

# Handbook of Research on Teaching Ethics in Business and Management Education

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# Chapter 13

## Developing Ethical Practice through Inquiry: It's not Know-What, It's Know-How

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter explores a graduate course designed for process consultant practitioners and change managers on the ethics of intervening in human systems. The course uses an ethical inquiry process which involves both individual and collective exploration. This is described through the background philosophy of embodied knowledge which underpins the design of the course and is further elaborated from the perspective of the professor and a previous student. Enactive and embodied knowing through an inquiry process draws attention to our skilful action through the challenges we face in acting ethically. This involves practicing three main methods used in the journey towards ethical know-how: the Discipline of Noticing (Mason, 2002), identifying the gap between espoused theory and theory-in-use (Argyris, 1995), and an individual and collective inquiry process (Roy et al, 2003) into ethical issues the authors have faced in their personal and/or professional lives.*

### INTRODUCTION

Warren teaches, and Andrew was a student in, a course on the Ethics and Philosophy of Human Systems Intervention in the Masters program in Human Systems Intervention (HSI) at Concordia University. The HSI program aims to integrate theory, values and skills in organization develop-

ment and human systems intervention and is designed to develop expertise as process consultants (Schein, 1999) for future organizational leaders and consultants who are interested in facilitating change processes within human systems. An understanding of this approach to consultation evolves through developing a learning community where students engage with theory in order to reflect on their experience and interaction with others.

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## ***Developing Ethical Practice through Inquiry***

Schein (1999) defines process consultation as “a set of activities on the part of the consultant that help the client to perceive, understand, and act upon the process events that occur in the client’s environment in order to improve the situation as defined by the client” (p. 11). These activities constitute interventions with the client through a collaborative process of data gathering and a series of interactions appropriate to the client context.

According to Taylor, De Guerre, Gavin, & Kass (2002) (who developed this cohort program) the purpose of intervention “at a process level is to enable the client system to catalyze its own learning and renewal, to change normative patterns to be more proactively adaptive; that is, to become a learning system” (p. 361). In year one of our program, students take a course in consultation methods which enables them to engage in an off-campus project matching a student consulting team with a client organization. The students organize themselves into consulting teams, find a client, obtain ethics approval to carry out fieldwork, and work with their client to design and implement a project related to organizational change.

In the second year, this process is replicated, except that each student engages individually, based on the process consultation model, with a client organization, be it a community, non-profit, governmental or corporate organization. These projects challenge the student consultants to develop an understanding of their values and attitudes as they work with a client.

One of the required courses in the first year is the Ethics and Philosophy of Human Systems Intervention. The pedagogical approach to this course is the subject of this chapter. Before we describe the activities in this course, which involve writing about ethical dilemmas and engaging in a collective and individual inquiry process about the themes that arise from these dilemmas, we feel it is important to provide the epistemological background which underpins its design, and which is rooted in a concept of the development

of ethical awareness and action which is called “ethical know-how” (Varela, 1999).

## **BACKGROUND TO THE COURSE: ETHICAL KNOW-HOW**

*Moral knowledge, as Aristotle describes it, is clearly not objective knowledge, i.e., the knower is not standing over against a situation that he merely observes; he is directly confronted with what he sees. It is something that he has to do (Gadamer, 1999, p. 314).*

“The change process is one not merely of transmitting ideas but of changing values... the process consultant is concerned about passing on his skills and values” (Schein, 1999, p. 191, 194). While this change process involves the consultant passing on values, the student becoming consultant is often unaware of his/her personal values and ethical practices. Therefore, the *teaching of ethical practice in process consultation does not just involve knowing-what set of techniques or activities to lead a client group through; learning knowing-how and when to use them is just as important.* John Dewey (1922) notes:

*We may be said to know how by means of our habits. We walk and read aloud, we get off and on streetcars, we dress and undress, and do a thousand useful acts without thinking of them. We know something, namely, how to do them (p. 177).*

According to Dewey, all human action is *moral* action because it has an impact on, and implications for, both self and society. The basis of the course’s approach to inquiry is that the development of an understanding of our values requires us to become attuned to, and act appropriately in, our environment. Through repeated engagement, our ethical know-how is employed and, through feedback, modified. What we experience is determined by what we do and what we know how to

do is determined by what we are open to doing. This is further understood when we approach this process through *enactive* and *embodied knowing*. *Enactive knowing* means that ethics develops not only as principles, but emerges collectively through engagement with others in joint and shared action. *Embodied knowing* means our ethical practices depend upon being actively attuned to, and in, the world.

Varela (1999) calls our lived situations “microworlds” (p. 10). By this Varela refers to the repertoire of habitual behaviours that ready us to act in every specific lived situation, and each of these situations involve interactions with other people. Moreover, we are constantly moving from one situation to another. Being ready to act is part of a person’s identity; the corresponding lived situation is the microworld which invites us to act. Thus ‘who we are’ cannot be separated from the world and people we are in relationship with. The point is not to categorize these microworlds, but to notice their recurrence, and to become adept at responding to them. It is that noticing which is the foundation of the course which we are describing.

When these microworlds break down, ethical know-how is generated through a “commonsensical emergence of an appropriate stance of the agent’s life” (p. 11). What is “appropriate” is determined through inquiry into the context of past actions, present stances, and plans for the future. In the course of any work as a consultant in a system (be it through data gathering, design, or intervention), one is faced with a multitude of decisions without recourse to planning, deliberation, or reflection. This requires thoughtfulness, which “leads to ethical awareness. When such ethical awareness is followed by ethical action in any sphere where action is needed, then we live and act as responsible citizens in our communities” (Speicher, 1998, p. 432).

In our view, moment-to-moment decision-making is the performing and enacting of ethical practice. Our practice is not based on objective principles which we apply in order to cause prede-

termined outcomes. Rather, principles emerge in spaces that integrate the purposes, processes, and outcomes of practice. Our living experiences as interveners in any system enable us to explore these spaces through an *enactive* and *embodied* view of knowledge, where we are part of a particular series of improvised experiences of intervention which are shaped by, and unfold in, the environment in which we are working.

In the day-to-day activity of a process consultation project contracted with a client, we do not stand back from the system as an observer and then impose our plan on it. We are in a much tighter relationship, as (inter)acting is experienced as a steady flow of skilful activity in response to our own sense of the situation. We must learn to continually adapt to the situation in an embodied way. As we respond to the situations in which we work in, we “skillfully cope” (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1999, p. 111) within the steady flow of the living/lived experiences of the system. This process, which Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1991) have described as letting go (“rather than to struggle to achieve some particular state of activity, then body and mind are found to be naturally coordinated and embodied” [p. 29]), we begin to pay attention to what we are thinking feeling and doing in the moment of (inter)action with others. This means we often must do things out of the range of conscious thought. Varela et al. (1991) refer to this as embodied and compassionate action, avoiding harmful actions and performing beneficial ones.

While agreeing that every society needs rules of behaviour, we believe that, unless such rules contain “wisdom that enables them to be dissolved in the demands of responsivity to the particularity and immediacy of lived situations, the rules will become sterile, scholastic hindrances to compassionate action rather than conduits for its manifestation” (Varela et al., 1991, p. 252).

We try and accomplish enactive and embodied knowing in a class on the ethics of human systems intervention by drawing attention to our skilful action through the challenges we face.

This involves practicing three main elements in the journey *towards* ethical know-how: the Discipline of Noticing (Mason, 2002), identifying the gap between espoused theory and theory-in-use (Argyris, 1995), and an individual and collective inquiry process (Roy *et al*, 2003) into ethical issues which we have faced in our personal and/or professional lives. As we are talking here about ‘know-how’, and not ‘know-what’, we will outline this process in the same sequence of the experiences that students have in the course, itself an ethical inquiry process. It is our hope that this gives the reader some inspiration to further investigate this approach to teaching, learning, and living ethically.

## **DISCIPLINE OF NOTICING**

### **Developing a Reflective Writing Practice: ‘Accountings of’ Ethical Dilemmas**

The discipline of noticing is an approach to the development of professional practice. It involves learning to pay attention to situations as they evolve. Thus one notices a possibility for the future, what is going on in the present moment, and reflects on what has been observed previously to prepare for the In the course on Ethics and Philosophy of Intervention students are introduced to the discipline of noticing by learning to write descriptions of experiences without interpreting them (what Mason [2002] calls *accounting-of*: “it is helpful first to get agreement about the ‘thing’ to be analyzed, the phenomena to be explained” [p. 40]), and then stepping back from the writing to see what has been noticed. Therefore, that which is noticed in practice, or that which attracts attention for noticing, is closely allied to understandings of the problem. Mason offers practical and conceptual insights into this relationship:

*It is almost too obvious to say that what you do not notice, you cannot act upon; you cannot choose to act if you do not notice an opportunity. Noticing requires sensitivity (Mason, 2002, pp. 7–8).*

If something is not noticed, then it is unlikely that a response will be forthcoming. Therefore, that which is noticed, and how and why, influences not only the nature of reflection but also the action(s) as a result of reflection. As Wright (2005) puts it, “[w]ithout some consciousness of my own becoming – my own transformative experience of being, which exists in part through my naming of it – it is impossible to appreciate any becoming or transformation beyond my self: indeed, to appreciate change and the systemic boundaries within which change occurs” (p. 89).

Noticing through our senses and writing that down enhances, and brings forth our experiences in the world, compelling us to not simply feel, listen, or see but bring heightened consciousness of these actions, in language and emotion. “This is the initial movement in the feedback system we encounter and identify ourselves within” (Wright, p. 90). Reflective analysis helps us to capture the types of experience we have within ethical practice and “the dynamics of the activity that could have been responsible for its emergence” (Hauw, 2009).

Noticing as inquiry helps us pay attention to what we are noticing. “Attention to noticing turns studies focused on other people and situations into studies which learn about other people and situations through learning about oneself. What makes some features salient and others invisible? What is the significance of what I find myself observing” (Mason, p. 181)?

### **WHAT IS BEING NOTICED: THE GAPS BETWEEN ESPOUSED THEORY AND THEORY-IN-USE**

The focus of the accounting-of moments are where students have experienced an ethical dilemma,

where they have noticed a challenging intervention in a human system, where they have a feeling that their espoused theory (“the theory that individuals espouse and that comprised their beliefs, attitudes, and values” [Argyris, 1995, p. 20]) and theory-in-use ([“the theory that they actually employed”, p. 20]) are in conflict. It is key to the inquiry process that students are asked not to try and resolve the conflict they have made an *account-of*. Often these conflicts between espoused theory and theory-in-use are a requirement for surviving in the system and can never be resolved. Sometimes, the theory-in-use might need to be changed; at other times, the espoused theory of how to act in this system must be changed. And, at other times, both need to be changed.

This is when what Mason (2002) calls *accounting-for* happens. It is where students offer “interpretation, explanation, value-judgment, justification, or criticism” (p. 41). Students begin to ask through their writing why they have had these responses to their lived experience. Mason calls this *wisening*, where there is a probing of details in the students’ accounts of their ethical dilemmas, thus looking at commonalities and contradictions between events and their responses to them. “Through such analysis one may become a little wiser, a little more likely to choose to act non-habitually in the future” (p. 42).

### **THE WORKSHOP PROCESS: ‘ACCOUNTING FOR’ ETHICAL DILEMMAS**

Through the reflective writing process the student practitioner develops critical thinking skills that enhance ethical practice. Such reflection is further encouraged through a workshop process, in which we create a safe and supportive context where students can experience and deal with uncertainty where there are no easy answers to the dilemmas they face. Such an exploration through group discussion amongst a student cohort that

comes from diverse backgrounds and goals (corporate, community development, social activism, government, not-for-profit) enables each to bring different questions and perspectives, pushing each other for elaboration of thoughts and feelings.

Now, stepping back from this *account-of* their ethical dilemma, they each then reflect on the issues/themes/areas of investigation that arise from their review of the situation. These generative themes<sup>1</sup>, “which contain the possibility of unfolding into again as many themes, which in their turn call for new tasks to be fulfilled” (Freire 1970, p. 92), that emerge in discussions between graduate students become the basis of an intervention into the life of the cohort based on these themes of ethical practice. We use a collective inquiry process here, a question based process of “self-directed learning that involves students determining what they need to learn, identifying resources and how best to learn from them, using resources and reporting their learning, and assessing their progress in learning” (Roy *et al*, 2003).

Through an adaptation of an open space process (Owen, 1997), students identify key themes that have arisen from their ethical dilemmas and groups are formed to develop inquiry questions that emerge from the themes they have selected. These questions<sup>2</sup> become the foundation of the inquiry process. The student groups then spend two months reading relevant literature and discussing the inquiry questions and sub-questions in order to design a facilitated workshop which becomes an intervention into their own cohort as a human system. Following this workshop, new themes emerge that become the basis of a draft ethical code of conduct for the cohort as process consultants.

### **INQUIRY: THE STUDENT AS INQUIRER INTO A HUMAN SYSTEM**

Stacey and Griffin (2005) underline that the individual and the social are not separate, but are

## ***Developing Ethical Practice through Inquiry***

part of the same phenomenon. The individual is the singular and the social is the plural of “interdependent embodied persons...individuals are paradoxically forming and being formed by the social *at the same time*” (p. 32, 33). The complex responsive process theory they advocate fits with this ethics course as students take their own experiences of ethical practice and try to understand it. In addition, because the cohort is a learning community, ethical know-how developed through this course is collective (no one can know everything there is to know about ethics), participatory (everyone has experiences of ethical know-how in their lives) and emergent (new knowing emerges in the interaction of students between themselves as knower and the world of ethics that is coming to be known). Ethical know-how, in other words, emerges through interactions between all three types of knowing.

This is why there is a link between individual student’s own ethical dilemmas and a collective inquiry process. The course models an inquiry process into ethics in both personal and social aspects, using what Argyris (1995) calls “Model II theory-in-use” (p. 22) where “behaviours are crafted into action strategies that openly illustrate how the actors reached their evaluations or attributions and how they crafted them to encourage inquiry and testing by others” (p. 22). In order to reflect this, the inquiry process is structured as an intervention into the human system of the graduate cohort.

In the month following the workshop, students are asked to reflect on their inquiry process as it happened in their group, as individuals, and as internal consultants to their cohort through the intervention. “The purpose of this assignment is to, using readings on co-operative inquiry (Heron & Reason, 2001), on complexity and inquiry (Park, 2007), and on communities of inquiry from a systems perspective by Kennedy and Kennedy (2010), reflect individually on your inquiry process you undertook in your group and with the whole cohort and think about how you might

apply such a process in process consultation and action research” (Linds, 2011).

Both Park (2007) and Heron and Reason (2001) emphasize the level of input that participants have on the construction of the central question in an inquiry process. While Heron and Reason focus on the “what” of inquiry, that is to say they propose an interpretation of what participative inquiry is and the different models that are examples of the theory in action, Park focuses more on the “how” of it. All three authors also explore the implications of a facilitator as inquirer on the development of an inquiry process.

Park (2007) approaches inquiry from a complexity perspective. He underlines that “the capacity to hold paradox in mind and sustain the contradictory is vital for seeing the mind, life and the cosmos as being simultaneously stable and unstable, knowable and unknowable” (p. 192). The emergence of knowing comes out of the chaos and complexity of the relationships between participants and between participants and the ideas that are being generated. Park describes this process as involving an interrelationship between a human system and the phenomena. “In other words, systems and participants are bringing forth and brought into being because of their relationships to each other” (p. 193).

The inquiry process can be used to bring forth and build relationships in a human systems context and allows for phenomena to emerge in a non-linear, unpredictable fashion. The role of the student inquiry group is as facilitator for the cohort, a facilitator committed to the issues and themes they are inquiring about through the workshop they conduct with the cohort. This is particularly useful for students who wish to work as internal consultants in organizational change as they experience the grey boundaries between involvement and distance. Heron’s (1999) notion of the co-operative mode of facilitation is useful here. Here the facilitator shares their “power over the learning process...you collaborate with the



members of the group in devising the learning process; your facilitation is co-operative” (p. 6).

The questions generated by students enable them to “create knowledge through the pursuit and refinement of questions and to develop self-directed learning, group, and communication skills along the way” (Park, p. 196). This happens through engagement with the questions themselves, involving “connected knowing, inter-subjectivity, democratic relationships and narrative-based evaluation” (p. 198), where storytelling (about situations where ethical dilemmas have emerged) through the discipline of noticing enables students to capture and share their personal reflections. The complexity of the microworlds of the student consultant then becomes manageable as ethical practice becomes *about* and *towards* something concrete. As Boyles (2006), drawing on Dewey, points out, knowing, knowledge, and intelligence are distinct processes in the inquiry process. “Knowing is a process of inquiry (specific instances of applying oneself to solving problems), knowledge is the stable outcome of an inquiry; and intelligence is the capacity to act (to inquire) in specific ways” (p. 64). Inquiry thus enables the emergence of a relational process of knowing that incorporates a connection between individual experience, collective wisdom and mindful practice.

It is through such a co-operative process of inquiry, developed and led by members of a facilitating group, that a form of collective wisdom emerges in the cohort. They begin to “develop new and creative ways of looking at things and learn how to act to change things you may want to change and find out how to do things better” (Heron & Reason, 2001, p. 179). This requires ‘work’ as often unstated barriers appear in groups working together. Heron and Reason also underline that this is an iterative process; cycling through, and between, experiential, imaginal, conceptual and practical learning and knowing.

Heron (1999) calls these four processes “manifold learning” (p. 3) which are interdepen-

dent forms of knowing that enhance each other in the inquiry process. Heron and Reason write that “we say that knowing will be more valid if these four ways of knowing are congruent with each other: if our knowing is grounded in our experience (experiential), expressed through our stories and images (imaginal), understood through theories which make sense to us (conceptual), and expressed in worthwhile action in our lives (practical)” (p. 183). Inquiry workshops must include all four of these types of knowing as our hope is that this may model what might be done in an intervention with a process consultant’s client organization. Woven into workshop designs are threads that are both systematic and rational (what Heron & Reason [2001] call Apollonian) as well as imaginal, expressive and imaginative (what Heron & Reason [2001] call Dionysian), providing the participants with what Heron and Reason (1997) call an “extended epistemology” or ways of knowing beyond the traditional conceptual ideas of knowledge. Students body sculpt, write haikus and tweets, write and sing songs, create depictions of emotions or thoughts with plasticine, create art, act out dramatic scenes, dance and discuss the topics under inquiry, thus experiencing different ways of knowing about, and intervening in, a human system.

As we pointed out earlier, the inquiry process involves questions, not answers. Our experience is that questions are usually initially posed from a problem-solving perspective, ie. How do we solve X ethical problem, but soon it becomes evident that defining the problem is as important as solving it. Kennedy and Kennedy (2010) call this process a conversation, which is “dialogical and dialectical—the former in that it depends for its success on a commitment by each member to the interrogation of one’s own beliefs and assumptions as well as of others’; the latter in that it moves forward through the emergence and attempted resolution of the contradictions both within and between assumptive frameworks” (p. 3). A good example of this is the question developed by one

inquiry group in one particular cohort: ‘What are the implications of being true to yourself when we are not always stable, good or true?’ Contrast this question with one from another group which had more of a problem-solving focus: “What conditions might enable the transferability of ethical know-how across organizational cultures?”

Of course, power is implicit in the relationships that develop between professor and students, within the inquiry group and with the cohort in the workshop. Hopefully, though, students also discover that power can be used as a positive force in this process of inquiry. As Bai (2001) points out, “. . . power does not lie in the individual beings but in their mutual interactions; hence democratic power is found in the relationships themselves. . . and in the collective wisdom that emerges from the mutual inquiry, consultation, and deliberation” (p. 308).

## **OUR EXPERIENCES**

To illustrate the inquiry process described above, we will reflect on, and question, two examples of learning from (and through) our practice, first as a professor, then as a graduate student.

### **Warren: As a Professor – Creating the Conditions to Explore Ethical Dilemmas**

I see my role as a collaborator in this process. I continue to learn about my own ethical practice through opening up my senses to, and being sensed through, the relationships that emerge in my teaching. Such connections are made through experiencing the process itself. I then use what we have lived through to open up possibilities for interpreting and understanding new experiences. Knowing emerges through intuition and introspection. In this way, by going through similar experiences I might listen better to the experiences of others (Howard 1996).

## **Accounting-of**

A class in the fall of 2009. Two students were discussing a reading as part of a group activity. I joined them. As they were talking about something different from the reading, I asked them what they were talking about. They shared that they were concerned about something that had happened in a cohort activity the night before<sup>3</sup> and asked me to find a way to enable the whole cohort to discuss what had happened. During the lunch break I thought about it, asking myself what my espoused theory was about this class and how my design for the afternoon might be made congruent with this espoused theory.

My espoused theory of teaching ethics was that the content of the class comes from the students, but that any design had to be coherent with a “spiral model of learning” (Arnold, *et al.* 1991, p. 38) that enabled an analysis, using theory, of particular student experiences and this analysis leads to action. In addition, my espoused theory is that I am not there to change the patterns of interaction among people, but rather to concentrate on creating the conditions for these changes to occur (Stacey & Griffin, 2005). Another goal is to model this process in my teaching. I asked myself: *Does an exploration of what had happened in the cohort the night before fit with my goal for this particular class?*

I had initially planned to do an activity about their individual ethical dilemmas. I decided to adapt my activity and ask them the question: What were your feelings last night when the incident of conflict emerged (*the past*)? What are you feeling about what happened then right now (*the present*)? What can be learned and applied from this discussion (*the future*)?

I often use Image (Boal, 1992) as both an embodied representation of, and a catalyst to explore, issues and experiences. As participants recall an incident or experience they have had, they create a series of static body shapes or ‘image’ to represent that experience. Imaging enables the participant

to fill the body shapes with feelings and thoughts that come from the interplay between the physical shape and experience. Thoughts and words initially emerge from the individual's awareness of the static body in the image and the world around the image. Images can then be activated into motion, movements that arise out of the interplaying of the physical shapes of bodies and their interpretation in words and action.

After a simple activity of sculpting their feelings into a body Image, we found common Images and put them together as groups to create a group Image of the value that was challenged when they had that common feeling. The inquiry process continued to deepen an understanding of what was going on in the cohort. The formed groups of images were viewed and decoded and interpreted. I asked those viewing each Image to name the value they saw being challenged, and then asked the group making the Image what value they were portraying. I then asked each group Image to make an Image of the opposite of the value that was challenged. Lastly, we engaged in a discussion of the Images and interpretations and what values were emerging as being challenged and affirmed in the relationships in the cohort.

This is an example of a discipline of noticing (in this case, feelings), linked to a dialogue about the espoused theories and theories-in-use of the cohort. The use of Image (bodies in relationship as language) became an emergent form of Inquiry that raised questions for all of us about the dynamics of the cohort. Ironically, what emerged in discussion about the Images was how diverse they were in values, feelings and content, and this theme of diversity was central to the conflict that was emerging in the cohort on this particular weekend.

One student wrote me after the class, "you mentioned that you were taking a risk and that was the best modeling of all. Much of what we will be doing as [consultants] will have some level of risk. It was great to see risk in action and have a successful outcome". This response underlines what Varela (1999) points out, "we *always* operate

in some kind of immediacy of a given situation. Our lived world is so ready-at-hand that we have no deliberateness about what it is and how we inhabit it" (p. 9).

### Accounting-for

*As people make sense differently they act differently, and it is in this action, in continuing actions with others, that macro patterns change in emergent ways which cannot be predicted or controlled (Stacey & Griffin, 2005, p. 33).*

What comes from all this? I haven't just *had* these experiences; I exist inseparably from them. They are part of the history of my life as a teacher of ethics. Ethics emerges in the compassionate actions and simple acts of everyday living. They are cultivated partly through engaging with the other. This address, this obligation to listen, conveys meaning that resides neither in words nor texts, but, as happened in the class, in the give and take of subjects in a constantly shifting shared space. This is perhaps where the social negotiation of ethical relationships between self and other begins.

I was/am not a detached observer reflecting on the situation of those moments. These "holistic and gripping experiences" (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1990, p. 242) became the basis of the development of my skilful coping with the people (and the inter-play within their own lives).

*Because truly ethical behavior takes the middle way between spontaneity and rational calculation, the truly ethical person can, like any other kind of expert, after acting spontaneously, reconstruct the intelligent awareness that justifies the action. And, like any other kind of expert, the truly ethical person can use such a postiori justification as a stepping stone for continued learning (Varela, 1999, pp. 31-32)*

It is important to ask here, how might one learn as a student consultant to engage in this way? Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) maintain that the "... teachers of a skill are frequently articulate dispensers of helpful facts, procedures and principles. As such, they may hasten the student's progress from novice to advanced beginner to competent performer. But if, like expert systems, all they know are facts and rules of inference, such teachers cannot possibly be successful doers or guides on the way to expertise (p. 201)."

How does a student consultant move beyond ethics as 'facts' and 'rules of inference' to intuitive action? This ethical know-how is based on continually developing common sense, wisdom and mature judgement. We need to move within the space/time of someone working not as a detached observer but implicated in a spell of involvement in the here and now. In this way, ethical expertise isn't just something we turn to, but we experience the enactment of our practice drawing that expertise out of us.

We become listeners in the consulting relationship as we begin to know and understand through intuition and introspection. In this context, ethical engagement means responding to situations similar to those the students have already experienced (and become expert in responding to). This includes not only experiencing the inquiry workshops, but also being in touch with the experiences that were outlined in the initial ethical dilemmas that gave rise to the workshop themes. Thus, ethical practice is not an abstract process. Principles and theories serve only for certain stages of learning. No principle or theory can ground an expert ethical response as each dynamic situation disrupts the ground we expect. We learn from our satisfaction and regret in similar situations. It means staying involved and refining one's caring responses in practical wisdom and compassion for the world.

## **Andrew: As a Graduate Student – Enacting and Embodying Knowing**

In the fall of 2005 I entered the HSI program with 20 of my fellow members of my cohort. We spent the next two years getting to know each other as we came to understand ourselves as a temporary learning system in service of each person's unique path as a human systems intervener. By focusing on our own dynamics and relations as a cohort we were able to have a very concrete basis on which to explore the more general patterns and principles of human systems. Of course, this is not always easy. Below is a reflection, written from my memory of the class, on the experiential encounter of learning 'human systems intervention' through Warren's approach to teaching ethics-in-action:

### **Accounting-of**

Our cohort has been together for 6 months now. We continue to struggle to make decisions as whole group (not an easy task with 20+ people!). Again we are struck by the question of power in our interactions. We spent the last evening trying to understand what is going on in our group. Talking around our circle, talking around our dynamics. It is like trying to catch fish with bare hands. Today, Warren is discussing power and the ethics of intervention. He is helping us to situate power within our own group dynamics.

Rather than talk in a circle this time, he asks us to find a partner to work with. We wander the room until each person has found a partner and then he asks us to stand across from the other person and to follow their movements. My partner and I are standing there not quite sure what to do. We see other people beginning to move with each other. Tentatively, we each start to follow the other as we are standing there. Slowly we begin to move our hands in front of each other like a mirror. Our instruction is to follow, but we are also initiating as following leads the other person to move in response too. We are moving our arms and legs

now – wobbling and wandering in each other’s movements. The tentative beginning is turning to mutual concentration. After a few minutes we stop.

### Accounting-for

Warren asks us to reflect on this process. We both commented on feeling awkward and nervous at the beginning of this exercise. I certainly felt a bit silly standing there waving my arms around. But then after a few moments, something happened where we became conscious of how the other person was moving. I began to notice the slight differences in our ‘mirror image’; how my partner was moving their fingers and balancing on their legs. Seeing these slight differences I tried to exaggerate them and found that my partner was now responding to and exaggerating these changes in movement. We talked about seeing how the other person was moving and how that came to, almost immediately, become one’s own movements. This sparked some observations of how follow each other in our group and particularly how we resist following each other. For example, when we are resistant to someone else’s suggestion or idea this makes it very difficult to see where they are coming from. My partner tells me that she has often found me very hard to follow in our work together, but in this exercise it felt different, like we were both moving together. Following each other in this instance became easy as we could see, quite literally, where the other person was standing and where they were moving.

Somehow by following each other’s physical movements, by focusing on our immediate embodied interaction, we came to reflect on the experience of influence in our group at large. In these micro-movements we come to notice what it is like to be in each other’s presence. This experience of ‘microworlds’ is at the very concrete basis of organizational and community dynamics. Power is the immediate dynamic tension lived in our interactions with each other. The accumulated history of interactions often leads to the solidify-

ing of power relations in human systems where people come to play certain roles and embody habitual behaviors. By attending to our enactive and embodied knowing we gain access to the ‘microworlds’ in which our larger systems are constructed. The implication is that we may be able to participate more fully in the co-construction of our organizational realities.

### CONCLUSION: COMPLEX ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN THE CLASSROOM

*Complex [phenomena] is used to refer to the tangled and dynamic web of participants, systems and relationships that influence (and are influenced by) an object of study (Park, 2007, p. 193).*

Change and its effects do not follow a linear path. Any bump on the journey will have an effect. Human systems are complex and adaptive and thus they have the capacity to learn by self-organizing in response to complexity.

Through the inquiry process, students become influenced by emergent phenomena in every encounter with new forms of knowing, with each other, and with the environment in which they work. It becomes difficult to pinpoint what makes a group effective, but students become aware of this difficulty as a condition of working with human systems. Through the ethics course, we introduce the concept of ‘safe uncertainty’ (Mason, 1991) which is a framework for thinking about one’s work, away from certainty to what fits at a particular moment. This is necessarily a messy process, with no easy answers. Students then bring these experiences into their work as consultants as they work with clients in using similar processes to exploring the (ethical and other) problems that exist in the system which have no easy answers.

As human beings, we bring something to each encounter in community. When there is a breakdown in the “chain of habitual thought patterns and conceptions” (Varela et al, 1991, p.

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27), new possibilities emerge. As we have seen, this type of breakdown in a lived situation is a creative moment, where concrete action is born. Because this happens with such immediacy, we don't see this, nor are we aware that we do not see it. This process involves a re-sensitization (through "mindful, open ended reflection"; Varela et al., 1991, p. 27) to the moments of our living in the world. Here are some of our thoughts of the implications for us as professor, and student.

### **As a Student**

As a student and consultant, we approach organizational dynamics from the positions of active learning and inquiry. Entering an organization for the first time to develop a consulting project requires inquiry into the unique concerns, constraints, and competencies of a client system. The perspectives of both student and consultant are, by their nature, based on an inquiry process. And it is from the perspective of both student and consultant that leads me to suggest that trained inquiry may be at the heart of ethical practice in organizational life.

Many dilemmas in organizations arise from entrenched values, visions, roles and responsibilities that do not serve the organization's purpose or the people who make up the organization. As an organization develops over time relational and behavioral patterns accumulate ('ways of doing things'). Over time we may become desensitized to what is happening right in front of us as we substitute patterns of the 'way things are done' for the way we are actually doing things. Argyris' (1995) notion of espoused theory vs. theory-in-use points to this very sort of conundrum in which may confuse what we are doing for what we think we are doing.

It may be easy to imagine how an elaborate architecture of rationalizations can obscure highly unethical behavior. Indeed, the very purposes of an organization may be terribly destructive to people and the environment, while the destruction goes

unnoticed as the 'way things are done'. This is as true for corporations, unions, not-for-profits, government, or any other structured group of people. Ethical practice in our contemporary society is the capacity to integrate our actions with our intentions. We may never be able to attain certainty that we are doing the "right thing", but we can, through practice, notice the way we are doing things and move closer to the way we want to be doing them.

In working as a student with Warren, I came to notice how the smallest of everyday actions are what come to make up the biggest and most complex social organization. By being able to notice the immediate dynamics happening around us, we may get a handle on the patterns of interaction that constitute organizational reality. Our capacity to generate ethical behavior and encourage that of others rests on our willingness to be open to new ideas and new ways of doing things. Or perhaps, it is our willingness to treat old ideas and ways of doing things as new encounters.

### **As a Professor**

There are, of course, challenges to this happening in a classroom situation. As Park outlines, "If I cannot control the learning directly, do I still think that I can step in and out of the classroom system and set the conditions that will cause students to learn? Am I trying to point to what students did themselves, but then say it was because of what I did or didn't do that they perform in certain ways? As an evaluator, what do I do about issues of power and legitimacy?" (p. 203). The course creates a "safe space" or a "zone of complexity" (Park, p. 194) which is a space between competence, which are skills that can be assessed and capability, which involves the integration of knowledge, skills and personal qualities. This is a place where learners are free to engender complex thinking and "trust action without knowing the outcome" (Tzu, 1998, p. 17). These are experiences where students are invited to experience ambiguity and

uncertainty, risk and create. I am mindful that this is sometimes not possible in the world outside of the classroom. As I teach these same students in their second year, supervising projects where they are no longer working in teams but alone with a support network of their cohort, their field supervisor and faculty as academic supervisor, I am mindful of the need to continue to work through the co-operative inquiry cycle of reflecting on (my and their) experiences, investigating them further in terms of ethical practice and cycling this back into the first year course for new cohorts.

Secondly, I realize that, as a professor, I am marking assignments, while at the same time, asking students to take risks in these zones of complexity. This could be seen as an ethical dilemma. On the other hand, if we reframe the situation, maybe this is just a part of the conditions of the learning system that is a university graduate program with all its demands and constraints on all involved, and boundaries between parts of the system X. These conditions can be part of the ‘space of possibility’, an emergent space which is “defined in the process of engagement” (Davis, 2004, p. 169), and where interactions result in something that cannot be traced back to the original components of interaction. For example, on reading the student essays that reflected on the inquiry process and workshops they facilitated, I realized that there were many emergent themes to take back to the cohort for more discussion and inquiry. In the first year that this assignment was given, there were at least 32 different themes that were then used in the last class of the year to focus discussion on the practical implications of the inquiry process as an intervention strategy useful for students who were ‘becoming process consultants’<sup>4</sup>. For example,

- “What is brought from outside the group into the inquiry process? We cannot divorce ourselves from the history of the group we are working with, nor our history with our inquiry facilitation group”;

- “What gets in the way of ‘real’ cooperative inquiry, or is that part of the conditions cooperative inquiry accepts as part of the process?”;
- “How might we foster and work with the release of ‘creative energy’ that emerges in the inquiry process?” and, lastly, and perhaps most importantly for an ethics class, and
- “What are the ethics related to inquiry and how might we deal with ‘inquiry-caution’ (orange lights that make us think whether it is even appropriate to use an inquiry process in a process consultation project)?”

In the next year, these questions were added to new questions developed by the next group of students so that, gradually, a living archive of inquiry questions is becoming available to students to inquire further into. This ensures that the teaching of, and through, ethical know-how will continue to emerge from class to class and from cohort to cohort, reflecting the cyclical nature of the lived experiences of teacher, students as process consultants. The next step in the development of this process will be to incorporate into the course the learning about ethical know-how in the world of process consulting from the experiences of students in their 2<sup>nd</sup> year projects as this will further connect the course to the world of process consulting.

*~May we all aspire to be old hands working with a beginner’s mind.~*

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## KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**Discipline of Noticing:** (Mason, 2002): An approach to professional practice that uses writing to enable one to learn to pay attention to experiences as they happen.

**Ethical Know-How:** (Varela, 1999): Moment-to-moment decision making as the performing and enacting of ethical practice.

**Enactive Knowing:** The epistemology which situates all knowledge in the acts through which knowledge is performed.

**Embodied Knowing:** The epistemology which situates all knowledge in the physical body and its movements.

**Espoused Theory:** (Argyris, 1995): What you believe in terms of values and attitudes.

**Inquiry:** a form of self-directed learning that uses student-generated questions to enable them to determine what they need to learn, identifying resources to help in this process, and enable them to assess their own progress in learning.

**Microworlds:** A term developed by Francisco Varela (1999) which means how we are always in readiness-for-action to respond to our day-to-day lived situations.

**Process Consultation:** (Schein, 1999): A set of data gathering processes and interactions where an internal or external consultant helps clients to perceive, understand, and act upon dynamics in the client's environment in order to improve the situation as the client defines it.

**Space of Possibility:** Moments or places where there is an emergence of features that cannot be traced back to the component parts.

**Theory-in-Use:** (Argyris, 1995): The value you enact when you do something.

## ENDNOTES

1. Some of the themes in the past five years have been: boundaries, honesty/trust, role of power, the ethics of being an internal consultant, authenticity, self-disclosure, integrity, doubt, presence, ethics and helping relationships, managing ethical dilemmas across different organizational contexts, and the relationship of views of the self to ethical practice.
2. In one year, the inquiry questions were: What are the aspects of my personal responsibility to intervene in a conflict? If authenticity is a journey, how do we know which path to take? What is the relationship between authenticity, information flow and power? How can we develop a process to deal with conflicting espoused theories?
3. A reviewer of our chapter asked, "can you be specific [about this issue] or is this an ethics violation?" Because of the difficult nature of what happened and the position I had as a professor, I feel getting retroactive consent to provide such details is problematic. You could say one of my ethical stances here as a practitioner/educator emerges from this inquiry question from the anonymous reviewer.
4. In a previous year, the final report of one of the second year students that I supervised in her Masters project had as one theme the ethical practice of being an insider/outsider consultant in a client system. Her published article that grew out of this project (Schwartz, 2011) looks at how she maintained integrity and managed biases in the project. One could see this framework, among other influences in her program of study, as a direct result of the Ethics course.