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Ethical Issues and Codes of Ethics: Views of Adult Education Practitioners in Canada and the United States

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Although the ethics of practice has become increasingly visible in the adult education literature over the past two decades, little empirical research has been done to inform the dialogue and debate. The purpose of this study was to examine the views of adult education practitioners in British Columbia about the need for a code of ethics and about the ethical issues, concerns, and dilemmas experienced in their practice. The study was an approximate replication of research carried out in Indiana reported by McDonald and Wood. This study was undertaken to broaden the empirical database within adult education, provide further insight into the ethics of practice, and determine similarities and differences between Canadian and American adult educators in their encounters with ethical issues and their views about codes of ethics. Major findings confirm positive practitioner views about codes of ethics and are generally consistent with the findings reported by McDonald and Wood.

In recent years, the ethics of practice has been a popular discussion topic in many professional fields, including adult education. Dozens of articles and chapters have been written during the past 20 years on the ethics of practice in adult education, including debates about the desirability and feasibility of developing codes of ethics. Among those who have argued for the development of codes of ethics are Boulmetis and Russo (1991), Griffith (1991), Connelly and Light (1991), Siegel (2000), and Sork and Welock (1992). Arguments supporting the development of ethics codes have focused on the need to protect the public from harm inflicted by unscrupulous or incompetent practitioners, the value of developing a common



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moral framework to guide practice, the expectation of self-regulation in maturing fields of social practice (one aspect of which is having and enforcing a code of ethics), and the commitment to ethically responsible practice that adopting a code represents.

There have also been strong arguments against developing codes of ethics, including those presented by Carlson (1988), Collins (1991), and Cunningham (1992). These arguments have included the decontextualized nature of codes and their consequent irrelevance to many problems of practice, the privileging of elites who usually hold positions of power that enable them to develop and enforce codes, and the impossibility of developing a meaningful code that is broadly acceptable, relevant, and enforceable given the diversity of the field. The debates on codes of ethics have largely been between academics. While these debates have continued, several practitioner groups in the United States have developed codes of ethics or guidelines for developing codes of ethics, including the Pennsylvania Association for Adult Continuing Education (n.d.), the Coalition of Adult Education Organizations (1993), the Learning Resources Network (1994), Michigan Adult and Community Educators (Mallet, 1994), the Association for Continuing Higher Education (Lawler, 2000a), and the Academy of Human Resource Development (1999). Although not presented as a code of ethics, Wood (1996) proposed nine ethical responsibilities that adult educators have to society, learners, organizations, and the profession. Most recently, Siegel (2000) proposed a universal code of ethics for adult educators consisting of 10 principles derived from other published work. The existence of these efforts to codify ethical principles and the reasons they were developed are strong indirect indicators that practitioners are encountering troubling ethical issues in practice and are seeking help in how to address them.

The purpose of this study was to identify the ethical issues experienced by adult education practitioners in British Columbia (BC) and their views about the need for a code of ethics for the field of adult education. The study was an approximate replication of a research project reported by McDonald and Wood (1993) that surveyed a variety of adult education practitioner groups in Indiana. We believed that it was important to do this study for several reasons. BC represents a different cultural context for the practice of adult education, and therefore, we wondered if the ethical issues faced by practitioners here would differ from those faced by practitioners doing similar work in Indiana. We also wondered if opinions about the role and desirability of a code of ethics would be similar because, as far as we know, no codes of ethics have been developed by adult education groups in Canada, and two of the strong critics of codes of ethics (Carlson, 1988; Collins, 1991) are based in Canada. There are also precedents for surveying practitioners about ethical issues to better understand the issues they most often encounter (Barber, 1990) and as a preliminary stage leading to the development of a code of ethics (Lawler, 2000a). In addition, knowing what ethical issues, concerns, and dilemmas practitioners experience provides the basis for planning professional development activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Discussion of the ethics of practice is a relatively recent phenomenon in adult education. Most of the literature that explicitly addresses the ethics of practice was published in the past 20 years. A good portion of this literature has focused on ethical issues that are likely to be encountered in specific areas of practice, such as program planning (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1998; Cervero & Wilson, 1994; Singarella & Sork, 1983; Sork, 1988), teaching (Caffarella, 1988; Lenz, 1982; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Pratt, 1998), administration (Pearson & Kennedy, 1985; Price, 1997; Sisco, 1988), marketing (Burns & Roche, 1988; Martel & Colley, 1986), counseling and advising (Day, 1988), evaluation (Brookfield, 1988), using mediated forms of instruction (Holt, 1996, 1998; Reed & Sork, 1990), and continuing professional education (Lawler, 2000b). Other literature has addressed ethics more broadly, including a recent book by Jarvis (1997) in which he made a strong argument for the universal "good" of respecting persons as an overriding moral principle that should guide all educational practice.

Empirical studies of the ethics of practice have been rare. In early studies, Clement, Pinto, and Walker (1978) and Maidment and Losito (1980) reported on surveys of training and development professionals and the kinds and frequencies of ethical issues they encountered in practice. Knudson (1979) surveyed professors of adult education in the United States and Canada regarding unethical situations with the goal of gaining insight into potential future directions for the development of ethical guidelines. Barber (1990) reported on a survey conducted to identify the perceived importance of ethical issues and how frequently these issues were experienced by extension professionals. More recently, Lawler (1996) surveyed members of the Association for Continuing Higher Education seeking member consensus about ethical dilemmas and principles to be used in addressing these dilemmas. The results of this survey were used to construct a code that was approved by the association in 1997 (Lawler, 2000a). In 1993, the results of a survey of adult education practitioners in Indiana were published by McDonald and Wood. This survey was designed to determine the extent to which practitioners confronted ethical issues in their practice, the kinds of issues confronted, and their views toward codes of ethics as tools to help them address ethical issues. Rather than summarize their findings here, we instead compare the Indiana findings with those of our study in BC.

RESEARCH DESIGN

As in McDonald and Wood's (1993) original study, we used survey methodology to determine the views of adult education practitioners about the types and natures of ethical issues, concerns, and dilemmas they experienced and about the need for a code of ethics. The BC study surveyed practitioners from four organizations that were roughly equivalent to the groups surveyed in Indiana: adult basic education instructors and administrators listed with Literacy BC, members of the

British Columbia Association of Continuing Education Administrators, BC members of the American Society for Training and Development, and BC members of the National Society for Performance and Instruction. In the Indiana study, the sample was drawn from adult basic education instructors listed with Indiana's Department of Education, members of four Indiana chapters of the American Society for Training and Development, and members of the Indiana Council of Continuing Education. Because the membership (population) of the four BC adult education organizations was considerably smaller than the population from which the Indiana sample was drawn, all members of the British Columbian organizations were included in the survey. Of the 460 potential respondents identified, 122 were continuing education administrators, 158 were adult basic educators, and 180 were training and development practitioners. In contrast, McDonald and Wood (1993) used a stratified random sampling technique to obtain 454 potential respondents. Of this total, 248 adult basic educators and 177 trainers were included in the sample. All 29 members of the Indiana Council for Continuing Education were included in the sample due to the small number of potential respondents.

The survey questionnaire used in the BC study was adapted with permission from the original questionnaire developed by McDonald (1991). Adaptations were made to McDonald's questionnaire because of the limitations of the original survey and the need to modify language reflecting the Canadian context. Both the original and adapted questionnaires were divided into three major sections: demographics, experiences and perceptions regarding codes of ethics, and personal encounters with ethical issues and dilemmas. In the BC survey, closed-ended questions regarding demographic characteristics included primary role in current position, age, sex, education, and years worked in the field. Section Two contained seven closed-ended questions including yes/no, Likert-type, and multiple-choice items. One of these questions was "Should there be a code of ethics for the field of adult education?" All respondents were asked to explain their answers to this question. These explanations were then analyzed and clustered into common themes. In the final section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to share examples of ethical issues, concerns, or dilemmas from their practice settings. The nature of these examples raised questions about what is the proper, right, fair, or responsible thing to do within the context of decisions or actions that affect other people. The questionnaire concluded with an opportunity for respondents to add any "additional comments" regarding ethics and codes of ethics in adult education.

The questionnaire used in the original Indiana study was pretested for face validity and field tested with a convenience sample of adult educators from the sample frame. It was also subjected to expert critique for content validity. Because the questionnaire used in the BC study had been modified from the original tool, field testing with a convenience sample of 12 adult educators was also employed, resulting in minor wording and format changes.

In early November 1995, 460 questionnaires were mailed to potential respondents in BC. A follow-up of nonrespondents was completed with a second mailing

at the end of November. As a result of the initial and follow-up mailings, 261 usable surveys were received (an overall response rate of 60% after correcting for nondeliverable surveys). By comparison, the Indiana study was based on 249 usable surveys (a 56% response rate).

Table 1 summarizes the proportion of respondents who were members of each type of organization included in the two samples. The relative proportions of respondents from the three types of organizations were more evenly distributed in the BC sample than in the Indiana sample. Continuing education administration was better represented among respondents to the BC survey than to the Indiana survey.

As in the Indiana study, three statistical tools were used to analyze and interpret the data. These were descriptive statistics, chi-square tests of significance, and one-way analysis of variance tests. Responses to open-ended questions were categorized and frequency counts made for each category. Although clustering narrative data is subject to errors of categorization, we are confident that such errors were minimal due to the clarity and uncomplicated character of the responses. Further detail about both the study's methodology and results can be found in Gordon (1997).

RESULTS

Responses to key survey questions and comparable data from the Indiana study are presented to reflect the similarities and differences in study results.

Demographics

In the BC study, 58% of respondents were female and 42% were male. In the Indiana study, 59% were female and 41% were male. In BC, the largest number of respondents (44%) reported that their primary roles were manager or administrator, whereas in Indiana, the largest number (43%) reported that their primary roles were instructor or trainer. In BC, the largest number of respondents (39%) held bachelor's degrees, whereas in Indiana, the largest number (45%) held master's degrees. In both studies, the largest percentage of respondents (52% in BC and 37% in Indiana) indicated that they had worked in the field of adult education for more than 10 years. In BC, the largest percentage of respondents (51%) were between the ages of 40 and 49. Age was not included as a variable in the Indiana study.

Practitioner Views About Codes of Ethics

Should there be a code of ethics? The major research question asked in both the BC and Indiana studies focused on adult education practitioners' views about the need for a code of ethics for the field of adult education. Fifty-two percent of the

TABLE 1
Respondents by Organizational Membership

<i>Type of Organization</i>	<i>BC Survey</i>		<i>Indiana Survey</i>	
	n	%	n	%
Adult basic education/literacy	97	37.2	113	45.4
Continuing education administration	71	27.2	23	9.2
Training and development	93	35.6	113	45.4
Totals	261	100.0	249	100.0

Note: BC = British Columbia.

individuals surveyed in the Indiana study answered “yes” to the question, “Do you believe there should be a code of ethics for you as an adult educator?” In the BC study, 73% of respondents answered “yes” to a similar question: “Do you believe there should be a code of ethics for the field of adult education?” Table 2 presents a comparison of study results. Although the wording of the BC study question was somewhat broader than the Indiana study question, the magnitude of the “yes” responses was surprising. Respondents were asked to briefly explain their “yes,” “no,” and “not sure” responses. The explanations provided were similar in both the BC and Indiana studies.

In the BC study, the most common theme supporting the need for a code of ethics was that a code should act as a guideline or reference point for acceptable behavior and ethical decision making. The following comments extracted from the survey reflect this general theme:

- I think it is important for any profession to have a code of ethics which states the principles and values to guide practitioners. A code sets boundaries for acceptable ethical and professional behavior.
- Public declarations such as a code of ethics provide an important frame of reference for our behavior and can be used as a basis for decision making by both teachers and administrators.
- A set of guidelines is definitely needed in this field to assist practitioners in making decisions about what is right or wrong.

The second most frequently occurring theme noted by respondents to the BC survey was that the primary focus of any code of ethics for the field of adult education should be the learners or clients. This theme is illustrated by these comments:

- A code of ethics should assure that each student is treated equally and fairly.
- I believe we owe the learners a standard of conduct that allows them to learn in an atmosphere of honesty and integrity.

TABLE 2
Beliefs About the Need for a Code of Ethics for the Field of Adult Education

<i>Belief About the Need for a Code of Ethics</i>	<i>BC Survey</i>		<i>Indiana Survey</i>	
	n	%	n	%
Yes	190	72.8	130	52.2
No	18	6.9	37	14.9
Not sure	53	20.3	70	28.1
Missing cases	0	0	12	4.8
Totals	261	100.0	249	100.0

Note: BC = British Columbia.

- A code of ethics should be essential for all fields of work when dealing with people's lives is involved.

Other frequently cited reasons for supporting a code of ethics included the following: A code helps to deter unethical behavior, a code enhances the credibility of the profession, and a code increases professionalism and accountability.

The two primary reasons respondents gave for believing that there should not be a code were that the existence of a code does not ensure ethical practice and that the diversity of the field of adult education precludes applicability to all settings. Two examples of comments from respondents who believed there should not be a code are as follows:

- I believe people who enter this field generally have a high degree of internalized moral values, so they don't need a code. For those who don't have values, no code will assure ethical professional practice.
- The field of adult education is huge and varied. I doubt any general code of ethics could be devised that would apply to such diversity.

Reasons respondents gave for feeling unsure about the need for a code included concerns about content, construction, and enforcement and issues related to the diversity of the adult education field. The following examples reflect these themes:

- The specific content of a code would determine a more specific answer. If a code protects the student/learner, I would say yes. If the code only protects the interests of the adult educator, I would give a definite no. Protection of an inept educator at the expense of student/learners absolutely angers me.
- I would like to see the content. It may or may not be useful depending on the wording, intended uses, enforcement policy, etc.

Functions of a code of ethics. Practitioners' beliefs about the functions of a code of ethics obtained through an eight-item Likert-type scale provided similar results

in both the BC and Indiana studies. The majority of respondents in both studies either agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements:

- “A code of ethics instructs the practitioner about what is good practice.”
- “A code of ethics gives the profession integrity or credibility.”
- “A code of ethics contributes to the identification of the occupation as a profession.”
- “A code of ethics for adult education is as important as a code of ethics for practitioners in law, medicine, and other professions.”
- “A code of ethics influences people to restrain themselves from engaging in unethical practices.”

There was no clear majority agreement in either study (50% in BC and 48% in Indiana) with the statement, “A code of ethics ensures clients that professional services are rendered with high standards.” More than two thirds (69%) of the respondents in Indiana and more than three fourths (83%) in BC were either undecided about or disagreed with a statement regarding codes of ethics deterring government regulation of the profession. Fifty-eight percent of respondents in Indiana and 68% in BC either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, “A code places power in the hands of an elite group of professionals who control the majority of practitioners.”

ANOVA, employed to examine the relationship between how respondents felt about the function of codes of ethics and whether they believed there should be a code of ethics for the field of adult education, produced similar results in both BC and Indiana. Respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with statements about the functions of codes of ethics were more likely to respond “yes” to the need for a code of ethics than those who were undecided about or disagreed with the statements ($p \leq .05$).

Currently operating under a code. Additional questions in the survey measured practitioners’ knowledge of existing codes and whether they were currently operating under codes. In both studies, less than 50% of respondents knew of the existence of a code of ethics to guide their practice in adult education. In the BC study, 40% answered “yes” to this question, whereas 27% in the Indiana study answered “yes.” Fifty percent of the BC sample and 34% of the Indiana sample indicated that they were presently operating under some code of ethics.

Issues a code should address. Those respondents who answered “yes” or “not sure” to the question of whether a code of ethics was needed for the field of adult education were asked to respond to the question, “What issues should a code address?” It is noteworthy that in both studies, learner-focused issues were cited most frequently. Client confidentiality and treatment of the learner were the two most frequently identified areas of concern that both BC and Indiana respondents believed should be included in a code. In both studies, the greatest number of ethical

issues, concerns, or dilemmas encountered by practitioners had to do with confidentiality, so it was not surprising that they believed that a code should address this issue. Interestingly, the least frequently mentioned issues in both studies were determining program fees, misuse of funds, copyright infringement, and professional development. These issues typically have fewer direct consequences for learners, whereas those more frequently mentioned have more direct and potentially more serious consequences for learners.

Creation, regulation, and enforcement of a code. Further noteworthy findings include the responses to questions about the creation, regulation, and enforcement of a code of ethics. In both studies, the professional association was the most frequently indicated organization that the practitioners believed should create and disseminate a code of ethics. In response to the question, "Should a code of ethics for adult education practitioners have a regulating function?" it was not clear to adult educators whether a code of ethics should have this function. Of the 242 respondents in BC answering this question, 39% responded "yes" whereas 37% responded "not sure." Of the 199 respondents in Indiana answering this question, 36% responded "yes" whereas 43% responded "not sure." Of those respondents who believed that a code of ethics should have a regulating function, differences were evident in study responses to the follow-up question of who should have primary responsibility for code enforcement. In the BC study, the professional association was the most frequently cited organization, whereas in the Indiana study, the employing organization was most frequently identified.

When demographic variables were cross-tabulated with respondent beliefs about the need for a code of ethics, and the chi-square test was applied, the only variable that indicated a significant difference in the Indiana study was respondent education ($p = .045$). Individuals without bachelor's degrees were more likely to respond positively to the need for a code of ethics. The only demographic variable that indicated a significant difference in the BC study was the respondents' primary roles in their current positions ($p = .026$). Teachers and trainers were more likely to respond positively to the need for a code of ethics. Managers and administrators were more likely to be unsure of the need for a code.

When the chi-square tests were applied to respondents' knowledge of the existence of a code, whether they were currently operating under codes, and how they answered the question on their beliefs about the need for a code of ethics, both the BC and Indiana studies produced similar results. Those respondents who knew of the existence of a code of ethics to guide their professional practice were more likely to believe that there should be a code of ethics (BC results: $p = .000$; Indiana results: $p = .004$). Similarly, those respondents who were presently operating under codes believed that there should be a code of ethics for the field of adult education (BC results: $p = .006$; Indiana results: $p = .000$).

When the chi-square tests were applied to citing issues that a code should address and practitioner group affiliation, both studies indicated similarities and differences. In both studies, adult basic educators (ABEs) believed more than the other practitioner groups that treatment of the learner and the needs of the learner should be addressed. In both studies, training and development (T&D) practitioners believed that copyright infringement should be addressed. In the BC study, T&D practitioners believed more than the other practitioner groups that the issue of credentials should be addressed. In the Indiana study, T&D practitioners believed more than the other groups that honesty in advertising and conflicts of interest should be addressed. Table 3 provides a summary comparison of significant values for issues that a code of ethics should address by practitioner group affiliation.

In response to the questions about the creation, regulation, and enforcement of a code of ethics, differences were evident in the study results. However, although differences in selected results were noted, the ABE group was consistently responsible for the statistically significant differences in both studies. In the Indiana study, when the chi-square tests were applied to responses about who should create and disseminate a code by group affiliation, the ABE group believed that a code should be developed by the employing organization more than the other two groups ($p = .014$). In the BC study, a statistically significant difference was found between responses of ABEs and the other two groups on the regulating function of a code of ethics. ABEs felt more positively about the regulating function than the other two practitioner groups ($p = .025$). In the Indiana study, a statistically significant difference was found between responses of ABEs and the other two groups on who should be responsible for code enforcement. ABEs believed more strongly than the other groups that the employing organization should be responsible for code enforcement ($p = .003$). No significant differences were noted in the BC study.

Personal Encounters with Ethical Issues and Dilemmas

In BC, 55% of respondents cited examples of situations that created ethical issues, concerns, or dilemmas for them (a somewhat broader question than that used in the Indiana study). In Indiana, 30% of respondents cited examples of situations that created ethical dilemmas in their practice. Of the 143 respondents in the BC study, 13 provided more than one example. Ten of these respondents provided two examples and 3 respondents provided three examples each. The organizing scheme used by McDonald (1991) in the original study was applied to the data. As content areas emerged from the analysis, it was clear that the original 10 domains used in the Indiana study generally fit the data. Additional categories were established through content analysis to reflect differences in the types of data obtained. The number of responses to this question allowed the creation of enough categories

TABLE 3
Summary of Significant Values: Issues a Code Should Address by Practitioner Group

<i>Issue (practitioner group)</i>	<i>Significant (p) Values</i>	
	<i>BC Survey</i>	<i>Indiana Survey</i>
Needs of learner (ABE)	.037	.002
Treatment of learner (ABE)	.006	.025
Copyright infringement (T&D)	.000	.000
Credentials (T&D)	.048	<i>ns</i>
Honesty in advertising (T&D)	<i>ns</i>	.011
Conflicts of interests (T&D)	<i>ns</i>	.001

Note: BC = British Columbia, ABE = adult basic educator, T&D = training and development.

that grouped analytically similar examples without masking differences by using too large or gross ones. Thirteen domains resulted from the categorization of examples provided by BC respondents. The three additional categories that were not evident in the original Indiana study were credential issues, learner–adult educator relationship issues, and intraorganizational issues. Table 4 presents the frequencies of ethical issues by practitioner group.

The most frequently cited issue across all three groups of practitioners was confidentiality, with the majority of dilemmas arising from issues around the provision of student information to “others” (family members, funding agencies, other students or teachers). T&D practitioners focused particularly on the issue of creating a “safe place” during training and experienced dilemmas when, for example, “the adult learner’s manager or supervisor wants to know details re: the learner’s comments, participation etc. during a training program.” Confidentiality was also the most frequently cited ethical dilemma in the Indiana study.

The second most frequently cited ethical issue involved learner–adult educator relationships. This domain focused on examples where respondents experienced, were aware of, or had witnessed student complaints about faculty, power imbalances, role conflicts, and socially intimate instructor–student relationships. Both continuing educators and ABEs expressed specific concerns about socially intimate student–teacher relationships centering on such questions as “how friendly should teachers behave with students,” “to date or not to date,” “how much extra-curricular socialization is acceptable,” and finally, the dilemma of being aware of student–teacher sexual relationships.

Financial issues were the next most frequently cited category and included examples involving program fees, allocation of resources, and billing clients. For continuing educators and ABEs, prioritizing programs in “budget cutting” exercises was a particular concern.

Professionalism and competence issues and conflicts of interest were the fourth and fifth most frequently cited categories. ABEs were particularly concerned about

TABLE 4
Major Domains of Ethical Issues, Concerns, and Dilemmas

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Practitioner Groups</i>			<i>Total</i>
	<i>Continuing Education</i>	<i>Training and Development</i>	<i>Adult Basic Education</i>	
Confidentiality	11	13	20	44
Learner–adult educator relationship	6	0	15	21
Finance	6	5	5	16
Professionalism and competence	2	4	8	14
Conflicts of interest	7	6	1	14
Evaluating student performance	3	3	4	10
Ownership of instructional materials	1	7	1	9
Intraorganizational concerns	3	1	5	9
Credentials	2	3	2	7
Unsound training design	2	3	0	5
Employment practices	1	1	2	4
Enrollment and attendance	2	0	2	4
Other	2	0	0	2
Total	48	46	65	159

instructor competence. One respondent asked, “How do you deal with someone who is not committed to doing a good job?” Issues of professional integrity concerned T&D practitioners. One consultant noted that during an organizational review, “the underlying intent was that I would recommend firing an individual.” Across all three groups, conflicts of interest most often involved individuals with training or consulting businesses generating second incomes. One respondent noted, “Colleges have to compete with their own faculty who are moonlighting as consultants and trainers.” Also included in this domain were examples of “perks” for business or services provided.

Evaluating student performance was the next most frequently cited ethical issue. Examples in this domain focused primarily on dilemmas associated with equitable standards, “bending rules,” or waiving academic requirements.

The seventh most frequently cited category was ownership of instructional materials. This was clearly of greatest concern to T&D practitioners. One respondent noted that “a major issue for educators at all levels is copyright infringement. Because as educators we believe in the free and open dissemination of information, we tend to justify unauthorized use of copyrighted materials!”

Intraorganizational issues were the next most frequently cited category, primarily concerning those practitioners employed in public institutions. Within this domain, compromising personal codes of ethics due to administrative decisions and whether to “report or not report a colleague” provided ethical dilemmas for respondents.

Credentialing issues were related primarily to teachers misrepresenting their qualifications or being awarded contracts based on reasons other than their credentials, and unsound training design issues were related primarily to the appropriateness of training. One continuing educator wrote, "I have declined to deliver training that did not clearly benefit the recipient or is clearly not the solution to a problem."

The next category providing ethical issues for practitioners was employment practices. This domain focused on questionable hiring practices (personal favoritism) and concerns about layoff procedures. One practitioner experienced the dilemma of "being asked by one's institution to engage in budget planning which inevitably limited the job security and opportunities of colleagues."

Enrollment and attendance issues were of concern to four practitioners. Two continuing educators wrote of their dilemmas in advising students regarding "enrolling in courses to boost lagging enrollment or boost budget numbers."

Additional Comments Regarding Ethics and Codes of Ethics

As in the Indiana study, respondents to the BC study were given the opportunity to add further comments about ethics or codes of ethics in adult education. Thirty-eight individuals in the BC survey and 41 in the Indiana survey chose to add their comments. Common themes evident in the BC study included the protection and needs of the learner, recognition of the diversity of the field and the associated challenges of a common code, and concerns about code enforcement. A continuing education administrator made the following comment: "A code of ethics has value as a set of guiding principles, however, I am concerned that enforcement by a professional body will lead to unnecessary bureaucracy and limitations on credentialing." Across all three groups of practitioners, support for a code of ethics was also a common theme.

DISCUSSION

The results of the BC study clearly confirm positive practitioner attitudes toward codes of ethics and support the findings reported in the Indiana study. Although this is not surprising because the respondents in both studies were from roughly equivalent practitioner groups, the magnitude of the BC response was surprising. Certainly, in the time since the original Indiana study, the visibility of ethics and ethical issues has increased in society generally. As Leskinen (1993) noted, "Hardly a day goes by without news about unethical behaviour by our elected officials, our fellow educators, business leaders, and ordinary citizens" (p. 6). This increased general awareness may stimulate adult educators to reflect on the issues and dilemmas that confront them in their everyday practice. Within this context of practice, the potential benefits of codes of ethics may be reinforced. The strength of the BC response may also be the result of greater experience with codes of ethics. Whereas 34% of

the Indiana respondents indicated that they operated under codes of ethics, 50% of the BC respondents indicated this status.

Although there is a high degree of practitioner support for codes of ethics, the respondents in both studies were not clear whether a code of ethics should have a regulating function. This is not surprising, because code enforcement has been a consistent issue in other professions. The many procedural issues that code enforcement raises (who should regulate, what practitioner actions are considered unethical, what disciplinary measures or sanctions would be developed) may affect responses to the enforcement issue. Perhaps the notion of regulation or enforcement is a premature component in the process of code development. As Connelly and Light (1991) argued, "the development of enforcement procedures is a later stage in the process of building a code of ethics" (p. 239).

In both the BC and Indiana studies, examples of situations that created ethical issues or dilemmas for the respondents clearly demonstrate the existence of complex, profound, and varied problems facing practitioners. As noted previously, more than half of the respondents in the BC study cited ethical situations from practice, and although the response rate was surprising given the open-ended question format, it was the description of the examples that was more surprising. The length and detail of the responses clearly conveyed the often difficult decisions that confront adult educators in diverse practice settings. The willingness of practitioners to share their experiences with ethical issues highlights the need for continuing dialogue within the field about the ethics of practice.

To those who are critics of the professionalization of the field, this study might represent little more than confirmation that practitioners, especially those who belong to professional organizations such as those whose members were surveyed, support the development of a code because it represents the values of the dominant and elite group to which they belong. A code freezes in time what the dominant group considers "responsible practice," thus reinforcing and reproducing the status quo. It is troubling to note that some of the codes of ethics that have been produced for adult education contain clauses that call for "following existing rules, policies, and laws." These clauses would effectively render unethical the work of social activists such as Paulo Freire and Miles Horton, who deliberately broke rules, policies, and laws that were unjust and oppressive. So, there is reason to be cautious about developing any code of ethics that prevents work that challenges unjust, oppressive structures. It is also the case that codes of ethics developed in Eurocentric cultures privilege a Western, liberal political philosophy. This marginalizes those from non-Western cultures and those with more radical philosophies and may result in adult education becoming a less inclusive field.

Although we recognize that these are real concerns, we cannot use them as excuses to avoid dealing with the ethics of practice. The important thing is that we are aware of the problems associated with professionalization and avoid the pitfalls that thoughtful critics have identified.

Implications

The findings of this study have a number of implications for the field of adult education. To those who may wish to continue the debate about whether or not there should be codes of ethics for adult educators, the BC study conveys a strong message from the perspective of practitioners. If practitioners' views are seen as important and valuable, then serious consideration should be given to continuing dialogue about the process of developing codes of ethics. Clearly, the ethical issues cited by the study respondents attest to the need for addressing ethical problems and the potential role of codes of ethics to guide professional practice. Professional associations and organizations related to adult education may wish to consider providing opportunities for their members to discuss and debate issues of code development. Additionally, through this process, support for practitioners in dealing with ethical issues and dilemmas could be a positive outcome. As McDonald and Wood (1993) asked, "Where are practitioners to find support and insight for recognizing and addressing such dilemmas . . . if not with the professional leadership . . . then with whom?" (p. 256).

To those who teach in adult education graduate programs, these findings suggest that explicit discussion of ethical issues and some experience with ethical problem solving might be useful additions to the curriculum. Ethical issues will not disappear. Whether graduates are employed as teachers, administrators, or program planners, their practice will involve dealing with ethical issues and dilemmas. If those engaged in the preparation of adult educators are not addressing the ethical dimensions of practice, they are not being responsive to the needs for assistance expressed by practitioners in both BC and Indiana.

Although the findings of the BC study strongly confirm positive practitioner attitudes about the need for a code of ethics for the field of adult education, further research should be done to confirm these findings. Conducting similar studies with other groups of adult educators may be valuable in gaining different perspectives on the issues addressed in the BC and Indiana surveys. Research into exploring workable regulatory mechanisms could provide clearer direction on the issue of code enforcement. Qualitative research studies that explore the lived experiences of practitioners may provide new insights into the ethical dimensions of practice and are suggested to further extend the findings of this study.

If there are still serious questions about the desirability or feasibility of developing codes of ethics for adult education, it would seem prudent to craft some alternative response to the pleas for help reflected in both the BC and Indiana studies. Adult educators have a proud tradition of responding to the educational needs of adult learners, but it seems that there is a strongly felt but unmet need among practitioners for knowledge and skills related to professional ethics. If there is no systematic response to this need, serious questions can be raised about adult educators' collective commitment to ethically responsible practice.

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