Introduction to the Ethics Bowl

Table of Contents

What is an Ethics Bowl?

An Ethics Bowl is both a collaborative and competitive event, where teams of students analyze and discuss ethical dilemmas. They imagine, criticize, and compare bold strategies, and may even amend their original positions when faced with convincing arguments. Students have opportunities to pose and respond to probing questions, which results in a deepening awareness of the stakes and principles that animate the discussion.

Teams from public schools are eligible to participate, and each school team comprises five students from Grades 9 to 12. In advance of the Ethics Bowl, schools receive cases that focus on current ethical issues—social, political, economic, scientific, cultural, or beyond. Students research and develop the cases, and arrive at the Ethics Bowl prepared to present their ideas and to listen to other perspectives. All teams participate in a round-robin style competition. In each round, two teams discuss two cases, and winning teams proceed to the semi-final and final competitions.

Students are evaluated on the following skills:

- communication
- use of relevant information
- critical thinking
- original thinking
- intellectual improvisation
- collaboration

What is the difference between an Ethics Bowl and a debate?

An Ethics Bowl looks the same as a debate from a distance: teams of serious, prepared students take turns talking and trying to outperform another team. Ethics Bowls and debates both have distinctive structures and processes, including a formal judging process. Each contest brings together two teams of students to engage in discourse around a selected topic or issue. The key difference is that a debate focuses on skilled opposition, while the Ethics Bowl encourages dialogue and collaboration.

In a debate, students demonstrate their argumentative skills. In an Ethics Bowl, they use argumentative skills to get at the heart of the matter, as they actually see it. Participants are judged on their demonstration of relevant knowledge, articulacy, respectful collaboration, originality, intellectual improvisation, and critical thinking.

Where a debate asks students to use skills of argumentation to rigorously defend an assigned position, the Ethics Bowl asks them to engage in dialogue to learn from one another about what they actually think is worth defending. They are not just trying to do it well in the Ethics Bowl. They are trying to get it right, even if that means correcting and amending their positions as the conversation develops.

In debate, teams take positions either in support of, or in opposition to a given resolution, and their goal is to "win the argument." There are no grey areas in a debate, and the team that presents the strongest arguments is judged to have "won." In contrast, the starting point for an Ethics Bowl is not a resolution, but an ethically rich, open-ended issue or topic with multiple perspectives and possibilities.

Rather than take a simple "for or against" stance, each Ethics Bowl team is expected to acknowledge conflicting perspectives on the issue. Teams propose a position on how to deal with the ethical conflict considered, rather than merely taking a preferred side. During an Ethics Bowl, teams have opportunities to support and challenge each other's thinking and perceptions. They are expected to pose questions that deepen the conversation and expand one another's awareness of the ethical stakes and principles that animate the discussion. An overarching goal of an Ethics Bowl is to provide an arena for students to share ideas and teach each other—bringing their own experiences and insights to bear on the conversation. When this works, students can show off how well they can learn from the interaction, and skillfully integrate this learning into their final positions.

Key Words to Describe an Ethics Bowl

An Ethics Bowl presents the opportunity for students to develop competencies in the following areas:

- mutual respect
- open-mindedness
- meaningful dialogue
- critical conversation
- active listening
- using evidence
- challenging assumptions
- thinking, rethinking
- courage
- flexibility, adaptability
- risk assessment
- synthesizing new information
- intellectual improvisation
- political, cultural awareness
- original thinking

Rules and Procedures of an Ethics Bowl

Team Composition

1. A team consists of three to five members, with a maximum of two alternates.
2. Team members may be selected from Grades 9 to 12 within the same high school.
3. Team alternates may be placed onto the team roster due to an absence of a regular team member. Changes may be made during a competition but not during a round. If a team member is absent during a match, the teacher leader will alert the organizing committee, and provide the name of the alternate, prior to the match.

Judges and Moderators

1. Judges and moderators cannot be family members or staff from the same school as a registered team.
2. Judges may be selected from the community (e.g., university students, retired or practising teachers, representatives from not-for-profit or for-profit organizations, or any other appropriate group or organization).
3. Judges do not need to be ethics experts, but must be willing to study selected ethical cases prior to the Ethics Bowl. They should be open-minded and prepared to take part in a judges' training session prior to the Ethics Bowl.
4. Judges may not converse with each other during a match, with the exceptions of during the questioning period and when filling out the team feedback forms. Judges may not discuss how they will be personally scoring the teams.
5. During the question period, judges are encouraged to ask open-ended questions that encourage critical reflection on issues raised during the match.
6. Judges are discouraged from speaking to team members during breaks.

Match Rules

1. Team members are not allowed to be in possession of downloading devices or written notes during a match.
2. The moderator controls the room and is expected to adhere to the timeline, as outlined in the Steps in a Round and in the Moderator's Script.
3. Prior to the start of a match, team members are expected to shake hands.
4. When a team is presenting, everyone else in the room must remain silent.
5. Teacher leaders must not coach their team members during a match.
6. All procedural questions must be directed to the moderator.
7. During a match, team members may pass messages amongst themselves on the paper provided.
8. At the beginning of each new match, team members will introduce themselves to the judges.
9. Prior to presenting, teams must declare who will be speaking on the case. More than one member may speak during a match.
10. During the question round, team members may ask judges to repeat a question or ask for clarification. Team members are encouraged to quietly discuss potential responses to judges' questions amongst themselves, and to elect one team member to respond to the question.
11. The Ethics Bowl will use a round-robin schedule to determine which teams move on to the semi-finals and finals.
12. The judges' feedback forms for each team will be given to the teams' teacher leaders.
13. At the end of a match, team members are once again expected to shake hands.
14. The moderator will declare the winner but not reveal scores.
15. Match wins are not based on the number scores assigned by the individual judges, but on the number of judges who give a win to a team. If the event of a tie, the number score will be the tiebreaker.

Overview of an Ethics Bowl

What to Expect during the Day

An Ethics Bowl has three competitive components:

1. round robin, involving all teams
2. semi-finals, with four highest scoring teams
3. final round to determine the winning team

What happens in a round?

The room is set up as illustrated below. A **moderator** conducts the proceedings, poses a question related to cases the students have researched, and keeps track of time. Three **judges** evaluate team performances. (The audience does not participate.)

Moderator

Team A

Team B

3 Judges

Audience
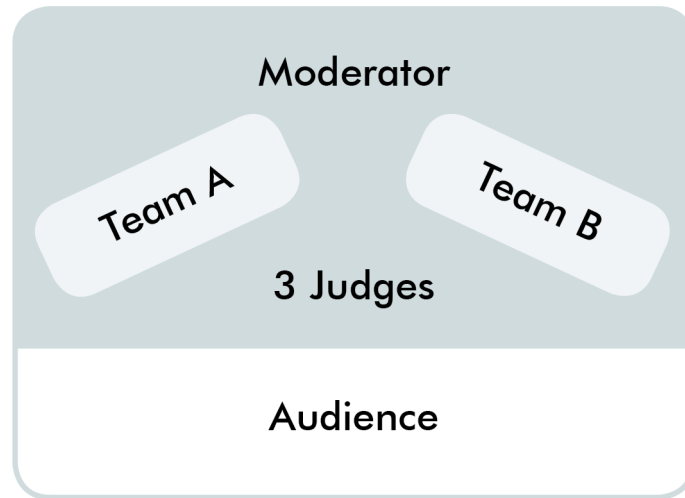
Steps in a Round

Each round involves **two cases**, and each team takes the "lead" on one case. The following steps show Team A as the lead on the first case:

Case #1

1. **Moderator** flips a coin, winning team chooses to lead or pass on Case #1. Moderator poses question for Case #1.
1. **Team A** has 2 minutes to confer; 5 minutes to present position on Case #1.
2. **Team B** has 1 minute to confer; 3 minutes to respond/ask questions.
3. **Team A** has 1 minute to confer; 3 minutes to respond to Team B.
4. **Judges** have 10 minutes to question Team A. (See Sample Questions.)
5. **Judges** score both teams for Case #1 and write feedback for both teams.
6. **Moderator** poses question for Case #2.
7. **Team B** has 2 minutes to confer; 5 minutes to present position on Case #2.
8. **Team A** has 1 minute to confer; 3 minutes to respond/ask questions.
9. **Team A** has 1 minute to confer; 3 minutes to respond to Team B.
10. **Judges** have 10 minutes to question Team B. (See Sample Questions.)
11. **Judges** score both teams for Case #2 and write feedback for both teams.

How to Select and Prepare an Ethics Bowl Team
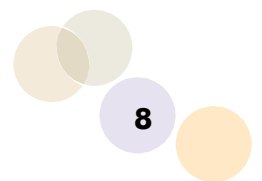
How to Select an Ethics Bowl Team

A team has a maximum of five students, and two alternates, from Grades 9 to 12. The alternates may be used as substitutes if a team member is unable to participate.

There are different ways of selecting team members. Here are a few strategies:

- Encourage teachers in the school to submit names.
- Organize a mini-competition based on an ethical dilemma, which may be judged by teachers. This approach increases the visibility of the Ethics Bowl throughout the school.
- Invite all the students in the school and have the students self-select.
- Teacher leaders might approach social justice–minded students and encourage their participation.

It is preferable that the composition of the school team be multi-grade. This will increase the sustainability and development of the Ethics Bowl over time. Throughout the training, team alternates need to be fully engaged in the process.

How to Prepare an Ethics Bowl Team

Week 1: Team members individually select the five cases they are most interested in researching. They then research the five cases and prepare pertinent ideas, including determining their own position and other perspectives, for the next meeting.

Week 2: Share the highlights of the research on the cases, and select two cases for the following week. Make it clear that all team members will continue researching the cases.

Week 3: Go over the protocol of how a match is run. Based on the two cases selected in Week 2, run a mock match.

Week 4 until the Ethics Bowl: Repeat until all the cases have been done. Bring in teacher judges to ask questions and provide feedback.

One Week Prior to Regional Ethics Bowl: Hold a practice Ethics Bowl in the school, with staff and other students as an audience. Staff may serve as judges.

Help students understand the difference between a debate and an Ethics Bowl. In a debate, a team defends a fixed position against attack and points out problems in the opponents' view. The Ethics Bowl, conversely, encourages students to collaborate, and to acknowledge and work constructively with the ideas and perspectives raised in discussion. The Ethics Bowl uses a dialectic approach.

Dialectic Approach

1. Thesis—iznitial position proposed

2. Antithesis—opposing perspectives considered to refine or critique position

3. Synthesis—new position developed, making good use of the best points in conversation

As the Ethics Bowl approaches, the team should meet frequently enough that everyone on the team (including the alternates) is familiar with each of the cases.

During a match, team members need to be aware of the tone of their voices, use respectful language, actively listen, and take notes. They also need to explore, respect, and acknowledge opposing and conflicting views in their presentation, but ultimately, present a unified voice on the ethical question or topic at hand.

It is critically important for students to understand that a team **does not** lose points during a match if they receive new information from the opposing team and change their point of view.

Finally, teams should focus their attention on the opposing team during presentations, and not make their case to the judges. The only time teams should focus on the judges is during the judges' question period.

Working with Students to Improve Ethical Discussion Skills

When working with students to improve ethical discussion skills, consider the following:

- Encourage students to help one another (both those on their team and those on the opposing team) to consider multiple points of view. This requires examining how different groups in society may be affected by their proposals, or how they may think and feel about their merits, given potentially different cultural or political assumptions.

- Synthesizing a discussion well does not require compromising or creating a view that all students would necessarily accept. (This could be impossible.) Working toward agreement with sincerity often means accepting when new obstacles to agreement are found, or when deeper divisions in viewpoints are uncovered. The leading team is responsible for taking stock of what the conversation has shown and yielded: that could be information about agreement or what has been learned about the disagreement.

- Collaboration does not mean that everything that is said has to be treated as equally valuable or relevant. Students are encouraged to be critical and thoughtful about what is truly important to the conversation. A team should be able to share that reasoning in their discussion, by saying why they feel a point matters a lot, or doesn't, to what they feel most confident proposing in the end.

Sample Cases

The following sample cases from the 2017 Ethics Bowl can be used when preparing an Ethics Bowl team. New cases will be provided for each Ethics Bowl.

Freedom of Speech or Protection against Hate Speech?

In the past few years, many radical speakers on both the far left and the far right have been prevented from speaking on university campuses due to protests from opposing viewpoints. For example, Ann Coulter (author of *In Trump We Trust*) was initially banned from speaking at University of California, Berkeley, which was ironically the stronghold of the Free Speech Movement that took place in the 1960s. The reason for the ban was stated as "active security threats," although many far-right supporters of Ms. Coulter suggest it was an infringement of her right to free speech (BBC News). Protesters often cite hate speech as their rationale for preventing people who speak hateful rhetoric from entering their campus. This was the case for students at Middlebury College who peacefully protested social scientist Charles Murray by standing up during his speech with signs reading: "Your message is hatred, we cannot tolerate it" (CBC). Should campuses be a haven for free speech regardless of what is said? Or are campuses meant to be a haven for students who feel threatened by speakers' hateful speech? What are we losing if we do not allow dissenting voices to meet?

References

BBC. "Berkeley reverses decision to ban Ann Coulter from speaking." *BBC News* 22 Apr. 2017. www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-39657088. (18 Sept. 2017).

CBC. "Why a campus protest has the right and left calling for more civilized discourse." *The Current.* 20 Mar. 2017. www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-march-20-2017-1.4032269/why-a-campus-protest-has-the-right-and-left-calling-for-more-civilized-discourse-1.4032535 (18 Sept. 2017).

Cultural Appropriation

The development of global trade over the last millennia has also led to the development of cultural exchange on a global scale. As goods were exchanged on the market, cultures were exchanged between traders who originated predominately in Europe, and those who originated from these colonized lands. Today, this cultural exchange continues to exist; however, some argue that due to the power relationship that continues to persist between the colonized and the colonizer, one should be careful not to mistake someone's culture as a trendy or exotic look. One example of such appropriation is when non-Black people sport dreadlocks, a hairstyle that is culturally significant to Black people and Black history (Conversation Africa). Another example of this involves author Joseph Boyden, who often writes about Indigenous cultures in his fiction (Associated Press). Some Indigenous people have contested whether Boyden's claims to be a member of an Indigenous community are accurate. Many Indigenous authors who believe Boyden is non-Indigenous are offended by Boyden's work and see it as a continuation of the history of Indigenous Peoples that has been recorded primarily by colonizers (CBC). Where is the line between cultural appreciation and cultural appropriation? Do members of racial or cultural groups have rights to their culture that others do not? What does it take to be a member of a group?

References

Associated Press. "Joseph Boyden: writers should be 'careful' on 'somebody else's turf.' " *CBC News* 5 Mar. 2017. www.cbc.ca/news/entertainment/boyden- careful-turf-1.4010679 (18 Sept. 2017).

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Global Refugee Crisis

Due to the recent conflicts in Syria, and natural disasters in Haiti, among others, we have entered a global refugee crisis. Countries in the global north have been bombarded by refugees who arrive en masse in seek of asylum from war or natural disaster. Many people in the global north have shown discontent towards these incoming asylum-seekers, fearing that their countries cannot handle this influx, or that these refugees will burden their local economies. In Canada, others call these views xenophobic, and openly welcome refugees (Macdonell), claiming that Canada is "arguably a nation not just of immigrants, but of refugees" (Kilian). Initially Justin Trudeau's openness to refugees was widely supported across the country, but as more and more refugees arrive at Canada's doorstep, more Canadians are concerned with how we will support them. Canadians are in a difficult position—should we allow more refugees despite the burden they will place on our current residents? How will Canadians develop the support system needed to integrate refugees into Canadian society? More broadly, for whom are we responsible? If we do not accept them, are we morally culpable for the consequences they will face in their home countries?

References

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Macdonell, Beth. "Surge of refugee claimants in Manitoba border town
    prompts temporary shelter." *CTV News: Winnipeg* 6 Feb. 2017.
    http://winnipeg.ctvnews. ca/surge-of-refugee-claimants-in-manitoba-
    border-town-prompts-temporary- shelter-1.3273216 (18 Sept. 2017).

Police at Pride

Pride Parades are held all over the world in communities where LGTBQ2A+ individuals feel safe expressing and celebrating their identities, which were historically oppressed. Recently, many parade organizers have requested an absence of police, or at a bare minimum, an absence of police in uniform due to the historical accounts of police-executed abuse towards LGTBQ2A+ individuals (Canadian Press). Many police and their supporters are offended at the request, stating that Pride Parades started in the pursuit of inclusion, and that Pride organizers should not exclude any group of people. Others feel unsafe in the presence of police officers and do not wish for police to participate. Should police officers be allowed to march in the Pride Parade in uniform?

Reference

Canadian Press. "Pride Winnipeg says police officers welcome at parade, but not in uniform." *Metronews.ca*. 26 May 2017. www.metronews.ca/news/winnipeg/2017/05/26/pride-winnipeg-says-police-officers-welcome-at-parade-but-not-in-uniform.html (18 Sept. 2017).

Ban on Junk Food

Obesity is one of the largest health concerns amongst Canadians. Many Canadians suffer from obesity-related illness. Thus, many elementary schools have placed bans on junk food to encourage and create healthy eating habits in their students from a young age (CTV). Some parents and community members are upset by this, as they believe these restrictions infringe on their free choice and ability to raise their children as they see fit. Others oppose these decisions stating that healthy foods are too expensive, and that these bans discriminate against low-income families who may not be able to afford to feed their children healthy foods (Paperny). On a larger scale, Health Canada recently proposed restrictions on advertisements for unhealthy food that are geared towards children (Gaviola). Do parents have ultimate authority over decisions involving their children, whether or not their decisions are healthy? Are these organizations overstepping their boundaries by enforcing such rules?

References

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Mandatory Voting

Two of the most significant problems in Canadian elections are low voter turnout and voter apathy. In recent elections, only about 60 percent of eligible voters cast a ballot in the election (Adams and Flumian). This is a significant drop from the past where voter turnout averaged around 70 percent, and means that only 60 percent of Canadians are making decisions that affect all Canadians. One of the causes of this low turnout is voter apathy, where voters are disinterested in the state of political affairs and do not see a reason to vote. A solution proposed by some is mandatory voting, where all eligible citizens are required to cast a ballot or face fines. Proponents of mandatory voting claim that "[Canadian] democracy depends upon the active participation of its citizens, and, while voting is only one element of political engagement, it remains the very foundation of our democracy" (Harb 4). Those who oppose mandatory voting claim that it goes against a citizen's freedom not to vote, and that they choose not to vote because they are dissatisfied with the available options, or with the system itself. Others do not feel as though they are informed enough about politics to decide which candidate to vote for, which perhaps indicates a failure from our education system rather than a failure of individual voters. Should we force uninformed citizens to vote? Does mandatory voting go against an individual's right to choose not to participate? Do voter apathy and low voter turnout indicate a larger problem with our political system?

References

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Harb, Mac. "The Case for Mandatory Voting in Canada." *Canadian Parliamentary Review*. Summer 2005: 4–6. www.revparl.ca/28/2/2 8n2_05e_Harb.pdf (18 Sept. 2017).

Use of Drones in War

Throughout history, the advancement of technology has often followed the need for weapons in times of war. The recent development of unmanned aerial vehicles, better known as drones, to attack members of ISIS and AL-Qaeda in the Middle East is no exception to this. Proponents claim that drones are "far more precise than other weapons systems," cause less collateral damage, and do not put soldiers in danger as they are operated from a distance (Mockaitis). Others say that they make it too easy to kill, as the soldier operating the drone is removed from the human aspects involved in the killing. They also say that they cause more civilian casualties than governments will admit, which in turn fuels anti-western sentiments in the Middle East and contributes to terrorism. Is war more justified if costs are reduced? How can we ensure that civilians are not injured by drones? Are operators less morally responsible for killing if they are operating a drone, an indirect weapon?

Reference

Mockaitis, Tom. "Drones and the Ethics of War." *HuffPost* 12 Jan. 2016. Last updated 12 Jan. 2017. www.huffingtonpost.com/tom-mockaitis/drones-and- the-ethics-of_b_8961510.html (18 Sept. 2017).

End to School Detentions

Due to their youth, students often arrive late or are absent from class, hand in an assignment late, get in arguments with fellow students, and commit countless other infractions. The timeless response to these behaviours has been to assign the student a trip to detention, where the student will stay for an extended period, as determined by the teacher. Recently students, parents, teachers, and administers alike have openly opposed this practice, saying that it is archaic and does not create a disincentive for poor behaviour. They argue that often students who are sentenced to detention are treated as though they are "guilty until proven innocent" (Johnson). Those who support this practice say that part of school is learning about rules, and learning the self- control necessary to follow them. More recently some have opposed this style of learning, stating that children with learning disabilities like ADHD have a harder time following these rules. Should detentions or suspensions be meted out regardless of individual circumstances? Would individual treatment appear as injustice?

Reference

Johnson, LouAnne. "Down With Detention!" *Education Week*. 30 Nov. 2004. www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2004/12/01/14johnson.h24.html (18 Sept. 2017).

Welfare Limitations

The welfare system became an essential piece of the modern western state in the middle of the nineteenth century. The welfare state is "founded upon the principles of progressive taxation and universal welfare" (Bell). Under this system, "the community as a whole provides for the other, and those in need receive this provision as of right," meaning that those who have a little more share with those who have a little less. However, this system counters the fundamental aspects of "the American [Canadian] Dream": work hard and attain the freedom to do what you want with your income. Many people oppose the welfare system, claiming that it promotes freeloaders, people who don't work because they receive what they need from the system. Does the welfare system promote freeloaders? Are there limits to the care we provide for those in need? Does it create a state of helplessness or undeserved entitlement for some? Or are we responsible for the most vulnerable in society?

Reference

Bell, David. "Welfare state expresses an ideal of the good society." *The Guardian*.
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Artificial Intelligence

Technology has been improving human life for the entirety of human existence. As our society gets more advanced, we are approaching a critical point in our development of technology, the development of artificial intelligence. For most of human existence, the factor that separated us from the rest of the animal kingdom was our superior intellect. Current researchers are engineering artificial intelligence that matches our own intellect, challenging human superiority. Many people fear that once we create these advanced forms of artificial intelligence, we will be unable to stop them from continuing to advance themselves, and possibly overriding our mortal domination (Dowd). Others suggest that these robots simply make life easier, and are simply a continuation of technological improvements of human life. Is there a risk to the development of artificial intelligence? Should there be limits to the development or do limits stifle advancements?

Reference

Dowd, Maureen. "Elon Musk's Billion-Dollar Crusade to Stop the A.I. Apocalypse." *Vanity Fair*. 26 Mar. 2017. www.vanityfair.com/news/2017/03/elon-musk-billion-dollar-crusade-to-stop-ai-space-x (18 Sept. 2017).