

## **Techniques for Lasting Impact in the Teaching of Ethics**

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*Ethical behavior, the overarching goal of ethics courses, is not an easy outcome to achieve. Adult learning theory prevails when teaching ethics, and activities should include practical, relevant training for best retention. Teachers of ethics should draw upon highly developed techniques in their repertoire of teaching methods that exhibit proficiency of the subject matter. Ideally, the ultimate goal is that adult students remember techniques learned in an ethics class to squelch fraud when it is encountered. This requires that learning techniques include action-oriented activities that are carefully planned to be very purposeful for the greatest impact in the teaching of ethics. The purpose of this paper is to provide tips that will improve the retention of ethics to increase the likelihood that adult students will know what to do if they encounter fraud. The paper describes adult-learning and constructivist approaches to the teaching of ethics with ideas for action-oriented learning activities, including practice of the Giving Voice to Values (GVV) curriculum.*

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### **1. Introduction**

Ethical behavior, the overarching goal of ethics courses, is not an easy outcome to achieve. Teachers of ethics might draw upon highly developed techniques in their repertoire of teaching methods that exhibit proficiency of the subject matter. The methodology should cover the essential theories and principles of ethics, i.e., the learning outcomes of the course. More importantly, a primary goal should be to dispel the likelihood that fraud will occur in the future or to provide students with a strategy to follow to mitigate the tendency for fraud. Ideally, the ultimate goal is that adult students remember techniques learned in the ethics class to squelch fraud when it is encountered. This requires that learning techniques include action-oriented activities that are carefully planned to be very purposeful for the greatest impact in the teaching of ethics.

The purpose of this paper is to provide discussion of the proverbial question of the value of ethics education. Ethics educators are faced with teaching a curriculum that is not fully tested and evaluated for its value. Furthermore, the true value may not be tested by students until many years after the knowledge or awareness is conveyed in the classroom. Nonetheless, ethics educators should strive to teach ethics with the techniques that will bring the greatest retention of the subject matter.

This paper is a repository of tips that will improve the retention of ethics to increase the likelihood that adult students will know what to do if they should encounter fraud. The paper serves as practical discussion of the contextual nature of ethics and

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communicates what is needed to make ethics education more permanent, relevant, and lasting for students. This paper is an attempt to help ethics educators to use sound adult-learning techniques to squelch fraud in students because research is lacking on the effectiveness of training methods for ethics education. The author substantiates and validates learning techniques with educational theory as adapted to the situational nature of ethics and fraud encounters.

Further research is needed to test and prove the soundness of the educational techniques presented. A Wall Street Journal article as recent as February 7, 2013, mentioned the imminent need for ethics educators to teach ethics so as to eradicate fraud from society (Korn, 2013). At the same time, the article posed the question “Does an A in Ethics have any Value?” Business schools are faced with this dilemma as they attempt to tie moral principles to their business programs. Ethics educators are in the state of moving their programs from talk to action pending further study of the effectiveness and value of ethics education. This paper provides a discussion of educational methods that might be used as ethics educators attempt to eradicate fraud in students enrolled in their classes.

## 2. How We Learn Ethics

“Significant learning” is a deep learning of information. Atkinson described this type of learning as a “permanent change in behavior that results from practice” (Wirth, 2012). Others have pointed out that the purpose of learning has shifted from being able to recall information (surface learning) to being able to find and use information (deep learning) (Ibid., p. 10). Clearly with ethics education, the whole student is being educated, and students should know what to do when they encounter fraud in their lives – hence; it represents significant learning.

Ethics comes from the word **ethos** meaning characteristics, attitudes and beliefs, and habits of individuals or groups. Ethics involves the whole being – with both cognitive and affective ways of thinking. The cognitive domain involves thinking of all intellectual sorts. The affective domain includes feelings, emotions, attitudes, values, and motivations (Ibid., p. 5). Within each domain, higher levels of thinking exist. Synthesis and evaluation in the cognitive domain require active thought and reflection (Ibid., p. 6) – techniques that ethics educators can effectively utilize.

The affective domain involves many things that at first seem unconnected; but the subject relates to the student’s commitment to learning (Ibid., p. 7). Because the affective domain involves soft skills that are may be more difficult to measure, educators commonly ignore this domain. But the affective domain is critical for ethics education. Fink proposed a taxonomy of “significant learning” that involves both the cognitive and affective domains (Ibid., p. 8). Significant learning, according to Fink, brings about some kind of lasting change that is important in terms of the learner’s life (Ibid., p. 8).

Ethics involves such “significant learning.” This kind of learning involves critical thinking, the process of analyzing and evaluating – both higher levels of thinking. Ethics education for the whole person is similar to emotional intelligence as written by Goleman

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and cited by Fink; it includes self awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Ibid., p. 9) – all which are needed in ethics education. Activities that are purposeful and that result in the retention of information for the long term should be designed and used in the teaching of ethics. Role playing, viewing multi-media clips and podcasts, filming situations in case studies, watching vignettes, viewing video clips, actively listening to others—all of these rich activities can provide the constructivist process needed for ethics education.

The constructivist theory of learning holds that understanding comes through experiences and interaction with the environment, and that the learner uses a foundation of previous knowledge to construct new understanding (Ibid., p. 11). The richer the links between new and existing information, the deeper the knowledge and the more readily it can be retrieved and applied to new situations. Students with deep approaches to learning have intentions to understand the purpose of the education. They generally engage in vigorous interaction with the content, relate new ideas to old ones, relate concepts to everyday experience, relate evidence to conclusions, and examine the logic of arguments (Ibid., p. 12). In doing this, students construct their own knowledge – a goal suitable for ethics education. In the process, the instructor becomes a facilitator rather than just a teacher; a consultant and advisor rather than a provider of information. Just as the learning of ethics necessitates higher levels of thinking and learning so do the instructional techniques. The instructional techniques need to be profoundly purposeful with the practice of **higher levels of learning** needed for greatest retention of ethics.

The constructivist theory has special merit in the ethics classroom – i.e., ethics instructors can think of their work as constructing actions for students to stop fraud. This view of social reality is consistent with the constructivist movement in cognitive psychology, which posits that individuals build their own understanding of the world through experience and maturation (Gall, 1996). With ethics, intelligence is socially constructed with different meanings for different situations.

### 3. Adult Learning Theory

Ethics education uses adult learning theory for the most part; that is, students are usually young adults and enter the workforce or are simultaneously in the workforce. At any rate, it is adult learning theory that prevails for the teaching of ethics. In that context, we learn from Eduard C. Lindeman in 1926 that “experience is the adult learner’s living textbook” (Knowles, p. 29) and that “experience is the richest resource for adult learning” (Ibid., p. 31). For that reason, ethics educators commonly rely on students’ experience in the ethics classroom, and they should design purposeful discussion techniques with the experience.

### 4. Experience

To rely on students’ experience in the teaching of ethics is a tenet of adult learning theory. The next step is to continue on with appropriate methodologies in the learning process. Group discussion is a value-laden methodology that is available for

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instructors. According to James E. Russell, dean emeritus at Teachers College, Columbia University, the best method for teaching adults is . . . group discussion (Ibid., p. 35). While group discussion is an often used, it does pose challenges when discussing ethical matters. With ethical dilemmas, values usually enter the discussion and can clash. Discussions force students to articulate and defend positions to display their reasoning to others and to accept and respond to criticism (Christensen, p. 288). The instructor can find himself/herself juggling competing topics and discourse. The situation can force the instructor to make judgments and show allegiance for a cause. Someone is likely to be disadvantaged or displeased by almost every action (Ibid., p. 288). The instructor can be left with facilitating discussion that needs to bring out the educational impact of the resulting action while they may be haggling over contentious discourse that frequently ensues. It is the outcome of the case being discussed that should be remembered - not the heated discussion.

### 5. Dialogue

The power of the instructor comes into play. By leading a discussion, the instructor makes many of the ethical choices (Ibid., p. 288). In ethics, subtle decisions can make major impacts. Consequently, the instructor must be comfortable in discussing the different sides and perspectives of the topic being discussed. Dialogue, a rich resource for instructors of ethics, must be handled appropriately. The instructor must craft purposeful strategies and memorable statements to make lasting impact moments. Multi-media can emphasize some key points. Vignettes are such tools that can provide lasting reflection on ethical topics. Video clips emphasizing key points work as well.

Discussion or dialogue is a powerful technique in that being able to talk about situations in mixed company (with high-profile individuals), competitors, clients, and others is a valuable skill to learn and practice. This skill can be practiced in the classroom with role playing activities. Perhaps some high-level individuals can visit the class to add drama to the class and allow students to practice talking about values and ethics.

Kenneth Goodpaster writes that ethics education is a life-long process in which work experience of students has a major effect on character development. Dialogue and group discussion enhance the clarity of understanding of the situation (Goodpaster, p. 26). The instructor takes a leadership role that encourages moral dialogue. In corporate settings, the instructor might have to allow scrutiny of management practices by employees. This can be a rather delicate situation requiring balance to appease all facets and parties in the situation. Albeit in the ethics classroom, the agenda should be to facilitate and help students talk about the situation or dilemma. Then hope that the communication process will continue in the workplace.

Fostering a moral dialogue is crucial in the ethics classroom so students get comfortable discussing matters in all settings. To be able to discuss alternatives in the workplace is an ultimate goal. Dialogue that draws out major ethical behaviors and practices is essential. Classroom discussions are a wholesome activity that instructors can practice to bring about a culture where ethical matters can be opening discussed.

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Impromptu role playing of scenarios are another worthwhile activity. Practice sessions wherein courage is emphasized by simply discussing pertinent topics can aid the cause of ethics. The skill of talking persuasively can also be practiced.

### **6. Sense of Purpose**

The teaching methods for ethics are at a higher level and should be focused on the purpose of the activity. For lasting benefits, each activity as planned for an ethics course should be designed around the intentions and purpose of the activity. For best results, the methodology must be intentional and deliberate to achieve a desired outcome. A sense of purpose should be instilled in the students for the course of recommended action.

For lasting benefits with adult students, the activities must instill a new-found purpose. Activities should be action oriented with opportunities for practice. Practice is a method from which students can benefit immensely. Students should gain a sense of “What would I do if this happened to me?” from the course. This deliberate and intentional teaching in ethics courses can make strides in setting the stage to combat fraud.

### **7. Reflection**

Reflection is another powerful technique that educators should advantageously use when teaching ethics. Reflecting on what is learned is a sure way to make students own the knowledge (Banner, p. 32). Reflection allows integration with knowledge that students already know. Reflection is personal learning that may take some time; reflection often occurs outside of class, over the weekend, on the job, perhaps months later, etc. To ignite reflection in class discussions, the instructor can ask questions like “Why is that so?”, “What does that mean?”, or “How does that relate to what has previously been learned?” Reflection leads to deep understanding of the subject and gives students meaning of what has already been learned. Instructors should capitalize on the power of reflection in the process of teaching ethics.

### **8. Instructor Values and Passion**

When ethics is taught, the type of person whom the educator is, will emerge. The instructor must try to instill a culture that allows the learning of ethics for the student population. The instructor’s values should ideally be “in tune” with the course. It is common pedagogy that good teachers teach with their whole being. They draw upon and offer from their own humanity (Ibid., p. 140). In the case of ethics instruction, values instilled from one’s upbringing emerge and guide the instructor. These ethical principles and values are especially important when teaching ethics to ensure passion and values are a part of the course. The effective instructor should purposefully ensure that students acquire lifelong skills so students can rise above fraud and gain essential skills to encounter fraud-prone situations in their lives.

### 9. Mentoring

Mentoring or connecting with others is another worthwhile strategy that can help and is one skill that the world needs to use more. To be able to enlist the advice of a colleague either inside or outside of the organization can be an extremely valuable strategy to tap when encountering a dysfunctional situation in the office. Students should be informed of this avenue when they are at a loss of what can be done under the circumstances.

Mentoring is a developmental relationship that is embedded with careers (Ragins, p. 5). The work world has become especially complex over the past two decades that has resulted in the need for employees to develop capacity for continuous learning (Ibid., p. 96). For self-directed, continuous learning, learning does become more personal. Mentoring relationships facilitate personal learning (Ibid., p. 98) and are an avenue that can be done in difficult situations.

Mentoring may help employees cope with stressful change in their organizations. Mentoring is a core aspect of developmental behavior for transformational leaders (Ibid., p. 149). Mentors are powerful socializing agents as individuals adjust to new jobs or organizations (Ibid., p. 185). Certainly, instructors of ethics should inform students that mentors might provide insight in certain situations. Mentoring is especially effective in the transfer of learning to the job as protégées can request advice and support from their mentors. The research suggests that students often need to be coached to utilize mentors in situations.

Mentoring is key for adults in the work world. Instructors of ethics both in the academic classrooms and in corporate environments should advise students to rely on their mentors for help in combating fraud. Such strategies can successfully work in situations wherein fraud seems to be running rampant in “good-old-boy” networks and organizations. Resolution of situations in those type of environments often result in employees quitting their jobs, an action that may not always be advisable for students who get in fraud-prone situations. Ways to cope with fraud-prone situations are paramount for working adult students.

### 10. Self-Discipline

Self-discipline is a quality on which values and ethics are based. Students acquire this quality commonly from their parents and teachers. In a disorderly world, external discipline might be necessary when combating fraud. Discipline is necessary both for the sake of the young and is a strategy used when controlling people, like those who cause hardships or wrongdoing to others (p. 81). As students progress through life, discipline becomes self-imposed and is more commonly called self-discipline. Self-discipline is a highly positive force that makes one the sole architect of his/her own life (p. 84). Self-discipline is the foundation for behavior on which ethics educators rely. Coaching to strengthen self-discipline is a strategy that can be used to acquire self-discipline.

### 11. Situational Leadership

Situational leadership involves situations in the development of leaders to influence change that fits various situations. Situations often call for adjustments in life. It is within situations that ethical dilemmas often exist. Not only should the instructor facilitate the discussion of the nuances of ethical case studies, but it is recommended that instructors devise a path to the desired outcome of what should prevail. The effective educator should equip students with strategies for common situations, such as dating situations that pose conflicts-of-interest situations, expense report fraud by one's supervisor, and the need to speak with courage in aforesaid situations. Mini-lessons on the development of courage or persuasion with practice sessions may be in order. If fraud is to be squelched, educators must equip students with tools and techniques to end wrong-doing. Tools and techniques can be customized to fit the situation, which requires that instructors improvise and take an active, action-oriented approach.

Situational and purposeful teaching activities can have lasting impact in the teaching of ethics. Action-oriented activities where students role play situations – such as, meetings to address conflicts-of-interest and other contentious matters are especially meaningful for students. It is the actions that will likely stick from role-playing different scenarios. Students enjoy this activity as well. A purposeful outcome might be to have students formulate discussion with others whereby they display their courage to speak up about questionable situations. Such practice sessions give students tools they can use in actual work situations. Students need to feel the passion, experience the need for fortitude, see how anger can enter into the situation, learn techniques to diffuse anger, and then formulate ways to deal with the different pathways.

An action-oriented activity is to film situations, such as expense report situations in which student workers or employees have to process fraudulent expense reports. Another situation is to undergo training wherein the employee sees fraud “in action” by the trainer. Such actual situations are encountered in real life, and students should be aware of strategies that should be implemented. Video clips can be easily uploaded into you-tube for viewing by the entire class.

### 12. Practice

Practice is vital in the teaching and learning of ethics or any higher learning type of activity. Numerous researchers and authorities have said so. The safest way to approach training is to “over learn” or practice until the brain learns the skills permanently. This is the strategy followed with piano or music lessons – that is, to practice until the skill is a habit. In this way, music can be played in stressful situations or other circumstances, such as during competitions or other conditions.

Students of ethics should practice their approaches or solutions to ethical dilemmas to give them ethical muscle should the situation recur. Ethics instructors should try doing this by use of action-oriented activities. Obviously, the key to successful prevention of fraud is ongoing training wherein people are reminded of the “red flags” that occur in the accounting situations and practices. Ethics educators can provide practice opportunities

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in the class, but managers must implement continual offerings to employees to make the “reminding process” part of the culture of the organization.

Both Raymond Noe, the noted expert trainer, as well as Mary S. Gentile, author of Giving Voice to Values, acknowledge that practice is powerful in training. Instructors should practice ways to counter fraudulent situations as well as practice other strategies to stop or impede subversive acts in organizations. Students should actively practice their methods to ensure they know what to do if the situations ever recur. Raymond Noe tells us that learning does not occur when students only talk about expectations (p. 157). Training wherein students explore and experiment with rules and principles for effective performance stands a better chance of being retained. Students need to continue to practice until they become comfortable using the skill or behavior for the most effective learning; the ethics classroom essentially is the laboratory for such practices opportunities.

### 13. Giving Voice to Values

Ethics educators have a new curriculum that can be tapped in the teaching of ethics. It is the Giving Voice to Values (GVV) curriculum by Mary S. Gentile (Gentile, 2010). The underlying premise is that values-driven scripts and actions are a competency that can be learned and practiced (Ibid., p. 6). Gentile says that students build muscles so that the approach will come more naturally and skillfully when encountered in life (Ibid., p. 7). The GVV approach leads to values-driven actions. Giving voice to values can be seen as a way to embody and enact values. It is about empowering anyone and all of us to a voice that derives the “right thing.” (Ibid., p. 46). Being able to speak up about a wrong may take a kind of courage that requires a unique set of skills. This kind of dialogue should ideally be practiced. To know what to do in the situation of fraud, the ideal outcome for ethics education, may involve the gathering of data to prove or disprove a potential wrong, and it may then require practice of the situation. It can involve collecting allies (in addition to data) to provide arguments to counter the reasons and rationalizations we are likely to hear in situations (Ibid, p. 64). Voicing our values should be practiced and become habit (Ibid., p. 71). Values-based behaviors will then become part of a can-do attitude (Ibid., p. 89) on the part of students when they encounter stressful situations.

GVV is a philosophy needed in the teaching ethics. Students should practice and be coached in that philosophy. GVV, a learnable skill, utilizes persuasion, negotiation, influence, leading-by-example, and actively listening (Ibid., p. 138). The voice must be developed according to Gentile (Ibid., p. 147). To have the courage to say “Can we discuss this?” asked sincerely can make all the difference in effecting action (Ibid., p. 152). GVV is a methodology and philosophy that should be used by effective ethics educators. The practicing of value-laden scripts and questioning techniques is muscle for students. To rehearse with peers will develop skills that build confidence in students. Ethics students can leave the class with their scripts for commonly encountered situations in the workplace. Filming commonly encountered situations can also be a highly rewarding activity.



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The GVV curriculum is all about taking control of lives and careers. It gives students the conviction that choice exists. GVV empowers students to more fully voice and act on their values. GVV builds the muscles and instincts to do so. (Ibid., p. 222). It is incumbent that ethics educators practice GVV skills with students.

### 14. Conclusion

Adult learning theory prevails when teaching ethics, and activities should include practical, relevant training for best retention. Training in the ethics domain should be very purposeful with well-planned interactions so as to teach strategies that might squelch potential fraudulent behavior. An ideal “practice environment” could include activities such as practice in questioning colleagues, co-workers, and subordinates; practice in saying “You believe another check (or step) should be done”; or practice with different soft-skill approaches so students are equipped with “What should I do if this situation presents itself?” Such practice activities may take inner strength or courage that often needs to be developed and practiced. Another worthwhile activity may entail crafting scripts for common situations and the practice of self regulation or restraint in emotional, highly charged situations. The “Giving Voice to Values” curriculum (Gentile, 2010) provides a repertoire of proven soft-skill approaches that have been implemented. Purposeful training activities might customize the GVV approaches to students’ work environments or emphasize real-world scenarios by role-playing. Other longer-term activities can illustrate how to seek advice of mentors, relationship building, and/or influencing co-workers. In summary, ethics educators should use purposeful training activities with social interaction for lasting impact on students.

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