

Ethics in the Curriculum

INTRODUCTION

Ethical matters may arise in a whole variety of teaching and learning situations. Dealing with legal and moral aspects of ethics is part of practice. It is useful for you to be sensitive to these and to develop strategies for dealing with them.

Ethics is a complicated subject in its own right. A simple view of ethics is that it is concerned with the way in which people live and the moral choices that are made – whether what we think, say or do is right or wrong, about justice and about how people should live. Ethics examines the choices people make and the values and reasoning behind them.

Many contemporary art and design practices and the kinds of work students do in art and design education come up against ethical issues. We support students to develop their practice and part of that is dealing with ethical matters.

This section is concerned with

- **DEVELOPING YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE SCOPE OF ETHICAL ISSUES RELATED TO ART AND DESIGN**
- **SUPPORTING YOU IN DEVELOPING STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH THESE**

You may find that some of this material, particularly the scenarios, would be useful seminar material to use with your students.

Ethical problems can be quite difficult to deal with since they can cut

Ethics in the Curriculum

across other areas; for example they can cross over into matters related to student diversity, health and safety, intellectual property and so on. The boundary between ethics and morals can be unclear, and moral codes may be influenced by cultural and religious background. It is important to be aware that diverse groups of students will may well have diverse views on what is or is not acceptable, and while an awareness of legal considerations (see below) is important, it is only part of the picture.

Defining boundaries can be particularly difficult in Art and Design. One's immediate reaction when confronted with a serious ethical issue may be to "play it safe", but this can lead to a sterile and predictable outcome and a limiting of interesting areas of investigation. Because of the complexity of this area, if in doubt it is a good idea to consult with colleagues or with the Programme Tutor/Course Director.

Usually the normal range of undergraduate activity is covered by standard ethical arrangements. However it may be the case that individual projects appear to be potentially contentious to the point of being unethical.

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is usual for institutions of higher education to have regulations concerned with ethics and Ethics Committees which have a remit for research degrees and staff research. These are derived from measures to avoid legal problems and to ensure planning has been adequate. It is also possible that these committees will concern themselves with undergraduate study where it may have ethical implications.

Ethics Committees and regulations are usually concerned with harm to others. In addition during work experience, the student could be exposed to ethical considerations derived from the commercial setting. Also in carrying out project work, the student could create ethical dilemmas for themselves, for tutors and for other students.

Given the regulatory aspects, you may find it useful to consult colleagues on any difficulties and inform yourself of any local procedures and groups involved.

Ethical matters include:

- **PSYCHOLOGICAL HARM**
- **PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY**

Ethics in the Curriculum

- **PHYSICAL HARM AND RISK**
- **WORKING WITH MINORS OR THE MENTALLY ILL (UNABLE TO GIVE INFORMED CONSENT)**
- **PUBLICATION OF DATA (PRIVACY)**
- **EXHIBITIONS OF CONTROVERSIAL POLITICAL/SEXUAL IMAGERY (OBSCENITY)**
- **SELLING ARTWORK INVOLVING THE UNKNOWING PARTICIPATION OF OTHERS (FINANCIAL INTEREST)**
- **ASKING SUBJECTS FOR SPONTANEOUS RESPONSES (LACKS PRIOR EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH)**
- **TESTING A DESIGN (PHYSICAL RISK)**
- **GOOD ETHICAL PRACTICES**
- **GOOD PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES**

Other ethical issues might be concerned with:

- **COMMERCIAL CONFIDENTIALITY**
- **SUSTAINABILITY**

These matters might cut across:

- **HEALTH AND SAFETY MATTERS**
- **LEGAL MATTERS CONCERNED WITH RACIAL EQUALITY**
- **PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE ISSUES**
- **DISCIPLINARY MATTERS**
- **BEHAVIOURAL NORMS**
- **CENSORSHIP / BLASPHEMY**
- **SOCIAL VALUES**
- **HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES**
- **ASSESSMENT MATTERS**

SCENARIOS

Here are some scenarios, which relate to ethical matters. This is quite a long list so it may be best to select about half for discussion in more detail.

All the scenarios listed here are related to real problems encountered by tutors in art and design departments, or relate to art and design professional practice.

Each scenario should be discussed to highlight any matters of concern and you should consider any possible actions to be taken or boundaries to be established. Potential effects on the student as well as others, including members of the public, need to be considered.

- 1 A design student is undertaking an analysis of how people use equipment in their kitchens. He has decided to observe people cooking, rather than to ask questions since this will lead to more reliable evidence. He is asking kitchen shops to supply him with lists of recent clients and then is proposing to set up video equipment to run on a 24 hour basis over a period of a week in each of the kitchens. He is not sure how to approach the nominated individuals and what action to take. What advice would you give?
- 2 A fine art student is working on images relating to extreme emotions. She wants to photograph people expressing shock. She has set up a staged car accident in a high street in the town, which people will come across suddenly. She will document expressions from a nearby window, from which she cannot be observed. What advice would you give?
- 3 A postgraduate student photographer has worked for many years in portraiture, doing commissioned portraits. However, he is interested in working with child nudes to express their innocence. He is using late Victorian photographs as visual references in the work. A number of friends have invited him to work with their children who are all less than 16 years old. The works are going to be shown in public and published in a book of child nudes. What advice would you give?
- 4 A student has been videoing crowd scenes and is making a video about the loneliness of individuals within crowds. This involves setting up a camera in Leicester Square at night. The work is going to be shown at a public exhibition which the student group is organising. The video material is going to be

- shown in extreme slow motion and individuals filmed will be recognisable. What advice do you give?
- 5 A group of fine art students is working around themes of physical danger. They have suspended themselves from hooks, done bungee jumps and now in a tutorial with you they are proposing to set themselves adrift in the sea to see what unfolds. What advice do you offer?
 - 6 A group of students are designing a questionnaire for school children on their use of mobile phones and the internet. They want to find out who they speak to and when, and what is spoken about. They also want to find out what internet sites they visit and why. What advice do you offer?
 - 7 A student is planning a performance which is going to be filmed. Three other students are working with her. The performance involves naked clay body painting. The other students have given verbal permission for the film to be shown as part of the end of year show. What advice do you offer?
 - 8 A student is undertaking a residency in a mental health setting. He wants to do an art workshop about childhood experiences and also the experience of being classified as 'special needs'. This would need all the participants to think about their pasts and to represent them. What advice would you give?
 - 9 A disabled student is working on a book about disability. Part of the brief is to produce photographic images of individuals with disabilities which break the usual stereotypes. The illustration student has been working with the individuals concerned, all of whom have volunteered to be in the book, although there has not been any discussion yet of the nature of the images. What advice would you give?
 - 10 A product design student is doing a field trip in a South East Asian country and has the chance to produce a batch of her products using local factory child labour. The work is to be submitted for assessment. What advice do you offer?

Ethics in the Curriculum

NOTE ON GIVING ADVICE:

Refer to previous notes on seeking advice from colleagues or Chairs of Ethics committees. If the project is not breaking ethical guidelines it may still be necessary to consider the following:

- RESTRICTIONS AT THE POINT OF EXHIBITION OR PUBLICATION
- INFORMED CONSENT FROM PARTICIPANTS, INCLUDING POTENTIALLY OTHER STUDENTS
- ADVICE ON RESTRICTING POTENTIAL PHYSICAL OR MENTAL HARM TO OTHERS OR THE CENTRAL PARTICIPANT
- CONSIDER OTHER WAYS TO ACHIEVE THE SAME LEARNING OR OUTCOMES