appropriateness of the learning experience

Prior to the introduction of the ethics component in level one study skills students had reported some misgivings about the relevance of material included in this module. Consequently the module leader was keen to demonstrate that ethical reasoning and critical thinking were vital skills for their discipline studies and future careers.

Feedback from course evaluation questionnaires suggested that in most cases these skills were highly valued by students. Many students felt the ethics components enabled them to "consider more aspects of an issue before jumping to your initial view" (Anon, SPSC1211 Student Evaluation, 2009) acknowledging that they often took "a more open view on issues" as a result.

The positive aspects of their experience were derived from learning 'differently' to other parts of their degree programme.

On the whole Students favoured the more enquiry-led, discursive approaches which focused on ethical questions. Particular advantages observed by students were the opportunities to listen to the ethical positions of others in small group discussions; the chance to articulate a well-structured argument and increased confidence in expressing a viewpoint.

The interactive nature of the seminars was well-received by most students with some acknowledging that by learning in such a way "you think about things that you might not have thought about if you were learning alone." (Anon, SPSC1211 Student Evaluation, 2009).

The motivation levels to engage in discussion were greater when ethical issues directly related to the sports context. Some students felt that issues concerning academic integrity while relevant to their personal lives were not sufficiently relevant to the study of sport and their future careers.

Feedback in the early stages of this pilot also suggested that while they enjoyed the discussions, a significant number of students felt they lasted too long. This was a concern the course designers had to balance against the importance of giving students space to explore the issues in sufficient depth. In some cases students of all disciplines may be inclined to take a fairly superficial view of ethical issues and where this is the case, time is needed to illuminate the complexity. This was possible for some students: “I learnt to think in more depth about questions I thought were simple.” (Anon, SPSC1211 Student Evaluation 2009) “[I learnt] that what I think and believe should be challenged; there are often two sides to an argument.” (Anon, SPSC1211 Student Evaluation 2009).

Lessons learned

Staff Perspective:

Staff perceived significant benefits in contextualising ethical content within hypothetical, real-life and personal sport-related scenarios. Where this took place students found the learning more meaningful.

Small group discussions facilitated greater inclusion and involvement in the predominantly enquiry-led, discursive mode of learning

Staff felt the use of case studies was a highly effective means by which to promote dialogue and enquiry around key ethical issues.

Student perspective

Students developed an awareness of how and where ethical issues might fit into their subject with many suggesting further areas of enquiry in their feedback.

Students widely reported the benefits of exploring an issue through constructive group discussion; recognising, in particular, the value of other people’s views.

Students found sport-related, ‘real life’ case studies; especially those presented in printed and digital media particularly engaging.

In conclusion

The teaching of ethics within the context of sport and exercise at undergraduate level clearly is not without its challenges. However, student evaluations reveal that the more the ethical content relates to undergraduate experiences, the greater the engagement; adopting a case study approach only serves to enhance this engagement. It is unsurprising that we should advocate the inclusion of teaching ethics within the undergraduate sport and exercise curriculum; for reasons previously mentioned. It is apparent from the embedding of ethics teaching that students move beyond relativist positions (“well it’s just a matter of opinion”) or an over-reliance on legal positions (“it’s against the law so it must be wrong”) to more sophisticated, independent positions. As a consequence this significantly enhances graduates’ capacities to make sound, ethical judgements in both their personal and professional lives.

References

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