

Business Ethics Teaching Approaches for Effective Learning in Palestine

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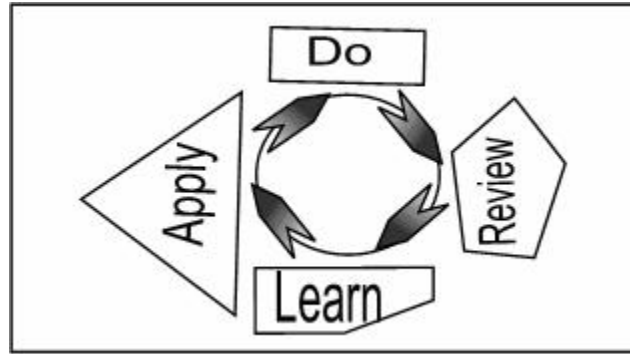
Abstract

This paper is primarily concerned with answering the question: “how can business ethics be taught effectively in Palestinian higher education?” The hyphen in the phrase ‘teaching-learning’ represents the core challenge of the whole teaching profession. This question is best answered by focusing on six areas important to teaching activities: goals, tasks, social structure, role, time and pacing, and assessment. It is also the contention of this paper to examine the positions that comply with the purpose of the tenor, and they are basically: cognitive, behavior, and managerial competences.

Introduction

Many have argued that business cannot be taught (Forbes, 1987; McDonald and Donleavy, 1995). People have freewill, and no matter how much you can teach them about ethics, they are always free to act unethically. They cannot become ethical by taking a class! On the other hand, preponderance of research suggests that teaching ethics in business schools can be effective in developing undergraduates’ moral reasoning skills, and ethical behavior (Collier, 1998). It is intriguing that many are still not convinced that ethics can be taught, especially when teaching ethics is incorporated into the business of curriculum. A model draws out key elements and makes a statement of their relation. Dennison and Kirk (1990) described the process elements, drawing on the model by Kolb (1984). This model highlights activity in learning (Do), the need for reflection and evaluation (Review), extraction of meaning from this review (Learn), and the planned use of learning in future action (Apply), Figure 1. The process may cognitively serve far the learner on her/his own, and it is actively making sense of an ethical learning occasion.

Learning is therefore a reflective activity that enables the learner to draw upon previous experience to understand and evaluate the present, so as to shape the future action and formulate new knowledge (Bloom et al 1969). It is therefore the thesis of this paper that ethics can be taught to undergraduates, so an effective learning can be materialized if: (1) the goals of teaching business ethics are agreed upon by stakeholders, (2) the ethics educational tasks are perceived as relevant by business undergraduates, (3) an experiential learning pedagogy that accommodates the social structure is used to teach business ethics, (4) business school plays a leading role in establishing safe lecture-theater environment for sharing student’s experiences, (5) time and pacing process is part of teaching business ethics, (6) assessment of both implementing and designing teaching business ethics (Reece and Walker, 1997). The remainder of this paper will discuss each of these six areas.

Figure 1: A proces model of learning

The Goals of Teaching Business Ethics are Agreed upon by Stakeholders

The notion of learning style has come to prominence in a range of different ways. An individual's overall approach may contain more than one style that is ascribed to activists, reflectors, theorists and pragmatists (Honey and Mumford, 1986). Undergraduates exhibit differences varying between surface-level and deep-level processing, i.e. memorization of specific facts and affective understanding, respectively (Biggs and Moore, 1993). Since learner characteristics are not fixed, the past experiences, previous competence and beliefs influence the learning in hand. Anderson (1982) argued that learning occurs through multiple channels using multiple intelligence.

Effective and efficient learning requires an amalgamation of concepts and applications together. Since learners vary in their beliefs about success, their motivation in learning, and their responses to difficult tasks (Dweck, 1986), ethics must be integrated into the business curriculum accordingly. A stand-alone ethics module in the curriculum, like a module to teach for example a new computer law, will be more effective when the knowledge is integrated into the curriculum. A typical question might be how would one go about making ethics an integral part of the business curriculum. Interestingly, "intercultural communication" which is the effective process of sending and receiving messages, is the most realistic cross-cultural transcend fit within the business curriculum (Bové and Thill, 2005). The lecturer lays down module learning objectives, but the module requires that s/he allocates sufficient time to address topics such as: building bridges to bribery and other specific issues in international management, building bridges to intercultural value conflict management, and to plenary small-groups discussions of well-chosen cases (Harvey, 1994).

The key stakeholders must share educational goals to integrate business ethics into the curriculum, because goals should reflect the values of the business school. Hence, the business school needs to build consensus regarding the goals of teaching business ethics. The process of building consensus is not dissimilar to the notion of developing a common mission statement. The responsibility of a business school to the students, society and prospective employers is not restricted to produce graduates to be astute future managers, analytical financial executives or creative stock exchange manipulators. The educational mission is also about development of intellectual capacities for ethical analysis, discernment, judgment and reflection. Palestinian learners vary though in their beliefs, success, motivation, and responses to difficult tasks. The learning domains are psychomotor, cognitive and affective (Reece and Walker, 1997).

Dweck (1986) proposed positive and negative patterns of motivation that stipulates criteria of motivation (Table 1). So, learning will be influenced by: the form of business

Table 1: Learners' Pattern of Motivation

	Pattern of Motivation	
	Positive	Negative
	“Learning Orientation”	“Performance Orientation”
1	Effort leads to success	Ability leads to success
2	Belief in one's ability to improve and learn	Concerns to be judged as an abler
3	Preference for challenging tasks	Satisfaction by doing better than others
4	Satisfaction from success at difficult tasks	Emphasis on competition in public
5	Self-instructions in problem-solving	Evaluate self negativity, helplessness

Source: Dweck, C. (1986) “Motivational Processes Affecting Learning”, American Psychologist, 41, pp.1040-1048.

School organization, style of management, and the climate of relationships between individual undergraduates and between groups. Therefore, the faculty is a key factor of institutional learning, where many constituencies in society contest its goals and it may lead to a conflict and lecturer strain.

A module objective might be behavioral (product) or expressive (process); but is concerned with what undergraduates must be able to do. Objectives are generally more much more specific goal-states. They are realistically used to formulate the learning outcome when attending a programme, and they are measured and measurable by given exams and curriculum evaluation procedures. Therefore, objectives are operationalizations of end-goals, and they contribute to the keeping of end-goals promises on track. Palestinian business school goals for teaching business ethics would be as follows:

1. Knowing lecturer's own moral values and thresholds.
2. Learning about moral issues, conflicts, accountabilities, and responsibilities.
3. Learning means of identifying specific moral aspect of a situation.
4. Learning criteria of sharing moral understanding.
5. Learning management of moral issues and conflicts.
6. Learning to acquire moral courage.
7. Learning to adhere to curriculum tolerance limits.
8. Learning to apply business school code of ethics

The business must develop a plan to make their goals operational. Gandz and Hayes (1988) argued that major requirements of business ethics education have to cover macro, molar and micro issues. Palestinian socio-economic is of unique circumstance that is mirrored in university graduates between the age of 20-24 years old who are merely 4.7% of males and 4.9% of females (Abu Libdeh, 2001). Since ways of student's learning styles at university may differ from his/her learning outside the university (Table 2); the teaching of business ethics in Palestine becomes not only a necessity, but it has to consider a far reaching effective inroad elements in the society at large due to a unique socio-economics in Palestine. The term “effective” makes sense when context and goals are specified. The business school undergraduates need to learn in an increasing range of contexts as well as compulsory electives, because an undergraduate has to relate to society in her/his ability to enhance and transfer learning.

Table 2: Faculty and Wider Context Learning

	Learning Inside Faculty	Learning Outside Faculty
1	Second-hand	First-hand
2	Needs motivation	Comes easily
3	Individualistic	Co-operative
4	Decontextualised	“Real” context
5	Assessed by lecturers	Self-assessed
6	Formal structures	Informal structures

Source: Doyle. (1983) “Academic Work”, Review of Education Research, 53(2), pp.159-199.

The teaching of business ethics must cover “business and society” issues as well as the resolution of moral dilemmas.

The Ethics Educational Tasks are Perceived as Relevant by Business Undergraduates

Teaching ethics is different from teaching other courses at a business school, because some scholars argue that it lacks the relevancy to undergraduates (Zoellers and Fort, 1996), whereas others argue that it contends with issues of ambiguity, credibility and effectiveness (McDonald and Donleavy, 1995). It is the responsibility of a business school to fully engage undergraduates in topics like ethics. The effective learning is usually described in terms of its outcomes and its processes (Table 3).

A description of the effective learning is very useful in the task of planning teaching-learning dual processes (Reece. and Walker, 1997). The challenge of relevance is to achieve a “click” between real life issues and personal choices (Hajjawi, 2007). The teaching of business ethics in Palestine should provide both the theoretical and local practical framework. Undergraduates can analyze, evaluate and choose a logically defensible response from conflicting moral demands. In fact, we employ theories of moral philosophy to differentiate between right and wrong, in which undergraduates will be able to examine their own value systems as well as those operative in real business environment. If a Palestinian business school intends to develop an undergraduate’s skills of enquiry, then the ethical development dimension should serve as the benchmark for undergraduate’s education as well as a springboard for a successful business career. The “relevancy” can be expressed in terms of operational levers such as awareness, legitimization, analysis, and application (De George, 2006). Hence, a cross-disciplinary programme development team that is made up of lecturers in sociology, law, philosophy and public policy can determine what additional outcome attributes needed in order to complement undergraduate’s technical and humanistic skills.

Table 3: Business school, lecturers and learners promote effective learning.

Effective	Learning
Outcomes	Processes
Higher order of skills, strategies and approaches	Making connections in different contexts about what has been learned
Action towards greater complexity and more learning	Reflecting about one’s own learning and learning strategies
Positive emotions, excitement, enthusiasm	Exploring how the learning contexts have played a part in making the learning effective
Enhanced sense of self	Setting further learning goals
More sense of connection with others	Engaging with others in learning
Further learning strategies	
Greater affiliation to learning	
Personal significance through a changed meaning of “experience”	
Deepened knowledge	

Source: Novak, J.D. and Gowin, D.B. (1984) Learning How to Learn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

In Palestine, attributes can be broadly streamed into areas of creativity, cross-cultural communication, and values. Business ethics and social responsibility courses can provide the necessary knowledge of those attributes, in addition to outside classroom learning projects, projects and seminars. A configuration of morals in business life would be a keystone, because “community” would be the central organizing concept. A Palestinian undergraduate must effectively learn how to function proactively in a business world that is dominated by political pressures, legal compliance, and ethical choices. The implementation of such strategic approaches will creatively apply learned frameworks, perspectives and skills to business issues of the 21st century (Hajjawi, 2007). Thus, the translation of knowledge to practice is an integral part of undergraduate’s experience.

An Experiential Learning Pedagogy that Accommodates the Social Structure is used to Teach Business Ethics

Morality is an action-oriented that refers to our judgments. The associated characteristics of a judgment are for one the universality to right and wrong, or good and bad. So, business students who participate in a learning workshop are required to ask themselves such basic questions: what is the right thing to do, or what is the wrong thing to avoid? A normative response is required from students who need to determine a course of action when they are subjected to experiential tests where moral questions entail personal criteria and interpersonal involvement (Sims and Sims, 1991). In the modern times, normative ethical relativism claims that when any two people hold different moral views of an action, both can be right (De George, 2006). A moral judgment could be determined by either a statement of emotion or of feeling that relates to the metaethical view of moral language, or by cultural relativism. It is more prudent to claim neither is right or wrong (Krausz and Meiland, 1982). Consequently, we can never disagree with anyone about the morality of an action! Palestinian business school curriculum ought to provide students with an integral experience to the underlying moral issues. What are the employees' responsibilities to a firm, trade union, family, and society at large? They would become acquainted with the possible consequences if they make an immoral decision and knowingly harm others. Sanyal (2000) argued the value of using experiential tests or exercises as a medium for teaching business ethics. The work environment would be simulated, and undergraduates will be party to the learning process. The experiential tests surely serve as an effective training mechanism to prepare undergraduates with the wide-ranging Palestinian ethical minefields that they are likely to encounter. Palestine ranked at 107 out of 158 worldwide to business perception of degree of corruption (TIC, 2005).

As in playing computer games, simulations of business ethics problems make undergraduates react and act though they were not in a real-life situation. The undergraduates develop code of ethics in a role-playing of workshops as they participate with high level of personal involvement. The field-based applications and business case scenarios can also contribute greatly to the pedagogical pyramid, because undergraduates analyze ethical problems and identify creative resolutions. The improper gifts, kickbacks and conflicts of interests will enhance undergraduates' ability to analyze unstructured ethical problems that discern alternative courses of action. Undergraduates' voluntary work at the local community provides the potential for emotional impact that may be difficult to simulate through traditional classroom sittings (Weber and Glyptis, 2000). The author has found that focusing on a current business event with ethical ramification in Palestine is a well familiar pedagogical approach. Many fraud and embezzlement cases make it to the headline of a local newspaper, Palestinian TV news or a journal that can be brought forward for a class discussion. The pedagogical approaches focus on undergraduates' active participation rather than lecturer-centered passive learning. Business ethics teaching that goes beyond the mechanical repetition of theory mastery should strive to be an interactive experience where undergraduates are questioned to identify the issue problem and to form an opinion. Such experiences provide tremendous boost for undergraduate development and growth. Of course, there is bound to be potential for confusion, misunderstanding and repugnant too. It is therefore crucially important to carefully design and thoughtfully execute a safe classroom environment for common dominator experiences (Jackson, 1994).

Business School Plays a Leading Role in Establishing Safe Lecture-Classroom Environment for Sharing Student's Experiences

Undergraduates should be invited to share moral issues with others in a "feel good" classroom safe environment. Business school must play an active role in analyzing confidentiality rules and the value of learning from other experiences (Binns, 1994). Classroom climate that is characterized by lecturer-determined dialogue, explains more of the effective variation in learning outcomes than does ability or previous performance. Sharing experience is the common practice for creating a safe environment, and

it begins with the round the table individual brief of own personal experience with ethical dilemmas. The undergraduates to think of a situation in which they were confronted with an ethical issue and they were requested to talk for five minutes about their experience and feelings. This method of presentation that enhances disclosure and risk-taking, is advantageous because all these “telling stories” are considered relevant to the learning process at differential perspectives and the sophistication enrich becomes knowledge for all in the classroom. Also, the undergraduates build trust, confidence, and conceptual thought as they open up and share personal values and stories (Coles, 1989). Questioning and discussion sessions are used to summarize a shared experience by the class, or to summarize an undergraduate’s experience. This type of summary is particularly effective after a shared oral presentation experience, or after a small, co-operative subgroup work activity. Questions need to be specific to the desired outcomes of the lesson plan to maintain focus within the group. Discussions might be difficult if too many undergraduates are involved. Discussion sessions are most effective when working with small groups and smaller subgroups of undergraduates. It is possible to evaluate undergraduate’s learning through the use of well-worded questions, and guided discussion sessions. Hence, a guidelines list that is mutually developed by the undergraduates and lecturer is beneficial as a means for stipulating rules to steer forward discussions. These discussions enable the lecturer to see an undergraduate working through particular concepts, and they curtail individual evaluation. The undergraduate will often be able to identify where an ethical directive is necessary with some guidance.

Time and Pacing Process is Part of Teaching Business Ethics

Teaching does not cause learning. Information does rather transform teaching into learning knowledge when an undergraduate has to do something with it. A lesson plan that identifies the enabling objectives necessary to meet information transfer objectives is very skills-based. Sequencing, timing, completion, pacing and time management are criteria to manage activity transitions generally. Lecturer’s (debriefing) frequent, timely and constructive feedback has to be a key to the learning process of business ethics. Learning is often, however, resources-dependent (i.e. visual aids, handouts, flipcharts, markers, overhead projector, tape recorder, etc), and it may make providing feedback challenging and reflective observation (debriefing). Ethics activities should be varied in type (whole group, paired, individual undergraduate), and modality (e.g. speaking, listening and writing) provide insight framework for post-experience analysis (Pearson and Smith, 1986; Higgins and Moore, 1994). The link between experience and the process of change is crucial, and it makes the elements of the experience as a part of undergraduate’s conceptual reflection. The business undergraduates would be challenged (1) to make ethical sense of what they have experienced, (2) to emphasize certain ethical business elements and not others, and (3) to relate encountered ethical experience to other events and ideas. This is in essence utilized to facilitate positive cognitive, behavioral, and affective change in learning (Thatcher, 1986; Nielsen, 1998). Hence, a conceptual dialogue is an opportunity to address the business questions of legal authority, moral authority, and own perspectives on the issues (Pagano, 1987; Johannesen, 1990).

The business schools in Palestine should therefore sponsor workshops within schools to bring together ethical dilemmas professionals and reflective analysis experts on controversial ethical issues in a business environment. In order to provide business skills that recognize the importance of able graduates, a structured process and conscious awareness have to integrate articulation of ethical dilemmas into acquired experience for future Palestinian business leaders (Fudge and Schlacter, 1999).

Assessment of Both Implementing and Designing Teaching Business Ethics

Assessment is a measurement of how effectively the undergraduates have learned; they are usually measured against stated learning outcomes. They are often equated with measuring performance on examinations. Indeed, assessment of ability to make well-informed ethical judgments becomes more complex than simply measuring the ability to master a unit on accounting or management information

system (Oddo, 1997). The essence of assessment is to generate reliable set of data that can be used to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of the evaluation. This resembles the legal requirement role that audits play. Independent auditors are appointed to check and provide the users of financial statements with assurance that the financial statement information is *true and fair view* of the economic circumstances of the company that issues it. By analogy, does an ethics course into the Palestinian business school curriculum make a difference in the ethical behavior of undergraduates? There are many issues relating to the evaluation of teaching business ethics (Loeb, 1991). Since, learning has a long-term impact on undergraduates' views of themselves, the outcomes of learning are not always simply measurable. A number of different frameworks can be beneficially applied for outcomes standards assessment (Kilpatrick, 1977). Such learning outcomes may include many of the following: (1) knowledge of things, people, and actions, (2) skills with things, ideas and people, (3) action, (4) feelings and emotions: anxiety, success and risk, (5) a sense of oneself, including self as a learner, (6) a sense of others and of interaction with them, (7) ideas and strategies about learning, and (8) affiliation to learning. However, a business school could be successful in both teaching ethical principles and in changing the behavior of undergraduates who are the subject of learning, but the outcomes of those changes may no be worthwhile (Goldstein, 1986). So, an action-based model that assesses processes rather than specific outcomes must guide the actual implementation of the outcomes assessment. An action-based model of five life cycle stages is well suited to this task, in which each stage of entrepreneurial, collectivity, formalization, elaboration, and renewal suggests how an educational program can be improved, incentivized, disseminated and/or upgraded (Daft, 1989). The impact of pre- and post ethics course analysis would go beyond simplistic measurement of ethical reasoning by utilizing Likert scales or Kohlberg scoring method (Colby and Kohlberg, 1987). Thus, outcomes analysis provides a mechanism for a business school to grasp what and why is/isn't working.

Conclusion

Business schools in Palestine cannot expect that they will be able to teach business ethics if they do not first come to terms on the goals of such course. Goals that denote to the objectives a school wants to achieve and why, determine the strategic and operational policies the school adopts. Once an agreement is reached, business schools should broaden ethics education to include ethical dilemmas that are very relevant to the daily life of undergraduates.

Although business ethics can be taught as a compilation blend of cognitive, behavioral and managerial competence, emphasis have to be on experiential awareness of the types of ethical dilemmas that undergraduates will be confronted with. A pedagogical demand for safe classroom environment is a presupposition in which undergraduates feel comfortable to develop trust and to share ethical experiences analysis. The ethical experience alone is not adequate. The undergraduates, who have the ability to learn, must reflect on their experiences and find ways to satisfy this learning process. The business school should bring about structured dialogue and create sense of belonging to the Palestinian community characterized by genuine concern, mature responsibility and positive respect. It is the lecturer's duty to provide the path to ethics learning, in which outcomes assessment has to be an integral part of all ethics education efforts. The quality improvement in the design and delivery of ethics education in Palestine is subject to a better understanding of all the elements that contribute to both success and failure of such a vital component of business curriculum.

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- 114
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