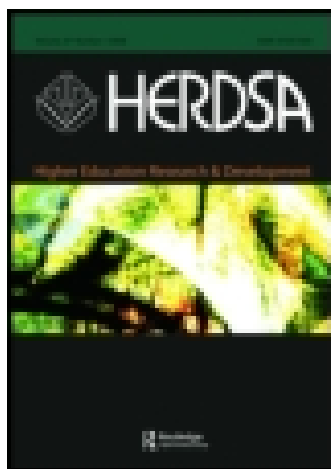


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The state of ethical learning of students in the Spanish university system: considerations for the European higher education area

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With the establishment of the European higher education area (EHEA), the ethical learning of students is a matter of central importance in European universities. This paper examines the current state of ethical learning of students in the Spanish university system. We present the results of a descriptive survey, which used a training model for university students and examined their ethical development in three categories: the construction of self, learning in fellowship and socio-moral reflection. The results of the survey reflect the current situation of ethical training among Spanish students and enable us to propose certain measures for consolidating and enhancing ethical development with the Spanish universities of the EHEA.

Keywords: ethical learning; European higher education area; Spain university; university teaching

Introduction

The concern with ethical development in universities is not new: indeed, the body of literature on the nature and purposes of the university (Wyatt, 1990) and on its history (Rüegg, 1992) demonstrates that the ethical development of students has long been considered an essential part of a university's mission. Ethical development can also be said to have an important global impact (Kerr, 2001; Scott, 2006).

The current reality of European universities requires us to re-examine professional ethics and to ascribe ethical learning the same importance as we do cognitive, functional and personal development (European Commission, 2005, 2006; European Council, 1996). Broadly speaking, one could say that the European higher education area (EHEA) is seeking to replace the discipline-based curriculum model, predominant in recent years, with vocational, professional and humanistic models (Karseth, 2006). This is why the renewed presence of these models at university level is beginning to be felt in areas such as the development and consolidation of teaching methodologies (Eyler & Gilers, 1999; Newman, 2008), and also in the increasing attention being paid to teachers' ethical performance. There are many reasons for the strengthening of this new commitment, but broadly speaking they can be grouped in two categories: those that lie at the social or community level, and those at the professional level. With regard to the former, levels of social commitment among students are reported to be low, and the fact that student bodies in Western societies do not identify with either political institutions or the initiatives of their local communities is a subject of increasing

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social concern (Duke, 2008; Saha, Print, & Edwards, 2007). The self-centred nature of young people today also has repercussions for university educators (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991), who have to teach students to be not only top-rate professionals but also citizens with a sense of civic engagement.

With regard to the second group of reasons, Europe's universities today have established more direct ties with the world of work and the professions (Smyth, 1995), with obvious consequences for students' ethical learning (Sloam, 2008). Moreover, over recent years the number of students who combine their studies with paid work has increased significantly (Curtis & Shani, 2002; Lucas & Lammont, 1998). These students claim that this situation benefits them in terms of their acquisition of ethical skills, promoting their understanding of ethical dilemmas in the workplace and boosting their confidence in their ethical development (Callender, 2008).

In Spain, current socio-economic policy implies a need to rethink ethical learning in universities (MICINN, 2010). Although Spanish universities have yet to develop a definitive model of ethical development, we believe that the opportunity is now there to bring ethical learning to the fore (Boni & Lozano, 2007; Escámez, García, & Jover, 2008) and, ultimately, to align it with the various projects that have been conducted in different European universities and which stress the need to evaluate and consider the state of ethical learning among university students. Here, special mention should be made of the Tuning Project, which includes (both personal and systemic) generic competences that are explicitly related to ethical development (e.g., Competences 6, 7 and 23), while several of the others (transversal) have obvious implications for ethical behavior (González & Wagenaar, 2003). In the case of Spain, the EHEA also provides us with an opportunity to learn from the university institutions of countries that invest substantial resources in teaching (Battistoni & Hudson, 2006; Solbrekke & Karseth, 2006).

This study has two main aims: on the one hand, it seeks to describe the current state of ethical learning in the Spanish university system, a member of the EHEA; and, on the other, it formulates a number of conclusions and recommendations, based on the data reported, which could be useful for teachers and researchers working in universities outside Europe and who also consider the ethical learning of their students to form an important part of contemporary university education. To do so, we employ a specific theoretical model and take into consideration a number of pertinent variables, including: the type of university, the particular degree course being studied, the academic year in which the students are enrolled and their employment status. It is our belief that the study is necessary not only to obtain an accurate picture of the current situation, but also to provide realistic data that should allow us to optimize ethical development and teaching in the Spanish university.

Ethical learning in the university: a theoretical approach

The kind of ethical learning in universities that we wish to defend draws upon a theoretical and practical model known as 'the construction of moral personality'. This model has been used for many years in pre-university education (Martínez, 1998) and it brings together ideas from other models that focus on development and moral reasoning (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987; Kohlberg, 1981, 1984), emotion and sensation (Prinz, 2009) and moral character (Lapsley & Clark, 2005). The moral personality model also takes on board the contributions of integrated models in moral developmental theory (Rest, 1986). The goal of our ethical learning model is to provide university

students with a firm ethical grounding, both as private individuals and as members of collectives (Veugelers, 2011). The model is based on the following premises: (1) knowledge, as the cognitive-behavioral tradition proposes, must favor the use of communicative rationality and dialogue in dispute resolution; (2) in accordance with Kantian ethics (Kant, 2008), people must be treated as ends in themselves and their freedom and individuality must be respected; (3) in accordance with Aristotle (1998), we must, in the notion of our future as virtuous individuals, recognize a teleological dimension and (4) and again with reference to Aristotle, students should be called upon as individuals to act within and exert influence upon their community (Aristotle, 1962).

This ethical learning model stems from educational work carried out in eight areas or dimensions of development that together constitute what we call ethical learning (Puig & Martín, 1998): self-knowledge; autonomy and self-regulation; dialogue; the ability to transform the environment; empathy or social perspective; social skills; critical understanding of reality and finally, ethical reasoning. These eight dimensions are further assigned to three basic learning categories: the construction of self, learning in fellowship and socio-moral reflection.

Construction of self-entails self-knowledge, autonomy and self-regulation. This category involves individuals learning to be autonomous within their communities, acquiring an understanding of who they are through their relationships with others, being able to evaluate this understanding, and, finally, learning how morally and ethically challenging scenarios require them to weigh up or temper the way they behave. Construction of self thus involves the formation of our way of being and everything that encompasses our intrapersonal sphere at what has been called a 'microethical' level (Apel, 1985). Within this category, ethical and moral teaching at universities must ensure that students reflect on the kinds of professionals they aspire to be. In other words, this teaching must always use higher-order professions as its point of reference, and be fashioned accordingly (Habermas, 1984). Finally, construction of self also teaches students to acquire a series of values that are often associated with academic performance: the importance of effort, perseverance, personal growth, the acceptance of one's own vulnerability and of setbacks, and freedom.

Learning in fellowship entails ability in dialogue and the acquisition of empathy or social perspective, as well as social skills. Primarily, this category trains individuals in the skills they need to live with others. It involves learning and defending norms or standards that are recognized as socially beneficial, whether or not they are the result of formal legislation, and requires individuals to acquire a set of abilities and social skills ranging from openness and transparency to sensitivity with regard to the principles of community value. Finally, it also means learning to assess knowledge in terms of its social value and understanding that knowledge gained in university is not an end in itself but the means by which to return to the community what rightfully belongs to it. Insofar as it helps individuals to be aware of ethical and moral issues at local, national and international levels of community life, this category can be said to provide teaching at a 'mesoethical' level (Apel, 1985). In addition, learning in fellowship challenges certain existing notions such as otherness, as well as topics in values education such as civility, hospitality, brotherhood and dialogue.

The third category, socio-moral reflection, entails a critical understanding of reality and an ability to engage in moral and ethical reasoning. This category trains people to consider real and hypothetical scenarios in which there is controversy or conflict and to

be able to anticipate conflict as the potential outcome of a given situation. It helps students learn the importance of reflecting before acting or of acting according to a process of reasoning. Learning in socio-moral reflection is, therefore, a way of experiencing knowledge in its ethical and moral dimensions, of questioning that knowledge and of making objective, ethically informed decisions. This category operates at what can be called a ‘macroethical’ level (Apel, 1985). Some of the values that underpin socio-moral reflection are justice, human dignity, respect, hope, interest, rigor and criticism.

By way of summary, Table 1 shows the overlap and correlation between the ethical levels, learning categories, and dimensions or strategies of ethical learning.

Survey methodology

The survey presented below is part of a larger project¹ that analyses ethical learning skills within the EHEA, the demand for ethical competence expressed by the business sector, the university resources currently being applied to promote ethical competence and the current state of ethical learning of students in the Spanish university system. This paper attempts to answer the following question: What is the current state of ethical learning of Spanish university students in relation to the three categories set out above?

Sample description

Delimiting a sample for a survey of this nature involved overcoming the problem of the size of the population, as well as the obvious geographical, physical and financial constraints. We needed a sample of sufficient size to enable us to obtain statistically satisfactory results. To satisfy this condition, we obtained a sample that, on the one hand, includes students from a wide range of degree courses and which, on the other, represents most of the regions of Spain. Students from six Spanish universities (both technical and generalist) and enrolled on a total of 23 undergraduate degree courses participated in the survey. Students at the following universities took part: the Technical University of Valencia (UPV), the Technical University of Catalonia (UPC), the Technical University of Madrid (UPM), the University of the Basque Country (EHU-UPV), the University of Barcelona (UB) and the Faculty of Business and Economics of the University of Cordoba (ETEA).

The overall student population of these six universities totaled 16,047. We undertook a stratified sampling of this population involving a two-stage proportional

Table 1. The relation between the ethical levels, learning categories and dimensions of ethical learning.

Ethical levels	Learning categories	Dimensions of ethical learning
Macroethical	Construction of self	Autonomy Self-regulation
Mesoethical	Learning in fellowship	Dialogue Empathy or social perspective Social skills
Microethical	Socio-moral reflection	Critical understanding of reality Ethical reasoning

allocation: first, the population was divided according to the number of students on each degree course, and then, within these subpopulations, we distinguished between first- and final-year students, in order to see the impact ethical teaching had had on a student's university education. The degree courses included in our sample were law, science, education, business and engineering. The final proportional sample included 2296 students: 212 from law, 75 from science, 552 from education, 305 from business and 1152 from engineering. Participants were randomly chosen by multi-stage stratification, using criteria of representativeness of the source university. There were 1169 first-year students and 1127 final-year students, and the gender mix was 1234 women and 1062 men. They had to fill in the questionnaire in their classes.

Questionnaire design

A questionnaire was designed for university students by adapting the specific instrument for assessing the aforementioned moral dimensions of personality, known as the Desarrollo de la Personalidad Moral (DPM, Moral Personality Development) in its original Spanish version, in persons aged 6–16 (Tey, Campo, Buxarrais, & Martínez, 2008). The questionnaire included 40 ordinal items that were coded according to the Likert scale (a summary evaluation method) and observable behavior, related to the moral dimensions of personality discussed in the theoretical model, was identified using polytomous responses. Each of the questionnaire items was scored by participants on a five-point Likert scale. The question was: assess yourself on the following sentences, and the response options being never, rarely, sometimes, often and almost always (the questionnaire is provided as an appendix). The categorical variables used were gender, university institution, degree course, employment status and first and final year of studies. This analysis, based solely on the use of the questionnaire described, could usefully be complemented with other data collection types, such as those applied to possible future qualitative studies or other quantitative data approaches in which the data gathered with this questionnaire are contrasted with other student data, such as the students' actual performance in assessments.

Analysis

We first conducted a descriptive analysis of the survey data in order to assess the results for each of the items and categories, with a contingency table being used to analyze bivariate data. This allowed us to determine how closely the variables, categories and items were related. We then performed a multivariate factor analysis using Varimax rotation. This analysis reduced the information in the data matrix by identifying three factors that grouped the 40 items and represented the original variables with a minimum loss of information. These three factors explained 74.6% of the total variance. All analyses were performed using SPSS 18.0.

The first factor corresponded to the category of socio-moral reflection and was represented by 19 of the questionnaire items. These were questions of an interpersonal nature (as mentioned in Section 2, the macroethical level) that elicited responses about how students behaved in their personal relationships with other students. The personal areas covered included judging, arguing, identifying and anticipating.

The second factor corresponded to the category of learning in fellowship (the mesoethical level) and was represented by 11 items. This factor tested students'

perceptions of the problems faced by communities at local, national and global level, and the items elicited what moral action students might take by using verbs like 'propose', 'participate', 'complain', 'criticize', 'disapprove' and 'commit'. Other concepts covered here were moral strength, perseverance, will power, having the courage of one's convictions and the moral actions that an individual might regard as suitable in given situations.

The third factor corresponded to the category of construction of self (the microethical level) and was represented by 10 items that had a more explicit relationship to the intrapersonal level. These items surveyed students' ability to engage in private reflection, as well as their personal time management skills, their assumption of study-related responsibilities, their self-perception in their relationships with others and their respect for others. Responses to these items also provide data about how students interpret the way in which others understand their intentions when they are starting a relationship (including the presence of factors such as vested interests or a person's imposition of their views) (Table 2).

Results

The variable 'university institution' showed significant differences in relation to the three factors analyzed, indicating that a student's ethical profile correlates with the university in which he or she is studying. The following data are the factorial values (F_{ij}) for each variable and each factor calculated in Table 1. With regard to the first factor (socio-moral reflection), students at the Technical University of Madrid (UPM) scored higher than their counterparts at the Faculty of Business and Economics of the University of Cordoba (ETEA) or at the University of the Basque Country (UPV-EHU), who achieved the lowest scores of all the universities surveyed. The second factor (learning in fellowship) also revealed significant differences among the universities. Here there were two distinct groups, one formed by the Faculty of Business and Economics of the University of Cordoba (ETEA), and the other, with a lower average score, formed by the Technical University of Madrid (UPM). The third factor (construction of self) also revealed clear differences in mean scores between the ETEA, the UPM, the UPC, and the EHU-UPV, which had higher averages of all. These results indicate that, although all the universities adhere to EHEA directives, the specific university practices of each conditions the ethical learning of their respective students and, therefore, the results point to the importance of such aspects as their mission statements, curricula, teaching programs and pedagogical practice which, in one way or another, are established in each of the university institutions (Table 3).

The variable 'degree course' showed significant differences in relation to the first factor, socio-moral reflection, which means that the epistemological nature of the courses correlated with the students' level of socio-moral development. With regard to the first factor (socio-moral reflection), education students (0.058) and engineering students (0.039) scored higher than sciences (-0.315) or business students (-0.152). In relation to the second factor, science (-0.133) and engineering students (-0.107) achieved a lower mean score than the rest, with the highest scores being obtained by business students (0.210). For this factor, therefore, the epistemological nature of the degree course influenced the development of learning in fellowship. The same applied to the microethical level, where differences between the various degree courses were statistically significant: business students (-0.244) obtained a lower

Table 2. Varimax-rotated factor matrix student questionnaire ($N = 2.296$).

Item	Factor			h^2
	Socio-moral reflection	Learning in fellowship	Construction of self	
<i>Socio-moral reflection (Factor 1)</i>				
SMR1: I can accurately describe different aspects of my character	0.41			0.47
SMR2: I can identify my responsibilities in different situations	0.47		0.21	0.45
SMR3: I consciously use the necessary skills to achieve good relations with other students	0.32	0.12	0.12	0.56
SMR4: I am responsible for my own actions	0.43		0.35	0.41
SMR5: I behave according to my own thoughts or ideas	0.44		0.23	0.44
SMR6: I usually use dialogue to solve conflicts	0.47	0.15	0.29	0.41
SMR7: I express my opinion in controversial situations	0.39	0.32	-0.22	0.42
SMR8: My opinions are based on reasoned arguments	0.50			0.39
SMR9: I respect other opinions even when I do not agree with them	0.28		0.26	0.45
SMR10: I understand the reasons for people's reactions	0.39	0.13		0.52
SMR11: I am able to see situations from the point of view of other people	0.49	0.11	0.16	0.47
SMR12: I can understand why conflicts start	0.55		-0.20	0.52
SMR13: I can identify the right and the wrong way of behaving in different situations	0.58			0.45
SMR14: I can foresee the reactions of others in order to avoid conflict	0.47			0.48
SMR15: I can create a good atmosphere among my work team	0.44		0.26	0.40
SMR16: I consider myself to be a good citizen	0.30	0.18	0.27	0.57
SMR17: I know my rights as a student	0.38		0.29	0.48
SMR18: I recognize good arguments, even when they are different to mine	0.50	0.15	0.14	0.35
SMR19: I mediate in arguments and try to solve them with dialogue	0.47	0.32	0.25	0.56
<i>Learning in fellowship (Factor 2)</i>				
TF1: I am sure that dialogue is not always the best way to reach an agreement	0.12	-0.24		0.58
TF2: I believe that students respect the material and the spaces of the university		0.14	0.15	0.61
TF3: I know how to organize my time	0.14	0.35	0.13	0.59
TF4: I apply my own ideas when considering social conflicts	0.40	0.43		0.48

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued).

Item	Factor			h^2
	Socio-moral reflection	Learning in fellowship	Construction of self	
TF5: I critically analyze the situations that my community, my country or the world are facing nowadays	0.28	0.50	-0.16	0.61
TF6: I propose solutions for problems	0.12	0.70	-0.15	0.61
TF7: I participate actively in a group or organization of a socio-political nature		0.59	-0.13	0.42
TF8: I am concerned by the problems that the world is facing	0.20	0.60	0.13	0.53
TF9: I show my disapproval in instances of discrimination	0.34	0.35	0.17	0.45
TF10: I participate in the academic decision-making system of my university		0.57	0.15	0.52
TF11: I speak out against instances of injustice	0.24	0.57		0.45
<i>Construction of self (Factor 3)</i>				
CS1: I respect my turn when speaking in informal conversations	0.22	-0.11	0.41	0.42
CS2: People try to impose their point of view in controversial situations ^a	0.28	-0.13	-0.30	0.39
CS3: I can change my point of view after a conversation			0.16	0.44
CS4: When faced with conflict situations, I usually consider one side of the argument and not the other ^a	-0.19		-0.39	0.32
CS5: In arguments I insist that I am right ^a			-0.56	0.55
CS6: I act in an impulsive way ^a		0.15	-0.51	0.51
CS7: I look for scapegoats when I have made a mistake ^a	-0.19		-0.51	0.47
CS8: I believe that people have hidden motives for the things that they do ^a	0.32	-0.20	-0.44	0.48
CS9: I respect all people regardless of their opinions or thoughts	0.29	0.13	0.44	0.54
CS10: I assume my responsibilities as a student	0.30	0.20	0.44	0.61
% Explained variance	32.2	21.7	20.7	74.6

^aThis item was negatively formulated.

average score than that obtained by science (0.133) and education students (0.109). The average score obtained by engineering students was not significantly different from that of either of the previous two groups. As with the second factor, therefore, the epistemological nature of degree courses together with, we assume, their respective curricula, teaching programs, pedagogical practices and learning evaluations was critical for the construction of self.

The fact that fellowship and socio-moral reflection do not appear to be significantly influenced as students progress through their degree courses raises questions about the nature of student life at Spanish universities, the meaning that university practice has for students and the weight that students' ethical learning has in their overall evaluation.

Table 3. Factor punctuations average by university ($N=2.296$).

University	Factor		
	Socio-moral reflection	Learning in fellowship	Construction of self
UPM	0.223	-0.199	-0.134
ETEA	-0.151	0.358	-0.275
UPV	-0.112	-0.016	0.007
EHU-UPV	0.080	0.094	0.129
UPC	-0.084	-0.055	0.099
UB	-0.091	0.037	0.050

Note: P -value $\leq .05$.

However, differences were observed in relation to the third factor (construction of self), where final-year students scored higher (0.60) than their first-year counterparts (-0.59). This indicates that the experience of university does have an effect on the construction of self (the microethical level), and one can assume that this construction would entail a greater degree of moral reflection on the ethical controversies surrounding questions of discipline and social, political and cultural issues.

Finally, with regard to the variable 'employment status' the only statistically significant difference occurred at the mesoethical level, where the average score for students who worked in addition to attending university was higher (0.91) than that for those who were only studying (-0.44). Attending university and not working was not correlated with the factors 'construction of self' or 'socio-moral reflection'. These results, in line with the studies cited in the introduction in this regard, indicate that working at the same time as studying has a positive influence on the development of fellowship, and this leads us to reconsider the benefits to be gained from this situation in which an increasing number of students find themselves, as well as to rethink the pedagogical methods used to help people enter the labor market and/or engage more with society.

Discussion and conclusions

In the light of the above results, a number of conclusions and recommendations can be made, which we discuss in relation to the theoretical model presented at the beginning of this paper and which could serve to optimize ethical learning and teaching in the Spanish universities of the EHEA, as well as in those universities operating in other contexts, which, in one way or another, are committed to this type of learning.

The first conclusion is that the results reported indicate that ethical learning is related to the university practices of each institution, that is, to the contents of their respective mission statements, curricula, pedagogical practices, educational programs and so forth. However, we cannot ignore the fact that the institutional culture of each university, which may not comprise the same explicitly formulated intentions and objectives, is also likely to be important.

As indicated in our discussion of influential ideas on the mission of the university (see Introduction), we believe it to be a positive feature that universities enjoy a certain degree of freedom and independence in devising their practices of ethical teaching and ethical learning, even in the current situation in Europe and in that of other areas of the world, which favor the national and international convergence of university education (Karseth, 2006). However, at this point it is worth making two recommendations. First,

to ensure that ethical learning becomes a reality, it is important that everything that goes into making up university practice at an institution (i.e., the formulation of its mission statements, curricula, teaching plans and methods and student systems of evaluation) has a sense of unity. The current formulation of ethical competences in European university education, and in that of universities operating in other contexts, is certainly on the right lines, showing as it does a concern for both professional and civic realities. However, it is no less true that, for epistemological, institutional and bureaucratic reasons and for questions related to the training of university teachers, some universities may well face difficulties when identifying these competences and maintaining this unity (i.e., when it comes to ensuring that what is laid down in their mission statements, curricula and teaching plans are made visible in the educational encounters between teachers and students). Second, ethical learning could be considered in a comprehensive, integral manner, so that, from the theoretical to the practical level, all its categories and dimensions are covered (Veugelers, 2011). Yet, here, it might be the case that some university practices and pedagogies give priority to certain categories and ignore others. The successful achievement of these two recommendations requires that academic leaders, teachers, experts in ethics, higher education and learning, as well as student representatives, work together in a team, with the goal of building a model of effective integral ethical training with a clear sense of unity that, without contradicting the new model of university skills training, is unique and characteristic of each university institution.

The second conclusion follows from the observation that the epistemological nature of the degree courses correlates with the students' ethical profiles, especially at the level of learning in fellowship, where science students do not score as highly as the other students, and at the level of the construction of self, where law and engineering students do not score as highly as the rest. These results raise the important question of whether the acquisition of ethical learning should be considered as something general and, therefore, independent of the specific subject studied or whether this acquisition should be adapted to the realities, conditions and circumstances that are specific to each field of knowledge, a fact that has traditionally come to mean the learning of the ethical codes of each profession. The current commitment of European university education, as well as that on other continents, suggests that the question raised could not be considered a dilemma: training in any field of knowledge results in ethical learning and vice versa. As the well-known French intellectual Jacques Derrida pointed out, training for a profession – whatever it might be – could also be training in the ethical, social and civic practice and development of that profession (Derrida, 2002). Academic leaders and the teachers in each faculty or discipline need to rethink their curricula, teaching plans and systems of student evaluation so that ethical learning, above all learning in fellowship and socio-moral reflection, forms an effective part of the professional training they offer, regardless of what this might be. Furthermore, in addition to the above, it would be recommendable that academic staff from different disciplines work together to explain to each other their approaches to ethical learning, identifying the meaning these acquire in their respective disciplines, and that they compare and share the best teaching practices they use with their students. This would enhance teaching innovation, and would ensure that the university training developed in each area of knowledge could draw on the experiences of other areas. It is by no means a bold thing to say that, today across the board, the faculties that make up European universities, and even on occasions the teachers who make up the same faculty or department, tend to work independently of each other from an educational point of view (Solbrekke &

Karseth, 2006); however, in line with the above discussion, it would be in our best interests if this tendency could be changed.

Methodologically, these results could be confirmed by a longitudinal study of a single group of students. In the future, such a study could be undertaken to eliminate, on the one hand, any biases that may appear in a cohort study such as this one, and, on the other, to verify how the students acquire their ethical profiles.

The third conclusion to be drawn from the survey results is that ethical learning is also influenced by the experience of university, albeit that this influence is only significant at the microethical level. In other words, university experience does not lead to an improvement in learning in fellowship and socio-moral reflection. These results confirm, on the one hand, one of the hypotheses put forward in the introduction to this paper, namely that the EHEA and its teaching model provide an ideal opportunity to develop ethical learning and, on the other, that the university experience provides an equally ideal opportunity for personal change and improvement from an ethical standpoint (Boni & Lozano, 2007). New active teaching methodologies that place greater emphasis on dialogue and student participation, and which are more clearly focused on the analysis of real, controversial cases addressing social and civic questions, can favor integral ethical student learning, especially as regards their learning in fellowship and socio-moral reflection (Moore, 2008). However, this point reminds us that today's universities could offer students a life experience in the fullest sense of the expression. University practices that above all serve to train the students – including lectures, seminars, tutorials and work experience, as well as others that on the surface might not appear to do so, but which have a considerable ethical dimension, including a whole range of cultural and sports events – could be offered in such a way that university life can be a unitary and integral process of ethical learning that lasts as long as the students' university studies. It has to be admitted though that this is not always the case and sometimes university for students is a succession of disconnected courses, subjects and pedagogical encounters which, occasionally, include some kind of ethical learning. University life is a typical topic included in the European discourse of university education, but which – at least in Spain – tends to go unnoticed, and yet, it offers vast potential for ethical learning.

The final conclusion to be drawn from the results is that students who are able to combine their university studies with a job see their ethical learning strengthened, especially, and as is logical, with regard to learning in fellowship. In line with the arguments presented in the introduction, we confirm that acquiring some familiarity with the professional world while studying at university encourages young people to participate, acquire critical reasoning skills and learn the value of social commitment. This indicates that university practices, curriculum design and systems of student evaluation should not ignore the fact that students are increasingly combining work and study. It could also be borne in mind when designing pedagogical approaches that foster student contact with the world of work. In addition, universities could seek to provide space and resources for students to engage with their local community through social and civic activities that can help them acquire ethical, citizenship and social skills. Teaching methodologies such as service learning and problem-based learning, among others, appear to offer the means of achieving this (Newman, 2008).

Ethical development not only has a particular place and purpose in university but has become part and parcel of university education per se (Kerr, 2001). Universities that form part of the EHEA, and all others that are committed to promoting the ethical development of their students, and which are implementing its various teaching

models, cannot afford to ignore this. Furthermore, we must not lose sight of the fact that our universities are in fact the ideal place to teach people to be both excellent professionals and dedicated citizens.

Note

1. The project: An analysis of the ethical-learning skills of university students in undergraduate and graduate degree courses offered within the framework of the EHEA: proposals for development has been undertaken within the Call for Research and Analysis organized by the Spanish Secretary of State for Universities (Ministry of Science and Innovation of Spain). The project's PI was Dr Alejandra Boni and the research team comprised the following members of the Moral Education Research Group (GREM): Miquel Martínez, M^a Rosa Buxarrais, Amelia Tey and Laura Campo.

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Appendix 1. DPM questionnaire adapted to university students*Socio-moral reflection (Factor 1)*

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- 1 I can accurately describe different aspects of my character
 - 2 I can identify my responsibilities in different situations
 - 3 I consciously use the necessary skills to achieve good relations with other students
 - 4 I am responsible for my own actions
 - 5 I behave according to my own thoughts or ideas
 - 6 I usually use dialogue to solve conflicts
 - 7 I express my opinion in controversial situations
 - 8 My opinions are based on reasoned arguments
 - 9 I respect other opinions even when I do not agree with them
 - 10 I understand the reasons for people's reactions
 - 11 I am able to see situations from the point of view of other people
 - 12 I can understand why conflicts start
 - 13 I can identify the right and the wrong way of a behaving in different situations
 - 14 I can foresee the reactions of others in order to avoid conflict
 - 15 I can create a good atmosphere among my work team
 - 16 I consider myself to be a good citizen
 - 17 I know my rights as a student
 - 18 I recognize good arguments, even when they are different to mine
 - 19 I mediate in arguments and try to solve them with dialogue

Learning in fellowship (Factor 2)

- 20 I am sure that dialogue is not always the best way to reach an agreement
- 21 I believe that students respect the material and the spaces of the university
- 22 I know how to organize my time
- 23 I apply my own ideas when considering social conflicts
- 24 I critically analyze the situations that my community, my country or the world are facing nowadays
- 25 I propose solutions for problems
- 26 I participate actively in a group or organization of a socio-political nature
- 27 I am concerned by the problems that the world is facing
- 28 I show my disapproval in instances of discrimination
- 29 I participate in the academic decision-making system of my university
- 30 I speak out against instances of injustice

Construction of self (Factor 3)

- 31 I respect my turn when speaking in informal conversations
 - 32(-) People try to impose their point of view in controversial situations
 - 33 I can change my point of view after a conversation
 - 34(-) When faced with conflict situations, I usually consider one side of the argument and not the other
 - 35(-) In arguments I insist that I am right
 - 36(-) I act in an impulsive way
 - 37(-) I look for scapegoats when I have made a mistake
 - 38(-) I believe that people have hidden motives for the things that they do
 - 39 I respect all people regardless of their opinions or thoughts
 - 40 I assume my responsibilities as a student
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