

Fostering students' ability and willingness for ethical reflection at a business school

Extended summary (930 words, max. 1000 words)

Aims/Research Questions

The present paper deals with the question how students' ability and willingness for ethical reflection can be fostered within a study program at a business school. Ethical reflection in the context of business education means to illuminate the hidden values, ideas of man and agendas in the models, rules and methods of economics and business administration which often remain hidden (Ulrich, 2000). Thus, lecturers need to discuss such uncovered values and agendas with their students and motivate them to take a stance based on their own values.

Thus, the aim of this research is to develop and investigate an intervention to foster students' ability and willingness for ethical reflection. The following questions will guide this research:

Which measures can be taken on the micro level of individual lectures?

Which methods of teaching and learning are suitable to foster ethical reflection?

How can the different courses and modules be arranged on the meso-level of study programs to support students' development of ethical reflection?

Theoretical foundation

There is a huge body of literature about reflection and reflection models, (e.g. Dewey, 1933; Hatton & Smith, 1995; King & Kitchener, 1994; Mezirow, 1991; Schön, 1983; Thorpe, 2004; Valli, 1997; West, 2000) as well as about promoting (Boud & Walker, 1998) and hindering factors (Boud, 1999; Dymont & O'Connell, 2010; Dymont & O'Connell, 2011). However, research about implementing ethical reflection into curricula is rare. Business ethics theory, above all the theory of "Integrative Business Ethics" by Ulrich (2000; 2008), promote using ethical reflection to think behind the rules of the economy and critically evaluate the way we manage our economy. The possibility adapting the theory for pedagogical aims and introduce it to Higher Education curricula is mentioned, but not further investigated (Ulrich, 2000, p. 558). Some first attempts describing methods to foster ethical reflection exist (e.g. Dworkin, 2007; Gentile, 2010), however, there are no systematic approaches to coherently address critical reflection throughout a complete study program at a business school.

Empirical research on students' reflection in general provides evidence that students often have misconceptions about what proper reflection entails (Beveridge, Fruchter, Sanmartin, & deLottinville, 2013) and do not reflect on the desired reflection level (Dyment & O'Connell, 2010). These findings and the realization that the world is becoming more dynamic and fast-moving, leads to the requirement to improve students' reflection and especially ethical reflection. When everything changes very fast and a lot of new ideas and possibilities emerge, it is important to look behind these novelties and examine them carefully. This process is necessary to act as an independent and responsible citizen. In the context of Higher Education, some calls for integrating ethical reflection into university are emerging (Cornuel, Hommel, & Dyllick, 2015; Currie, Knights, & Starkey, 2010; Weltzien Hoivik, 2009). The present paper follows these calls and develops a concept, which could integrate ethical reflection to a study program in a comprehensive way.

Methodology

As the purpose of this paper is to develop and introduce an intervention in Higher Education which is not developed yet, the research approach of educational design research' is used in this project. Euler and Sloane (2014, p. 16) characterize this research approach "by the requirement that the development of innovative solutions for practical educational problems should dovetail with the acquisition of scientific knowledge." (similar McKenney and Reeves, 2012). What makes this research approach unique is that it is "not only describing and clarifying that which exists, but also the innovatively discovering and developing that which is possible." (Euler & Sloane, 2014, p.16). Educational design research therefore connects the three areas theory formation, theory testing and theory application. In addition to developing solutions for a practical problem, the approach of educational design research also generates so called design principles which "recommend how to address a specific class of issues in a range of settings" (McKenney & Reeves, 2012, p.34). These principles could be used to integrate ethical reflection into the curriculum of another study programs or another university. They also provide an important theoretical contribution with regard to fostering ethical reflection. For this project, one specific study program has been chosen. Based on insights from relevant stakeholders, such as lecturers and program coordinators, the concrete aims of the interventions will be defined. In a second step, interventions on the

course level and changes in the curriculum of the study program will be developed, using theoretical concepts as well as practitioner knowledge. After prototyping these interventions in several lectures, the interventions will be adjusted and tested again. The research cycle culminates in the definition of design principles as well as in a summative evaluation of the developed intervention (see figure 1).

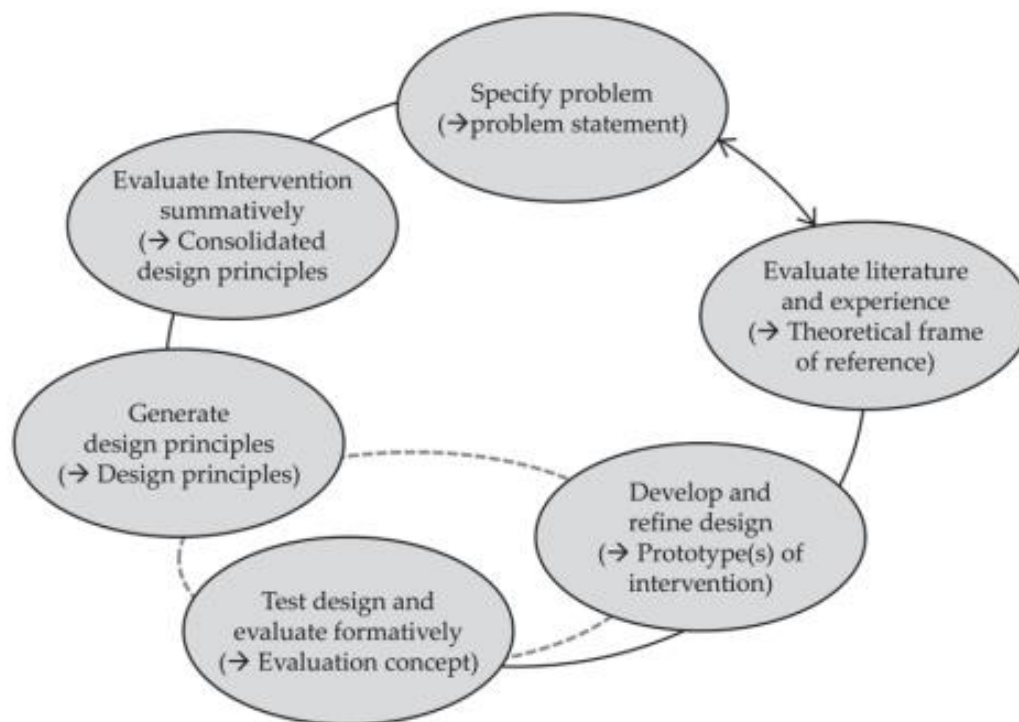


Figure 1: The research procedure (Euler & Sloane, 2014, p.20).

Expected Results

The research will lead to the development of a) a learning design to foster ethical reflection and b) design principles supporting the design of interventions in similar settings with the goal of fostering ethical reflection. As the developed interventions will be repeatedly evaluated during the research process, the generated design principles are considered to be reliable.

Questions for round table discussion

Interesting questions for the round table discussion can be divided into two sections. The first is the development of interventions in single lectures and throughout the study program. Which methods, sequences, prerequisites etc. are required to reach the desired goal of ethical reflection?

The second section contains questions which deal with the problem of initiating a change process in a study program. What are good and successful ways to include all the stakeholders into the change process and therefore increase the success probability in this project?

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