The Process of Ethical Inquiry

Awareness
Question

Background that Impacts Decision-making

Content
Ethical Perspectives

Content
Science

Values

Context

Reasoning
Analysis
Decision-Making Framework

Decision
Motivation and Justification

Outcome
Action and Evaluation

Feedback to all levels of process
The Process of Ethical Inquiry Flow Chart provides a visual representation of the steps involved in analyzing and responding to an ethical issue related to science. The following components are part of the sequence diagrammed:

1. **Awareness: Questioning**
   SENSITIVITY: Being able to recognize the issues and frame the question. Moral analysis begins when there is confusion about competing alternatives for action, when values of stakeholders conflict, and when none of the alternatives are entirely satisfactory for resolving the dilemma.

2. **Background: Ethical Perspectives and Values**
   Many elements influence the background that goes into decision-making. These include:
   - Science Content – presented in classroom and/or researched by students.
   - Ethical Content - presented in classroom (discussion of perspectives and theories) and/or researched by students. The Ethics Background Summary for students presented in this section provides background information on ethical content.
   - Context - the cultural, legal, social, historical context
   - Values - the values brought by the students themselves, based on family values, religious values, cultural values, etc. Because values differ for each student, each student will bring their own perspectives and ideas into the process.

   JUDGMENT: The student makes a judgment about what course of action is morally right (or fair, or just, or good), thus prescribing a potential course of action regarding what ought to be done.
   
   The student analyzes the situation and takes a logical and critical approach to reasoning through the problem.
   
   Decision-Making Frameworks are useful in helping to structure student thinking about a problem.

4. **Decision: Motivation and Justification**
   MOTIVATION: Personal Responsibility/Commitment
   The student makes the decision to do what is morally right.

5. **Action and Evaluation**
   CHARACTER: Perseverance / Implementation
   
   The student implements the moral course of action decided upon and evaluates the outcome. The cycle may be repeated.

*Based in part on materials modified from Dr. Kelly Fryer-Edwards, University of Washington Department of Medical History and Ethics, and from the Four Component Model of Morality (Rest 1984).*