To Improve the Academy: A Journal of Educational Development

Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education

2009

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"Ethical Guidelines for Educational Developers" (2009). *To Improve the Academy: A Journal of Educational Development*. 677.
https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/podimproveacad/677

Ethical Guidelines for Educational Developers

Preamble

Educational developers, as professionals, have a unique opportunity and a special responsibility to contribute to improving the quality of teaching and learning in higher education. As members of the academic community, we are subject to all the codes of conduct and ethical guidelines that already exist for those who work or study on our campuses and in our respective disciplinary associations. In addition, we have special ethical responsibilities because of the unique and privileged access we have to people and information—often sensitive information. This document provides general guidelines that can and should inform the practice of everyone working in educational development roles in higher education.

Individuals who work as educational developers come from different disciplinary areas. Some of us work in this field on a part-time basis or for a short time; for others, this is our full-time career. The nature of our responsibilities and prerogatives as developers varies with our position in the organization, our experience, interests, and talents, as well as with the special characteristics of our institutions. This document attempts to provide general ethical guidelines that should apply to most developers across a variety of settings.

Ethical guidelines indicate a consensus among practitioners about the ideals that should inform our practice as professionals, as well as those behaviors that we would identify as misconduct. Between ideals and misconduct is the area of dilemmas, where each of our choices seems equally right or wrong, or where our different roles and responsibilities place competing—if not incompatible—demands on us, or where certain behaviors may seem questionable but there is no consensus that those behaviors constitute misconduct.

It is our hope that these guidelines will complement individual statements of philosophy and mission and that they will be useful to educational developers in the following ways:

- In promoting ethical practice by describing the ideals of our practice
- In providing a model for thinking through situations that contain conflicting choices or questionable behavior
- In identifying those specific behaviors that we agree represent professional misconduct

Responsibilities to Clients

- Provide services to everyone within our mandate, provided that we are able to serve them responsibly
- Treat clients fairly, respecting their uniqueness, their fundamental rights, dignity, and worth, and their right to set objectives and make decisions
- Continue services only as long as the client is benefiting, discontinuing service by mutual consent; suggest other resources to meet needs we cannot or should not address
- Maintain appropriate boundaries in the relationship; avoid exploiting the relationship in any way; be clear with ourselves and our clients about our role
- Protect all privileged information and get informed consent from our client before using or referring publicly to his or her case in such a way that the person could possibly be identified

Competence and Integrity

Behavior

- Clarify professional roles and obligations
- Accept appropriate responsibility for our behavior
- Don't make false or intentionally misleading statements
- Avoid the distortion and misuse of our work
- When providing services at the behest of a third party, clarify our roles and responsibilities with each party from the outset

- Model ethical behavior with coworkers and supervisees and in the larger community
- Maintain appropriate responsibility for the behavior of those we supervise

Skills and Boundaries

- Be reflective and self-critical in our practice; strive to be aware of our own belief system, values, biases, needs, and the effect of these on our work
- Incorporate diverse points of view
- Know and act in consonance with our purpose, mandate, and philosophy, integrating them insofar as possible
- Ensure that we have the institutional freedom to do our job ethically
- Don't allow personal or private interests to conflict or appear to conflict with professional duties or the client's needs
- Continually seek out knowledge, skills, and resources to undergird and expand our practice
- Consult with other professionals when they lack the experience or training for a particular case or endeavor and in order to prevent and avoid unethical conduct
- Know and work within the boundaries of our competence and time limitations
- Take care of our personal welfare so we can take care of others

Others' Rights

- Be receptive to different styles and approaches to teaching and learning and to others' professional roles and functions
- Respect the rights of others to hold values, attitudes, and opinions different from our own
- Respect the right of the client to refuse our services or to ask for the services of another
- Work against harassment and discrimination of any kind, including race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, sexual orientation, age, and nationality
- Be aware of and don't abuse the various power relationships with clients (for example, power based on position or on information)

Confidentiality

- Keep confidential the identity of our clients, as well as our observations, interactions, or conclusions related to specific individuals or cases
- Know the legal requirements regarding appropriate and inappropriate professional confidentiality (for example, for cases of murder, suicide, or gross misconduct)
- Store and dispose of records in a safe way, and comply with institutional, state, and federal regulations about storage and ownership of records
- Conduct discreet conversations among professional colleagues; don't discuss clients in public places

Responsibilities to the Profession

- Attribute materials and ideas to their authors or creators
- Contribute ideas, experience, and knowledge to colleagues
- Respond promptly to requests from colleagues
- Respect your colleagues and acknowledge their differences
- Work positively for the development of individuals and the profession
- Cooperate with other units and professionals involved in development efforts
- Be an advocate for institutional and professional missions
- Take responsibility when you become aware of gross unethical conduct in the profession

Conflicts Arising from Multiple Responsibilities, Constituents, Relationships, Loyalties

We are responsible to the institution, faculty, graduate students, undergraduate students, and our own ethical values. These multiple responsibilities and relationships to various constituencies, together with competing loyalties, can lead to conflicting ethical responsibilities. Here are some examples:

- An instructor is teaching extremely poorly, and the students are suffering seriously as a result.
    - *Conflict:* responsibility of confidentiality to client teacher versus responsibility to students and institution to take some immediate action

- A faculty member wants to know how a TA, with whom we are working, is doing in his or her work or in the classroom.
  - *Conflict:* responding to faculty's legitimate concern versus confidentiality with TA
- We know firsthand that a professor is making racist, sexist remarks or is sexually harassing a student.
  - *Conflict:* confidentiality with professor versus institutional and personal ethical responsibilities, along with responsibility to students
- A fine teacher is coming up for tenure, has worked with our center or program for two years, and asks for a letter to the tenure committee.
  - *Conflict:* confidentiality rules versus our commitment to advocate for good teaching on campus and in tenure decisions

In such instances, we need to practice sensitive and sensible confidentiality and do the following:

- Consult in confidence with other professionals when we have conflicting or confusing ethical choices.
- Break confidentiality in cases of potential suicide, murder, or gross misconduct (in such cases, to do nothing is to do something).
- Inform the other person or persons when we have to break confidentiality, unless to do so would be to jeopardize our safety or the safety of someone else.
- Decide cases of questionable practice individually, after first informing ourselves, to the best of our ability, of all the ramifications of our actions; work to determine when we will act or not act, while being mindful of the rules and regulations of the institution and the relevant legal requirements.

Conflicts Arising from Multiple Roles

As educational developers, we often assume or are assigned roles that might be characterized as, for example, teaching police, doctor, coach, teacher, or advocate, among others. We endeavor to provide a "safe place" for our clients; we are at the same time an institutional model and a guardian for a conscience for good teaching. These multiple roles can also lead to ethical conflicts.

Some educational developers, for example, serve both as faculty developers and as faculty members. As faculty we are on review committees but through our faculty development work have access to information that probably is not public but is important to the cases involved. Given these multiple roles, it is important always to clarify our role for ourselves and for those with whom we are working. When necessary, we must rescue ourselves.

A particular case of multiple roles needing guidelines is the summative evaluation of teaching. Faculty and administrators (chairs, deans, and so on) have the responsibility for the assessment of teaching for personnel decisions.

In general, educational developers do not make summative judgments about an individual's teaching. In particular, we should never perform the role of developer and summative evaluator concurrently for the same individual, other than with that person's explicit consent and with proper declaration to any panel or committee. However, we may provide assessment tools, collect student evaluations, help individuals prepare dossiers, educate those who make summative decisions, and critique evaluation systems.

Conclusion

These guidelines are an attempt to define ethical behaviors for the current practice of our profession. The core committee welcomes comments and suggestions, as we continue to refine this document in light of the changes and issues confronting us as educational developers in higher education. The guidelines will be updated on a periodic basis.