

EDUC 525 – Learning Task 2

Analysis of the Dr. Levin Ethical Dilemma

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Educators are leaders in society, looked upon for guidance and knowledge, and act for the greater good. Teachers must demonstrate impartiality and respect, ensuring that all decisions are defensible. Duty of care is foremost. The situation regarding Dr. Levin's ability to speak at ABC University and the use of his works is emotionally charged and divisive as he was found guilty as a sadistic pedophile (WARMINGTON, 2017). This ethical dilemma will be evaluated using the deontological, utilitarian, and foundationalist approaches. These schools of ethical thought apply logical reasoning to promote effective ethical decision making.

We are faced with a divided faculty. Some members feel that Dr. Levin should be reinstated into the academic world, while others feel his crimes warrant expulsion of both he and his works. Dr. Levin was a highly regarded researcher whose works have advanced the field of education. "(he) advised on progressive education systems all over the world... wrote inspiring books... professor at OISE and held the Canada Research Chair in educational leadership and policy" (McKeon, 2015). As an educator, he was held to the highest standards within the education community. Can we separate a person from their scholarship?

The foundation for deontological ethics lies with "one's obligations to act in accord to ethical principles or rules" regardless of the consequences (Donlevy & Walker, 2010). Considering this, we must consider to whom we hold a duty as professors. Our primary duty is to the students in the Faculty of Education, to provide them with an academically sound education allowing them to read, critique and learn from diverse sources. We also have a duty to both the children in the classrooms of these future teachers and the public. We must act as leaders, modelling ethical and moral behaviour.

The Golden Rule element of deontological ethics has us consider how we would want to be treated and ask if it is right to support him. In consideration of his co-authors, they likely contend that because their work is of the highest quality, the personal crimes of their co-author should not negate their significant contribution to educational research and understanding. However, the primary duty to the faculty and students takes precedence. Teachers are role models, with well-developed and strong ethical values. The question then becomes, would we want our teachers to be taught by Dr. Levin and use his work to instruct future teachers? Given the public outcry during Dr. Levin's trial, one can infer that the public would not (Boesveld, 2015).

The Categorical Imperative, specifically the elements of universality and the treatment of people as "ends and not means" is useful to clarify a deontological position (Donlevy, 2019). Considering universality, if Dr. Levin had committed another type of crime, perhaps white-collar, he may be invited to speak, and his work referenced. Therefore, the nature of this crime influences the outcome. A convicted sadistic pedophile would never be invited to guest lecture. This is universal.

Applying this thinking to educational research becomes more difficult. By its very nature, scientific research, being peer-reviewed to ensure sound method and reasoning, is separate from the actions of the author and should be referenced in all cases. Others would argue, that because of the closeness in subject matter for both the research and the crime, it is impossible to separate

the two. From a deontological perspective, as Dr. Levin's crimes were directly related to his area of expertise and his crimes violated the moral code, his work should not be referenced. He should not be an exception.

In evaluating the categorical imperative, we must ensure that all people have value. Undoubtedly, Dr. Levin's personal and public views on children conflict. His crimes are consistent viewing children as objects, and one would not want to align with such perspective. This element also supports not using Dr. Levin's work. Lastly, one must consider principle. The Code of Conduct, which guides teaching practice, would prohibit an invitation to lecture and give pause to referencing and using his educational research considering the author's deviation from the professional code.

Through a deontological ethics point of view, we are compelled to "do the right thing" and would not invite Dr. Levin to lecture. Nor would we encourage the use of his referenced works. A key facet to the deontological perspective is to disregard consequences. In this case, the loss of educational research to educational practice is deemed irrelevant, in favour of moral duty.

Analyzing this ethical dilemma through a utilitarian lens, one must consider if the decision will lead to "the greatest good or happiness for the greatest number of people" (Donlevy & Walker, 2010). An analysis of the costs and benefits is often used to conclude the best course of action (University of Texas, 2019). Do the benefits of having Dr. Levin speak outweigh the costs? As an accomplished researcher, education students would likely benefit from his expertise and years of acquired knowledge in the field of education. However, given the nature of his crime, there is a significant risk associated with allowing him to lecture. Since teachers are held to a higher standard, they should be taught only by those who engage in and model ethical behavior. Dr. Levin's credibility and professionalism are forever tainted.

Ethnocentrically, society considers children and their well-being to be of utmost importance. Proposing to invite an individual who was convicted of a severe crime against children, casts doubt on the University's ethics. Additionally, lecture attendees may also be negatively viewed, as others may perceive their attendance as forgiveness for his actions. While some may see the act of accepting Dr. Levin to speak as a "new start", it is likely that the majority will see accepting his speaking presence as a moral wrong. This is especially punctuated as it appears that Dr. Levin is not remorseful for his actions, nor does he feel that he has committed a crime. After parole, he commented online "It's important to open up the world of pornography in a non-emotional way if we are ever to understand it's (sic) place in human life and its effects on sexual behaviour." (Mandel, 2017). Consequently, the University would lose the trust and respect of the public based on societal values. A utilitarian perspective would ultimately prohibit Dr. Levin from taking a position of influence, including being invited to speak in an academic setting.

Using Dr. Levin's research presents a different challenge. Dr. Levin has contributed a great amount to the field of education through his academic works. His academic articles have been peer-reviewed and are considered revered in the academic community. In the utilitarian interest of the common good, the benefit from learning from this research through critical discourse is greater than the risk of eliminating peer-reviewed academic knowledge from the curriculum.

Applying a foundationalist approach, we must consider our personal and professional convictions and decide what would lead to the “provision of the best human services possible for all” (Walker & Donlevy, 2006). We must ask ourselves if it is possible to separate the scholar from the crime? We acknowledge that Dr. Levin was considered an academic and public leader. He has not displayed leadership in the community, he is not a community member in good standing, and has failed to act ethically. As an educator who is held to a higher moral standard and placed in a position of trust, he failed to meet these expectations. Thus, he would not be invited to guest lecture.

In considering if Dr. Levin’s published works should be referenced, our duty lies with exposing our students to an expanse of ideas and theories. We must also consider his co-authors. Is it ethical to restrict their works? Academic work is peer-reviewed and present theories supported in the education community. Weighing our commitments to professional and personal principles, we would allow the works of Dr. Levin and his co-authors to be cited, ensuring that our students received the best possible education and exposure to highly regarded works that may be critically discussed.

A foundationalist approach provides grounds and backing to support the difficult decision, especially made with colleagues belonging to a vocation with a high standard of professionalism. In using the 5 commitments of the foundationalist view (Walker & Donlevy, 2006), we review our beliefs as a faculty at ABC University considering “all justified beliefs are either foundational or derived.” (Tramel, n.d.). We move to not invite him to speak at our event and we chose to not ban his academic work. This decision:

- 1) Aligns with our commonly held principles and values as educators;
- 2) Aligns with our view of integrity and commitment to dignity held for others and children;
- 3) Aligns with our profession’s code of conduct and standards;
- 4) Has a clear sense of understanding of right from wrong. We feel emotionally compelled to not support him and invite him to our event, yet know our community may benefit from building on foundations outlined in his previous peer-reviewed research;
- 5) This decision aligns with professional convictions as teachers, leaders and our commitment to be held to a higher standard in the community.

As educators, we are held to a higher standard. We must choose to act ethically in all matters that relate to our profession and community. Dr. Levin’s actions and crimes do not uphold these beliefs and values. He has not presented himself as a leader of leaders in his failure to protect the vulnerable. We should never have to question an educator’s intent behind his work, which his actions have ultimately led us to do. His work has had a significant influence on policy and education, and we see an overall benefit as an education community in using his research. However, inviting him to speak at our event jeopardizes our beliefs and values as educators and may lead the public to lose faith in the education system.

Trying to balance the ethical points in this essay has led us to seek structure in articulating the emotions that drive our ethical decisions. The foundationalist view did this effectively with the 5 commitments. Reviewing and applying the different ethical viewpoints led us down a path of manipulating our values or creating curves in straight roads to meet the needs of each view. Similar to the fable of the Miller, our roundabout discussions led us initially to lose our ass (Walker & Donlevy, 2006). Fortunately, we were able to get it back on the path.

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