



# What do we know about the effect of ethics education?

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When ethics teaching is advocated and efforts undertaken to initiate or reinforce it, there commonly is not real opposition. It is usually assumed that such teaching is good and laudable, especially in practical disciplines that serve a socially desirable purpose. This does not mean that ethics teaching is actually promoted and supported. A frequent argument is that it is not necessary, and even superfluous since professional education is already permeated with moral values which are implicitly transferred. Sometimes it is argued that explicit ethics teaching is useless since it will not result in significant changes in the attitudes, virtues and behaviors of students. At most, it can point out the normative, usually legal framework, in which professionals used to operate in the particular setting of a country or culture.

The discussion of course depends on the intended aims of ethics education: what do we want to accomplish with teaching ethics to (future) professionals? Since long, there is debate about whether ethics teaching should be informative, i.e. conveying ethical knowledge, or whether it should be more ambitious, i.e. enhancing particular skills and competencies in order to help professionals to make ethically sound decisions, or even promoting specific attitudes and virtues in order to produce reliable and trustworthy professionals (De Bree 2016). In the area of research ethics and integrity, the aim apparently is clear: promote integrity and advance responsible conduct of research. This aim seems to include information, attitudes, and behavior so that future researchers will acquire specific virtues and competencies. After numerous incidents of scientific misconduct, most research institutes and funding agencies have made ethics teaching mandatory in research training (Ndebele 2016). Contents and methods of such training programs however vary substantially.

In this issue, Tammeleht et al. (2024) report on the effectiveness of training the development of research ethics and integrity competencies. This is a welcome study

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since it can contribute to enhance the effectiveness of this type of ethics training programs. The authors used learning diaries to measure the development of ethical competencies. They conclude that the use of learning diaries is an effective tool to increase the competencies of learners, especially reflection. This is especially the case when diaries are created in an internet forum platform so that learners can read each other's contributions and exchange their responses. This finding confirms the observation in a range of ethics education settings that interaction and dialogue encourage self-critical reflection on personal experiences and intuitions.

## References

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