

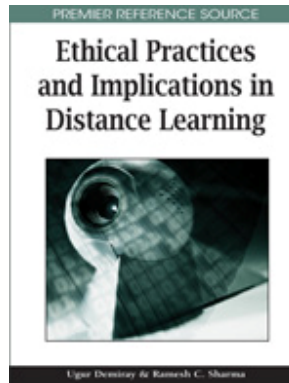
ETHICAL PRACTICES AND IMPLICATIONS IN DISTANCE LEARNING

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Reviewed by TOJDE



INTRODUCTION

Ethical values are deemed to have a positive effect on the day-to-day conduct in the lives of the People. More so, when ethical values are less held in the priority list, still caliber coupled with high morale has been the most adorable theme for many. Achievement and progress without any Moral Character seem to be more criticized than being acknowledged. And Distance Education/Open Learning Discipline is no exception to confiscate this issue of ethics in its practice. Above all, ethics should be highly regarded amidst nuclear deals, space growth, blue/green/white revolutions and to make this a practice, every human being irrespective of the origin, education and monetary status have to join hands together right from the entrance to the exit of life in this world. For those, who ask why a book on ethics in distance education, my answer simply will be "Why not?".

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this book is to present the experiences of teachers, administrators and researchers towards the implementation of ethical practices in distance education setting.

The field of open and distance education has witnessed much transformation from simple print based communication to the WEB 2.0 strategies.

With the increasing use of new communication technologies, adoption of distance education by traditional educational institutes and owing to growing demand on the part of learners, it becomes more important to discuss the ethical issues. UNESCO has advocated ethics in its educational programmes and has initiated deep instilling the ethical values based on the cultural, legal, philosophical and religious heritage of the various human communities. Keeping in tune with the rapid growth in the area of scientific knowledge and technology, the General Conference of UNESCO in 1997 approved the formation of a World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST) which is consultative in nature.

Ethics in education in general and distance education in specific has its manifestations in various forms like those pertaining to pupil-teacher relationship, research ethics, cheating in examinations, information and Internet ethics etc. The main objective of this book is to bring out the experiences pertaining to such domains.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

The book contains nineteen numbers of chapters which cater to the theme of Ethics. All these chapters have been organized under three sections: Contextual, technology based and Case based. The Contextual section sets the background for the ethical field and comprises of four chapters.

The chapter 'Ethical Conundrums In Distance Education Partnerships' by Michael F. Beaudoin traces the mysteries behind the launch of online courses full programs of study offered at a distance by novice in the field and describes of how the modus operandi of the International Distance Education Partnerships, Organizational Culture of the Partners, leadership patterns in the Partner institutions in distance education field, affect the extent of responsibility and accountability for effective service to the students.

After recalling the ICDE Dusseldorf 2001 Conference, where the dire need for the establishment and monitoring of a set of standards for ethical practice in distance education was felt initially, the author feels sad that even now there is no recognized body that ensures the adoption or enforcement of a code of ethics for distance education. While condemning this effort as an narrow-minded activity intended for profit mainly by academic institutions partnering with for-profit corporate organizations, the author presents mini-case studies and emphasize on ethical dilemmas both at philosophical and practical realm for those who enter into distance education partnerships so as to ensure promotion the "right" values and fostering of ethical behavior.

Paul Kawachi in his Chapter entitled 'Ethics in Interactions in Distance Education' presents the desirable interactions involved in teaching and learning at a distance, based on his personal experience as a Teacher and the Learner. He describes by linking to various theories of teaching-learning of how one's own learner autonomy is reduced both to facilitate others and oneself to learn in both cooperative group learning and in collaborative group learning in distance education where student interactions with other students constitute a major part of the education process.

Kawachi has recalled the four-stage Model of learning (which illustrates the cyclic iterative process through Stages 1 to 4 to equip and bring the student to go onto independent learning in a further new cycle starting at Stage 1 in a new learning venture) and at the three dimensions of Structure, Dialogue, and Autonomy of transactional distance theory that can describe distance education. He defines ethics as those pro-active interactions that induce the motivation to lifelong learning in all the students, which should override individualist autonomy as a goal in education. However, the author had focused on only that human conduct that is good practice, and not on that which is bad.

'Ethics in the ambit of distance Education' J S Dorothy, Ugur Demiray, Ramesh C Sharma and Ashwini Kumar have encircled the various aspects in the realm of distance education. After a brief about the factors that made the Distance Teaching Institution (irrespective of the type) a fair option to many, the authors after defining ethics state the reasons for adoption of ethics in distance education. The authors have identified eight spheres of concern for ethics in distance education namely Student Support Services (Administration, Admission, Eligibility Criteria/Calibre, Academic counseling, Medium of Instruction); Collaboration (Learner Support Centre, How, why they are selected); Credibility (Employability versus Continuing Education); Duplication of Efforts (Material Production, Launch of Programmes, Course Writing); Provision of intersystem transfer (Lack for interface to aim transfer); Expertise (Academic activity, Administrative activity, Resources, Research, Who does, How it is done). In each spheres, the authors have also depicted the aspects which fall under each gamut of concern. The authors have also enumerated the advantages and limitations of facilitating ethics in Distance Education besides giving a brief about the Future of Distance Education on the basis of ethics.

Dele Braimoh and Jonathan Ohiorenuan Osiki in their chapter, "Creating a Firewall against Unethical Behaviours in Open and Distance Education Practice" highlight those grey areas which should be of great concern to many stakeholders in distance education practice, globally, include those of quality control, policy formulation and ethical issues. This chapter has contextualized ethics and ethical practice in open and distance learning against the operational philosophy and belief of what is a morally right or wrong behaviour in the education sector of the society. This unethical practice is not only found among students of both conventional and the virtual learning institutions, but it also extends to parents and tutors who, unfortunately, collaborate with the learners. The reasons why this is the case is conjectural. For a worthwhile education therefore, and in particular, for a lasting premium on professional behaviour and academic credibility of Distance Education and, or the Open Distance Learning to be highly regarded, clear and definitive proviso should be put in place to mitigate on multiple interpretation of academic standards.

The next section deals with ethics in the context of technology and thus named as technology based. This section consists of six chapters.

The first Chapter under this section 'Ethical Concerns with Open and Distance Learning' by Glenn Russell highlights on the ODL Practitioner while the Chapter 'Preparing Students For Ethical Use Of Technology: A Case Study For Distance Education' by Deb Gearhart concentrates on the Learner.

The note from the editorial desk suggests to the reader that these two chapters should be read together. Glenn, putforths that because globalization emphasizes instrumental aims (instead of social aims) of education, it remains a challenge for ODL designers and teachers to concentrate on cognitive tasks and market-driven aspects of Open and Distance Learning at the expense of the social harmony instead of implementing an appropriate pedagogy which satisfies both aims. Glenn also outline certain pedagogies which highlight the prevalence of human touch, for use by the ODL practitioners and also expresses deep concern about of the pedagogy should be seen in association with the deep rooted social and cultural contexts.

The Chapter 'Preparing Students For Ethical Use Of Technology: A Case Study For Distance Education' by Deb Gearhart is based on the research of how the students-inspite of being accustomed to the use of technology such as computer chats, instant messaging, text messaging-are either ill-prepared for using technology or use technology unethically. Deb with so much concern warns educationalists that ethics if not nurtured in school and higher education level is sure to mar the societal ethics at the end. In essence, Deb traces of how computing technology intended for educational purposes are misused by the learners and that too during the study process. Deb also acknowledges that the challenge to instill ethical values in students or to have students understand the issues of social responsibility leading to ethical behavior is very hard to be achieved during the learning process by the Teachers. Deb stress the importance of institutional/ contextual/ attitudes/ personal factors related to academic integrity/ academic dishonesty and suggests that Review of institution's policies, Work environment comprising of the faculty who assist in developing and maintaining an ethically sound distance learning atmosphere and Constant upgradation of policy to be remedy to maintain ethics in computing technology Courses offered through Distance Education.

The Chapter titled 'Conversation Ethics for Online Learning Communities' itself suggests to the learner of what Rocci Luppicini to cover in. Luppicini after rendering an overview of the key concepts and strategies underlying Conversation Ethics identified key elements of Conversation Ethics for online learning communities and progressed to offer practical suggestions for influencing online learning communities through increased attention to Conversation Ethics to optimize social interactions. Highlighting Technoethics, the author concludes that research in key areas of Technoethics has the potential to revolutionize social practices and institutions (including Distance Education) relying on technology use for social benefit.

Terry D. Anderson and Heather Kanuka in their Chapter 'Ethical Conflicts In Research On Computer Mediated Conferencing For Education Purposes' have traced of how the culture and principles of the network enabled education is different from that of the conventional mode. The authors have also complimented the network enabled education for serving the dual role of being a means (by ways of networked mediated activities) and also a Institution -that too at the same time. Concentrating on the Internet-based research, the authors highlight of they are vulnerable to be misused by wicked researchers, who not only degrade the research but also the participants. The authors hold the view that ethical behavior is an conscious act aimed at social good and are more person specific than being cultivated by rules and regulations.

The authors also opine of how the application and adoption of tools in the internet are the key factors governing the moral values of e-research. The authors also stress the importance of free and voluntary Consent, Authenticity, Privacy, Confidentiality, and Anonymity in e-research. They also discuss the various Online Forums namely Privately-Public, Publicly-Private Or Semi-Public, which are widely used in e-research. The chapter ends with the conclusion that interaction between the members of Internet communities, research participants, and the research community is the best possible way to maintain ethics in e-research.

The Chapter 'The Ethics Of Designing For Multimodality: Empowering Non Traditional Learners' by Michael Sankey and Rod St Hill after investigating the changing nature of distance education in the context of higher education suggests the a two phased ethical approach to develop courses, namely;

- 1) integrating a range of multimodal learning and teaching strategies and
- 2) giving students the opportunity to discover their preferred approach to learning, which were drawn from four case studies.

Questions in relation to the ethics of quantity reach- 'massification' and delivering technology enhanced courses to an increasingly diverse student body were discussed. Coherent way of adherence by academics to the policies set by the Institutions is still a dream. The major recommendation of the authors was to have an array of different learning modalities namely 'multimodal course materials along with the additional multimedia components' so as to fulfill the needs of the multiliterate, culturally diverse and dispersed student groups.

As the Chapter titled 'Why 'Cultural Sensitivities' And 'Localizations' In Global Elearning?' suggests to the reader, Shalin Hai-Jew, examines the importance of cultural sensitivity and localization in the delivery of global eLearning. She had traced the intersection at which global eLearning lies namely Cultural boundary crossing, "brain drain" in terms of economy besides being a means to "study abroad."

After reviewing some relevant research literature findings, she had highlighted about of how subject matter experts, instructional designers, faculty, teaching assistants, global online learners and others affect cultural sensitivity and localization in global eLearning, which is relevant in terms of educational ethics. The author had also given some helpful principles and strategies for promoting cultural sensitivity in global eLearning. The author had also appended a tool "Cultural Sensitivities and Localizations Course Analysis (CSLCA)", which covers the Course the four arenas of a global eLearning course namely Ecology, Curricular Content, Planned and Unplanned Interactivity and Instructional Strategies.

The third section deals with specific cases which pertain to country specific or group specific or individual experiences based. This section brings out some unique examples of how the practice of ethics is followed in different countries like United Kingdom, United States, Australia, Turkey, and Hong Kong etc.

The Chapter 'Open to people – open with people: Ethical issues in open learning' by Ormond Simpson attributes multi-culturalism as the causative factor to study ethical dimensions in higher education in the UK.

Simpson also stresses the need to review ethical issues in the light of recent developments namely the increasing use of e-learning- which excludes the educationally disadvantaged people, the high dropout rates- which poses the question of whether the distance education has catered to yield optimum results and done the optimum to retain vulnerable students, and the development of methods of predicting student success- which targets the means to convey the information to the student from time to time. He also highlights the need for formulation of models by Practitioners to judge ethical issues in distance and open learning instead of adapting from the medical fields. This chapter puts a challenge that the Research, theory and practice should be unanimously targeted to have advanced state of maturity in terms of ethics in the field of distance education.

In the Chapter, 'An American Perspective of Ethical Misconduct in ODLS: Who's to Blame?' Chi Lo Lim discusses using three specific cases in the American Institution, the problem of persistent academic dishonesty in the United States.

The author besides offering cases of ODLS misconducts at an American University, also documents the process that faculty members took to document academic dishonesty, the appeals process used by students, the consequences of dishonesty and provides insights from faculty faced with dishonesty. Besides enumerating the causative factors for the students to cheat, she also suggests of what administrators should do to support their faculty in curbing dishonesty in their institutions. Concluding, the author stress that the academic integrity is both the responsibility of the Institution and the Faculty.

Patrick J. Fahy in the Chapter 'Ethics Review Issues Faced By Distance Researchers' explains the Tri-Council Policy Statement that governs research ethics in Canada, and then reviews the Ethics of research involving humans intended to protect human dignity by balancing harms and benefits. He also opines that Distance Researchers should be facilitated by psychological, geographical, temporal, and other distances existing between researchers and online subjects to have desirable attributes of research like candor, reflection, thoughtfulness, and objectivity. The author places stress on the need of the non-publishing practitioners and non-researchers to be well-informed about the policies under which distance research must be conducted.

Dr Fahy also covers the issues related to "internationalization" and "localization" often faced by well-informed experienced (published) internationally known distance researchers. He concludes by placing importance for independence and autonomy to be prevalent in all types of researchers which seems to be the need of the hour for all around the Globe.

Judy Nagy in the chapter 'Market Forces In Higher Education: Cheating And The Student-Centred Learning Paradigm' discusses of how in the era of globalisation of education, a rise in academic cheating is more prominent mainly because the higher education students are prone to challenges and opportunities for exhibiting cheating behaviours due to the ready availability of technologies. Dr Nagy has discussed the scenario in the Australian Higher education system, which is a complex mix of competing ideologies and constraints, which places pressures on academics and supporting infrastructures, and the ways adapted to prevent cheating as a case study.

The author also describes of how the positive outcomes of the case study were used to support a plan to offer the increasingly diverse students more than one learning pathway i.e., diversity in teaching paradigms. After categorising the contributing factors to be either traditional or that due to recent developments, the chapter traces the existence of Academic dishonesty and Plagiarism, besides highlighting the use of software to detect students who exhibit such cheating, by means of cutting and pasting from the Internet. The author, through the case study also culminate that academics have little influence on the reasons for cheating.

Lesley S. Farmer, in the Chapter 'Using Real Case Studies To Teach Ethics Collaboratively To Library Media Teachers' has reported of how can Case studies can serve as a way to teach ethical behavior. The author focusing on Teachers of the Library Media, highlight of how a case study serve as a tool to reflect both the instructor's and students' knowledge base. The author's choice of targeting on Teachers of the Library Media, is being mentioned in the first line of the chapter wherein it is written that 'As professionals, librarians are expected to behave ethically'. The author have also explained of how Bloom's 1973 affective domain taxonomy can serve as a view point to examine how pre-service library media teachers (LMT) become ethically competent. In addition, this chapter examines of how using case studies can facilitate professional ethical behavior. The author have also traced of how ethics-base case studies assist practice and pave way to improve the day-to-day life. In the closing para, Dr Farmer has given cues for further research about the potential use of case studies especially with the increased use of digital communication.

Tina J. Parscal and Peter Bemski in their Chapter 'Preparing Faculty To Integrate Ethics Into Online Facilitation' explore through a qualitative case study in Regis, a Jesuit university, of how ethical principles for online facilitation are integrated into an online training course for 18 randomly selected faculty members who are preparing to teach online. In this case study, for each assigned ethical principle, the participants were asked to frame two engaging discussion questions that support two different cognitive levels of learning followed by providing feedback to their partner's questions.

The authors conclude that ethical principles can and should be built in to online courses, and must also be modeled and proactively made a part of the course by faculty as the need for the ethical principles has been felt by both the teacher and the taught.

As evident from the title, 'Computer Ethics: Scenes From A Computer Education Department In Turkey' Yavuz Akbulut, H. Ferhan Odabasi, and Abdullah Kuzu in their Chapter takes the reader to the work on Computer Education ethics in Turkey. Starting with conceptual framework of computer ethics, the authors identified five categories of unethical computer using behaviors of undergraduate students, which were classified, as intellectual property, social impact, safety and quality, net integrity and information integrity and moved on to summarize the applications of the research conducted in the department on the departments' courses. However, the grand finale of the authors is the provision of the implications of ethical practices for distance education, which urge the professionals to keep themselves abreast about the concepts and practices regarding integrity.

The authors also lay emphasis that since Computer science has a crucial place in distance education, necessary precautions for the framing of the base level policies and implementation of the instructional processes, should be well laid to prevent unethical behavior in all forms.

In the Chapter, 'Ethical Practice and on-line learning- a contradiction?: a case study" Donna Harper and Petra Luck have explored the effects of on-line learning using a sample of 60 students from Northern Ireland and England and investigated ethical issues such as individual integrity and rights affecting on-line students who were Early Years Managers. The authors have focused on describing and analyzing ethical dimensions of relationships tutor-student and student-student in on-line, in the context of the pedagogical approach of the subject/institution. The authors have used Pelz's framework, which attempts to identify best practice in on-line learning to examine the ethical issues as perceived by students and found that no major ethical concerns emerged as regard to students' individual integrity and rights. The authors also highlight from the findings that there was optimum social interaction where, Students preferred the opportunity to share and learn from their colleagues and above all, there was no contradiction between working in their professional context (an ethical environment) and studying on-line.

In the Chapter 'Bilingual Plagiarism In The Academic World' Carmel McNaught and David M Kennedy, begin tracing from their experience of how their papers were translated into a different language without due acknowledgements. Multilinguistic professionalism is an asset in the era of globalization, but has serious negative effect to plagiarize work found in another language. The authors, while acknowledging the fact that the ownership of knowledge varies with the culture, challenges the academic community not to do academic theft under the head of translation to facilitate reach to the potential group. As borders cross over for mutual benefit in this shrinking universe, the authors state that, copied work can never be hidden and most of the time plagiarized work in the different language is being identified by the original authors themselves.

Finally, the authors call for integrity in the individuals of the academic fraternity and encourage academic cooperation not only to cultivate the habit of honoring the original work but also to prevent misusing them by any means.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, it can be said that even though this book covers various topics ranging from general administration based to Case-study context based to Technology based, it would claim to have a wide coverage, when the discussion on subjects like ethics governing editorial board in writing of the Distance Education (be it course materials or papers or books), ethics related to ghost writers, outsourced writers and hired writers and ethics related to coauthoring, vetting and refining as a second person also gains priority. However, it is the sincere hope of the Editors, that a Volume II on the same topic be released to cover the aspects which have significant implications for the Open and Distance Learning practices

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