Teaching in Higher Education

Dealing with Dave's Dilemmas: exploring the ethics of pedagogic practice

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ABSTRACT *Dealing with ethical dilemmas is part of the real, everyday life of a university lecturer. However, the literature on ethics in higher education largely focuses on the broad social agenda, academic freedom and issues connected with research. Using an auto-ethnographic case study about a 'day in the life' of a new university lecturer as a basis for discussion, the paper reports the reactions of two focus groups, representing newly appointed and more experienced academic staff, respectively. Applying Forsyth's taxonomy of ethical ideology, it is suggested that there are marked differences in approach between staff in dealing with ethical dilemmas. Experienced staff, accustomed to higher levels of professional autonomy, were more inclined to argue for a 'situationist' position, while inexperienced staff, inculcated into a more rule-bound culture, tended to adopt an 'absolutist' or 'exceptionist' stance.*

Introduction

Programmes of professional development for higher education lecturers in the UK are now commonplace. The evolution of such programmes is closely related to the modern role of the state as a 'hands on' consumer (Scott, 1995) and the re-definition of the 'student-as-customer' (Scott, 1999). In the UK, the government has played a significant role in focusing attention on teaching standards. This has been achieved via a range of policy initiatives, notably the introduction of teaching quality assessment in the early 1990s and, more recently, a funding stream for institutional Learning and Teaching strategies. The creation of the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILT), in the wake of the Dearing report [National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE), 1997], is perhaps the most symbolic development in this respect.

The Dearing Report recommended, *inter alia*, that although the ILT would be concerned with all aspects of teaching and its pedagogy, there should be 'priority to developing assessment practices and strategies which would become a key part of the initial training and continuing professional development of teaching staff' (NCIHE, 1997, p. 221). The practical tenor of Dearing is reflected in many recently estab-lished programmes designed to produce 'skilled' or 'competent' lecturers. The

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education has also expressed its support for a competence-based approach (Randall, 1998).

The Limits of Reflective Practice

The 'reflective practitioner' model (Schon, 1983), hugely influential in the field of professional education, has been deployed to support this practical, competence-led vision for academic development in higher education. The ILT has adopted 'reflective practice' as a founding basis for their professional accreditation framework. However, reflection tends to be conceptualised in terms of the specifics of teaching and assessment rather than the complex, associated processes of managing student learning. Furthermore, by definition, reflection is on 'practice', rather than broader contextual issues that relate to the academics' role justifying educational development as a study '*for*' higher education. In other words, reflective practice is being deployed as a conceptual framework for preparing lecturers with the skills and knowledge needed to perform their (teaching) duties.

However, while reflective practice may promote an ethos of continuous improvement, it is not safe to assume that academic staff necessarily enjoy the practical freedom to experiment with regards to teaching and assessment methods. The movement from an elite to a mass higher education system and the demands of quality assurance means that many lecturers, especially in popular vocational subjects areas, are now working as members of large course teams seeking to provide a consistent experience to many hundreds of students. Uniform lectures and ancillary materials allow little space for experimentation and creative independence in the classroom. In practical terms this means that 'reflective practice' can be reduced to little more than rhetoric given the conditions of a 'McUniversity' (Ritzer, 1998).

Furthermore, while the notion of reflective practice is clearly an important basis for educational development, there is a danger that other, broader aspects of professional education may be given insufficient attention. As indicated earlier, the concept of reflective practice has been used to support a fairly narrowly conceived study '*for*' higher education. By contrast, a study '*about*' higher education is concerned with the broader canvas of professional life. It gives attention to the philosophical, economic, social, political, and managerial context of higher education. As Malcolm and Zukas (2001) suggest, there is a 'pedagogic gap' between the often narrowly technical teaching and learning literature, and work that focuses on the broader higher education context.

A study 'about' higher education invokes issues less likely to be confined to the immediate environment of the lecture hall or the seminar room but equally as important to professional life. Studying the aims of a higher education, the reasons and consequences of re-structuring, system and global change, organisational issues connected with the management of institutions, the meanings of 'quality', and quality assurance, disciplinary and community values, such as academic freedom, and the responsibilities of the sector in terms of social justice, are all examples of issues which might play a role in any professional education of university staff. Moreover, this is not just a case of special pleading. Gaining a theoretical under-

standing of the purposes of a university education is essential to inform the practical task of curriculum design, for example. Indeed, without an understanding of the aims of a higher education how is it possible to fully conceptualise aims and objectives in one's own discipline?

The Ethics of Pedagogic Practice

A study of the ethical aspects of working in higher education is part of this broader conception of professional development and in keeping with the need to re-define the nature of scholarship (Boyer, 1990). However, much attention, in the field of academic ethics, has traditionally focused on an essentially self-regarding agenda. This is largely wrapped up in research issues (e.g. the falsification of research data, the misuse of research funds or plagiarism), concerns about academic freedom (for staff, rather than students), tenure decisions affecting staff in US universities in particular and power relationships within the university (see, for example, Whicker & Kronenfeld, 1994; Evans *et al.*, 1998; Kennedy, 1999). More generic organisational matters, such as interpersonal (e.g. sexual harassment or discrimination) and organisational abuse (e.g. equipment theft or padding expense accounts) are also a key focus.

While academic autonomy may have been eroded in recent years by governments in many parts of the world, lecturers still possess a considerable degree of power over student lives. The issues are numerous and complex with the power of assessment lying at the core of an essentially ambiguous relationship between teacher and student. Although the language of higher education may have moved on to emphasise the importance of student empowerment, independence and autonomy, a harsher reality still exists, sometimes uncomfortably, behind the rhetoric of this new lexicon. The purpose of this paper is thus to investigate how lecturers cope with many of the day-to-day dilemmas they face in managing student learning.

Methodology

Ethnographic novels and dramas are a well-established means of disseminating the results of observation and personal experience (Banks & Banks, 1998). They are the product of a lived experience in a community, and provide a means of understanding how an ethnic group is organised and relates to the wider world. The world of higher education has its own strand of ethnographic fiction, although this has had a tendency of over-representing accounts of life inside elite institutions, especially Oxford and Cambridge (Carter, 1990). Ethnographic 'fiction science' (Watson, 2000) straddles the worlds of creative writing and social science providing material, which is 'made up', but 'true' (Watson, 2000).

While ethnographic accounts of lived experience are used predominantly, from a research perspective, to report and analyse observations as the end-point of enquiry, there is no reason why such accounts may not also be used as a research instrument to probe further into understanding the norms within a community. This research instrument is essentially a type of 'case study' or problem-based learning

activity, widely deployed in management, social work, medical and legal education, as a teaching tool. Thus, such fictions can be used for both teaching and research.

An ethnographic fiction or case study (see Table I) was designed by the author on the basis of observations and experiences acquired as a business and management lecturer working in higher education over the last 14 years. This 'day in the life' of a new university lecturer is thus largely, but not exclusively, auto-ethnographic, highlighting a range of ethical dilemmas. In constructing the case study, the author was also influenced by the vignettes of academic life produced from a US perspective by Whicker and Kronenfeld (1994). The case study was previously published as an appendix to an earlier paper by the author (Macfarlane, 2001), which explored some of the fundamental ethical dilemmas facing lecturers in their teaching role mapped against four forms of justice.

Two focus groups were established to discuss the ethical issues raised in the case study. One of the focus groups consisted entirely of new or relatively inexperienced lecturers. Members of this group of six, drawn from a university college, had less than 2 years (full-time equivalent) experience of higher education practice. The other focus group consisted of experienced practitioners, all of whom occupied relatively senior positions as Senior/Principal Lecturers, Heads of Department or members of the senior management team. Moreover, this group of seven was drawn from across two institutions: an 'old' (pre-1992) university and a university college. Subsequently, these two groups will be referred to as 'inexperienced' and 'experienced', respectively.

In keeping with the conventions of focus group methodology, the researcher adopted the position of moderator and observer. Both hand written notes and a tape recording aided the production of a full transcript from each focus group. Subsequent analysis was based on an electronic 'cut-and-sort' technique recommended by Bickman and Rog (1998) in relation to focus groups. This is also broadly similar to Krueger's (1998) 'long table' approach, involving low-tech equipment, such as scissors and coloured pens, as a means of identifying key categories and themes within the data. The necessity of moderating discussion meant that only limited attention was paid to non-verbal aspects of group behaviour. However, the reporting which follows seeks to convey, at least to some extent, the emotional reactions of the respective groups to the issues under discussion.

Results

Dilemma 1: the group assignment

The inexperienced group defined the solution to this problem principally in terms of seeking evidence for each individual's contribution. Thus, they discussed a variety of means by which individual contributions could be assessed. One participant suggested either getting the fourth member of the group to complete the assignment on their own or for each member to produce an individual report identifying what they had done. Another suggestion was to establish managerial responsibilities within the group with a designated leader and secretary using the minutes of team meetings as

TABLE I. A busy day for Dave Andrews

It is Dave Andrews first term as a lecturer at NewU and he has been finding it hard going. After spending most of his twenties doing a PhD and then working as a postgraduate research assistant on various projects, Dave secured a lectureship on a 3-year contract last September. Although Dave did 'pick up the odd seminar' while working as a researcher, he came to NewU with very little teaching experience. He was shocked that as a new lecturer he was given such a heavy teaching load and feels dumped with several irksome administrative jobs, such as 'quality assurance', which clearly no-one else in the department wants to do.

Today Dave has a busy day ahead with teaching in the morning and the afternoon. He desperately needs to finish marking some assignments, which he has promised to return to the students by the end of the week. He also has a scheduled 'office hour' at lunch-time in order that students can come to see him on a first-come-first-served basis. Dave returns to his shared office after finishing his morning teaching. It is now his office hours, but he decides he needs to get on with his marking. Before he can get very far though there is a knock at the door and three students enter. They want to talk to him about a group presentation they are due to do next week, an assessed part of their course. Dave listens whilst the three students tell him that the fourth member of their group has hardly ever turned up for meetings to discuss the presentation and is generally not 'pulling their weight'. The students say they have done a lot of work and are worried that the fourth group member 'will just turn up and take equal credit for all *our* hard work' on the day of the presentation. On the other hand, they are also concerned that their grades will suffer as the fourth group member has not prepared properly. They ask whether they can do the presentation without the fourth member. Dave tells the students that he will have to think about it and sends them away with a promise to see them the next day.

Munching a sandwich Dave returns to his marking but quickly becomes concerned about two essays which appear very similar. On closer inspection Dave notes that there are whole paragraphs which are almost identical save for the odd word or different phrase in places. He remembers that the two students had worked well together on an earlier group project and are probably good friends. Dave sighs and puts the two essays to one side. He will have to think about this.

Just as he is about to mark another essay, there is a knock at the door and a student enters looking somewhat sheepish. The student explains that he feels under a lot of pressure because he has a number of assignments due in at the same time. He also mentions that he had a cold last week. The long and the short of it is that he wants an extension on the essay set more than 2 months ago at the beginning of term. The telephone rings and Dave tells the student to come back in the morning to discuss the matter further.

Half an hour later the departmental secretary appears at Dave's office with a gift for him left in the departmental office by a Chinese student from Hong Kong. The present, wrapped in Christmas paper, turns out to be a large (2 L) bottle of whisky (Dave's favourite tipple is single malt and he remembers, somewhat guiltily, how he made some light-hearted reference to this effect, as an aside, at his last lecture). The card reads: '*To Mr Andrews, my favourite teacher, Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, thank you for all your help, best wishes, Lee*') Dave recalls that this is a hard-working student but one who has struggled to gain good marks partly due to problems with written English. Ironically, Dave has Lee's latest assignment as the next one on the pile to mark. He wonders what he should do about the bottle of whisky.

After finishing his last teaching session at 6 p.m., Dave returns to his office and remembers that he had better check his e-mail. Dave opens two messages from students. Opening the first e-mail, he recalls that this student is attentive and a good attender although he is yet to mark any of her written work. The e-mail explains that as a dyslexic student she would like a few days extension on the assignment deadline in order that it can be checked over for errors by an advisor at the Student Learning Centre (a central body at NewU that, among other things, helps students with learning difficulties). The other e-mail is from a mature student Dave teaches on a part-time post-graduate course. This student also wants an extension citing 'work pressures'. Both of these requests for an extension relate to the assignment set more than two months ago at the beginning of term. Dave decides not to reply immediately to either e-mail in order to think over the requests before making a decision.

Dave is in a quandary about all the dilemmas he has faced during the day, but knows that in the early evening he is meeting his mentor for a drink after work and plans to ask for some advice.

a basis for determining whether individuals had 'pulled their weight'. This 'rat sheet' could establish which areas of research group members were responsible for and get students to peer assess each other's contribution. Another participant mentioned the use of reflective logs detailing what each individual had done, but also, more developmentally, getting students to write about things like leadership styles and the way the group had interacted. The failure of some student groups was regarded as inevitable and frequently related to poor attendance.

Fairness and equality was recognised as the reason why it is important to determine individual contributions to group assignments. Examples were related from experience. One participant mentioned an instance with a group who had petitioned him to allow them to stay together in subsequent group assignments as 'they don't want to be in a group where they've got people of lesser ability'. In reply to this, though, another participant contended that the importance of group work in replicating the conditions of a working/professional environment meant that students had to get used to working with people of different abilities. There was general muttered support for this position. Finally, it was pointed out that personal animosity might lie behind the delegation complaining about the fourth member and that, therefore, it would be important to investigate before deciding on a course of action.

By contrast, the experienced group focused more heavily on negotiation with the student team, rather than relying on mechanisms to determine levels of individual contribution. While the group concurred that establishing clear ground rules from the outset was vital the solution to the problem was seen to lie in talking the issue through with the students. One participant referred to this as 'a negotiated rather than dictated settlement'. Although it was recognised that unequal contributions can be a problem, participants agreed that group work should normally be rewarded with a group grade, since this solution was often favoured by students anyway and reflected 'what the real world is like'.

The emphasis on negotiation meant that this focus group talked at greater length about the importance of investigation to get the fourth member's side of the story. The possibility that the fourth member might have concessions evidence based on sickness or family problems was discussed in this context. However, the onus to resolve this problem was seen to lie with the students since group work was referred to by two participants as a learning process in itself. The participants viewed their role as managing and mediating, but ultimately allowing the group to agree on their own solution.

Dilemma 2: suspected plagiarism

The inexperienced group approached this issue in almost exclusively rule-bound terms. One participant gained a round of applause after citing 'chapter and verse' on institutional procedures, while another commented that 'you shouldn't have to think about it because its not a personal decision'. The phrase 'pushing the big button' was adopted by group members to denote starting the formal institutional procedures. Concern was expressed though that plagiarism may be going unpunished

because 'you can't know every textbook inside out'. The concern here was that penalising a particular student might be inconsistent with the way others had 'got away with it'. Moreover, it was argued that students are sometimes unaware that they have done anything wrong. As one participant stated: 'They (i.e. students) think you're being picky'.

The experienced group focused more on how to investigate plagiarism and were more inclined to discuss personal interventions to resolve the problem. An immediate issue identified was the need to check to see whether any more of the essays appeared to have the same or very similar text. The importance of not accusing students was stressed while, at the same time, asking them to account for the similarity of their work was suggested as a more subtle approach to uncovering the truth. It was important not to 'put yourself in a position where you might have to back off'. There was murmured agreement among participants that investigating cautiously and interviewing students separately is crucial. Building the possibility of a viva into assessment procedures was suggested as a means of formalising this form of investigation and giving a teaching team a fall back position in cases of suspected plagiarism. One participant had a sympathetic attitude when plagiarism occurs amongst first year students. This participant rehearsed what they would say to a student in such a circumstance as follows: 'look I obviously haven't explained to you what is expected of you so the fault is partly with me as well as with you. Go away and do it again.' Group participants nodded agreement to the suggestion that this might be punishment enough in such a situation.

Dilemma 3: extension requests

The inexperienced group were totally dismissive of the student requesting an extension on the basis of being under a lot of pressure with assignments and having had a recent cold. The following excerpt from the transcript summarises the group's stance:

> *Member A*: So he knew he was sick a while ago. There were two, maybe three days he couldn't work so why did he leave it this late?
>
> *Member C*: Because he's lying!
>
> *Member B*: Exactly. He hasn't done the work.
>
> *Member D*: Medical certificate?
>
> *Member C*: With a cold! (General laughter)
>
> *Member B*: Okay. Check to see whether he phoned the medical centre and your department secretary. Even if he's got a medical certificate he has to have asked seven days previously for an extension. No.

The exchange also illustrates the importance placed by this focus group on following standardised rules/procedures, such as a 7-day deadline preceding the assignment hand-in date for requesting any extension and a medical certificate as evidence of

sickness. The group went on to comment that meeting deadlines is a matter of time management and one participant commented that part of their practice is to ask students for an assignment draft partly as a means to later determine when students actually started working on a piece of work if an extension is requested.

With respect to the dyslexic student, the inexperienced group were broadly sympathetic, but wanted reassurances that the request was genuine. Participants agreed that it was important to check to see that the work had been completed and that this request was not being used as an excuse to obtain extra time to write the assignment. Finally, the group were largely unsympathetic in their attitude toward the mature student seeking an extension due to 'work pressures'. They were concerned about the genuineness of this request, and would expect a more detailed explanation and accompanying evidence. Even if this was forthcoming, however, the consensus was that such excuses are, in principle, unacceptable. They justified this position by arguing that the heavy workload of combining work and study is something students should be aware of at the outset of a degree programme. Moreover, the group drew a parallel with the demands of the workplace where the expectation would be that 'if the boss gives you something to do you stay up until 1 o'clock in the morning because that's the way the culture operates. So why shouldn't they (i.e. the student) stay up until 1 o'clock in the morning to finish an essay?' Other group members nodded in accord with this statement.

The experienced group focused their discussion almost entirely on the request for an extension by the mature student. This was largely because they assumed that the dyslexic student would be able to produce an educational psychologists report, while the student with a cold might have a medical certificate to evidence their respective extension claims. The experienced group were sympathetic towards the mature student for a variety of reasons. One participant argued that job restructuring had resulted in unforseen increases in workload for many of his mature students working in the health service. Another issue raised was the likelihood of bereavement affecting mature students who can often have elderly parents, while the group also discussed mature female students with primary child-care responsibilities. The result of these factors, in the eyes of the group, was to place mature students in a different category to young full-time undergraduates without such responsibilities. However, the group were cautious about the advisability of giving open-ended extensions and establishing rules about giving notice of a failure to meet a deadline, a point also made by the inexperienced focus group. A note of caution was also struck that, in giving extensions 'there is an issue of justice to the others'.

Dilemma 4: the gift

The inexperienced group were concerned that accepting the gift would compromise Dave's integrity while, at the same time, recognising that rejecting it might cause offence because of cultural differences in the relationship between tutors and students. One solution suggested was that Dave should 'out himself' by informing his Head of Department about the gift and share the bottle with the department on

some future social occasion. Other members of the group, however, favoured politely declining the gift.

The experienced group also recognised that the giving of the gift was 'a cultural thing' and potentially awkward to refuse. One participant related a similar incident that had happened to her, although this gift was presented by a group of overseas students (rather than an individual) at the end of a course. Picking up on this anecdote, participants agreed that it is less problematic to accept gifts from groups as opposed to individuals and at the end of, rather than during a taught course. The importance of maintaining 'objectivity' in marking this students' essay was regarded as the crucial issue not to lose sight of, although it was also recognised that acceptance might have an adverse impact on other people's perceptions of Dave's professional integrity.

Discussion and Analysis

Both groups emphasised the importance of following university procedures/policies with respect to the issues raised. Unsurprisingly perhaps, the experienced group drew out the complexities of each case study issue in greater detail. However, there were key differences between the groups. Most noticeably, the inexperienced group were less tolerant than the experienced group in their attitude towards student difficulties in working as a group, requesting extensions and in the case of suspected plagiarism. The experienced group was more inclined to negotiate solutions and use their professional autonomy. These differences might partly be explained by the fact that the inexperienced group consisted principally of lecturers from broadly professional and vocational areas with frequent parallels being made in discussion between the conduct expected of students at university and in the workplace. Alternatively, it is possible that these newly employed university lecturers have been inculcated into a more rule-bound culture. The attitude of the experienced group to the same dilemmas suggests they are more accustomed to exercising academic autonomy in decision-making.

While group dynamics played a role in shaping responses, there were clear individual differences in ethical reasoning. In order to explore these individual differences, and take the analysis a stage further, Forsyth's (1980) ethical model (see Table II) was applied. Forsyth's model identifies four distinct ethical positions based on the concepts of relativism and idealism. In the analysis which follows each of the four positions identified by Forsyth is briefly explained and then explored in terms of responses to the case study.

Absolutists and Exceptionists

Absolutists believe in upholding universal moral rules. We tend to associate this position with people who oppose the taking of human life regardless of the circumstances. An absolutist might oppose abortion, euthanasia or the death penalty, for example, from either a religious or secular perspective. By definition absolutists do

TABLE II. Forsyth's ethical ideologies

Idealism	Relativism	
	High	Low
High	**Situationists**	**Absolutists**
Low	**Subjectivists**	**Exceptionists**

Source: Forsyth (1980).

not believe in making exceptions to moral rules. Exceptionists, as their name suggests, believe in moral absolutes, but adopt a more pragmatic and flexible attitude given certain exceptional circumstances in practice. For example, an exceptionist may, in principle, be opposed to the taking of human life, but inclined to make an exception, on utilitarian grounds for instance, when they feel the circumstances justified this (e.g. in self-defence or to save other human lives).

In applying these perspectives to the case study, some participants were 'absolutist' in their unwillingness to make exceptions to rules affecting staff and students. Deadlines should be strictly applied, gifts should never be accepted, students working in groups should receive the same grade, plagiarism must always be punished and so on. Member B of the inexperienced group was highly influential in discussion and adopted a clear absolutist position. This was particularly apparent in the case of the deadline extension request on the grounds of claimed illness/too many assignment deadlines where she encouraged the group to brook no compromise. Underlying this position is a belief that to make exceptions would be unfair on other students who have abided by the rules In a sense this is a utilitarian rationale that the moral rule must be upheld in the interests of the majority, rule-abiding students.

Although an exceptionist might agree with the importance of universal rules to promote equality and fairness, such as assignment deadlines or punishing plagiarism, they are more ready to admit circumstances where they might make exceptions. An example of this is the preparedness of some lecturers to extend the deadline for certified illness. While individuals in the inexperienced group were instinctively absolutist in their outlook some were prepared to make exceptions. By definition, an exceptionist will take a good deal of persuading that an exception is justified. This attitude manifested itself in the insistence of some participants on persuasive 'evidence', such as a medical certificate, to justify giving a deadline extension to a student claiming illness. The focus of the inexperienced group on evidence with regard to both the extension requests and the group project dispute is symptomatic of individuals whose 'gut' reaction is that of an absolutist, but who, with sufficient evidence, are prepared, reluctantly, to make the odd exception. In a sense, university rules which make provision for circumstances when students may be permitted extra time in examinations or a deadline extension are essentially exceptionist in philosophy.

Situationists and Subjectivists

Situationists reject moral rules and advocate an individualistic analysis of each situation they encounter. Unlike absolutists, situationalists are strongly relativist in their outlook and prefer to deal with dilemmas on the basis of the individual circumstances of each case. However, they believe that they can find the correct or ideal ethical solution. Subjectivists also use personal judgement to guide their decision-making, but unlike situationists, lack idealism and are ethically sceptical.

Individuals in the experienced group were more inclined to advocate an approach based on negotiation rather than insistence on rules and regulations. Many of these participants were situationist in the way they stressed the importance of negotiating with the student team in the groupworking scenario. Individuals who adopted a situationist stance were also prepared to extend the deadline of the part-time, mature student depending on the exact nature of this person's particular circumstances. The focus of these lecturers was first and foremost on the individual and secondly on course rules regarding deadlines. The subjectivist position appeared to have the weakest implicit support, perhaps because participants were keen to seek (or be seen to seek) an ideal solution in respect to each of the scenarios presented.

Forsyth's model was helpful in teasing out individual differences in responses to the case study. The main split in reaction to the case was between lecturers who adopted an absolutist (or reluctantly exceptionist) stance toward the dilemmas and those who were more inclined to approach the issues raised as an ethical relativist. The inexperienced group contained more individuals with an absolutist inclination while experienced group members were more relativist in their attitudes. This may reflect the changing nature of higher education where new staff are inducted into a more bureaucratic and rule-bound environment. While it is relatively easy to adopt a situationist approach with small student numbers and strong personal tutoring relationships, the time-consuming nature of this position becomes harder to sustain as student numbers rise. Individuals who have worked in higher education for many years with relatively high levels of personal autonomy may also equate the notion of professionalism with freedom to make decisions affecting students unencumbered (as they may see it) by bureaucratic rules.

Conclusions

In many respects the dilemmas presented in the case study and debated by the focus groups barely skim the surface of ethical issues which confront lecturers in their daily lives as managers of student learning. They are examples though of an every day reality that forms a demanding part of professional life and incorporates relationships with a range of other stakeholders, such as teaching colleagues, institutional managers, research partners, funding bodies and, in some cases, corporate clients. The relationship with students, however, lies at the heart of academic practice where the core roles of 'teaching' and 'managing' (Blaxter *et al.*, 1998) intersect. Indeed, the unequal nature of the student–lecturer relationship makes a reflective attitude to these responsibilities a professional obligation. Despite the existence of institutional

regulations, managing student learning is still a messy reality which throws up a range of demanding and highly complex ethical dilemmas. If lecturers in higher education are to develop a greater sense of professionalism, as the ILT and other organisations are seeking to encourage, it is important that the ethical responsibilities and challenges of practice are more fully conceptualised and debated.

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