

Exploring the Ethics of Animal Dissection

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Introduction to HRA

- ◆ Non-profit member-based organisation based in Melbourne
- ◆ Advocate for animal-free research
- ◆ Campaigning organisation (public campaigns and legislative reforms)
- ◆ Scrutiny, exposure and dissemination of information via various outreach channels
- ◆ Resource on animal experimentation
- ◆ Engagement with relevant stakeholders

Why am I here today?

◆ Why are you here?



LEGAL STATUS AUSTRALIA

Internal school policy

Code of Practice for the Care and Use of Animals
for Scientific Purposes

State legislation

State-wide school animal ethics committees

No records are published of the number of animals
reared and killed for dissection in schools

Code

- ❖ It includes the use of animals in research, teaching associated with an educational outcome in science, field trials, product testing, diagnosis, the production of biological products and environmental studies.
- ❖ The Code applies to the care and use of all live non-human vertebrates and cephalopods.
- ❖ Section 4: The care and use of animals for the achievement of educational outcomes in science
- ❖ All activities, including projects, that involve the care and use of animals for scientific purposes must be subject to ethical review



Code

- ❖ Institutions must ensure that animals are used for teaching **only when their use is essential to achieve an educational outcome in science**
- ❖ Institutions must identify the person with ultimate responsibility for the care and use of animals in teaching activities. This person does not relieve the individual responsibility of the teacher who is involved in the care and use of animals in teaching activities.
- ❖ Teachers must ensure that students have the opportunity to discuss the ethical and social issues, and legal responsibilities, involved in the care and use of animals for scientific purposes, at a level appropriate to their learning ability and comprehension, and before the use of animals commences.



Source of Animal

- ❖ Dissections from animals which are by-products of meat industry for human consumption
- ❖ Cane toads
- ❖ Still born piglets
- ❖ Pet shop
- ❖ Bred by supplier

abc.net.au/news/2016-02-19/peta-rejects-dissecting-cane-toads-in-school/7184886

ABC NEWS

Cane toad dissection should be sliced from Queensland schools, says PETA

Replacing dissection with software that's humane, cost effective and also an effective teaching method is a valuable thing to do.

"Obviously we thought that was a great opportunity to actually help schools take the step to stop using cane toads."

According to a spokesperson from the Queensland Department of Education and Training, the most recent change to the Queensland Schools Animal Ethics Committee's standard operating procedures on cane toad dissection was made nearly 18 months ago, on August 27, 2014.

While the spokesperson did not comment on the letters sent to schools by PETA or whether any Queensland schools had accepted the software, they said that 1,973 toads were dissected in 150 Queensland schools during the 2015 school year.

Regardless of when the procedure was updated or how many toads had been dissected in the past, PETA Australia was of the firm belief that no animals should be dissected in school classrooms.

"Dissection of any animal teaches students that animals are no more than

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School AEC

- ◊ Varies according to each state and territory –broader remit than dissection
- ◊ Science Assist response links to each state and territory policy <https://assist.asta.edu.au/question/3892/piglet-dissection>
- ◊ NT No live animals may be acquired or bred for the sole purpose of dissection. Dissection of animals in schools is prohibited. If there is a need to examine organs, then only food grade organs (kidneys, liver, brains, stomach, heart, lungs, tongue, and eyes) should be used.
- ◊ SA- Non-Government Schools Animal Ethics Committee;: The only vertebrate animals to be used for dissection are those that have been bred specifically for that purpose or, in the case of agricultural education, designated for that purpose
- ◊ May have pre-approved activities that do not require AEC approval
- ◊ Dissection may not be subject to AEC approval



Discussion

- ◊ Your experience with AEC
- ◊ Anything think could be done differently?
- ◊ Should dissection be subject to AEC approval?
- ◊ Does the source of the animal matter?

Ethics and Rights

- ◇ New versus existing knowledge
- ◇ How important is it to have dissection skills?
- ◇ Value of animal life
- ◇ Religious objections
- ◇ Right to objection
- ◇ Protection from moral distress
- ◇ Right to choice of learning method
- ◇ Right to teach preferred method



Ethical Issues and Positions- where do you stand?

- ❖ No state education department in Australia has made dissection compulsory. Dissection is also not an essential preparation for students who will study medicine or veterinary science
- ❖ Could be argued that under the Code the use of purpose-bred animals for dissections should not be permitted where an alternative exists but this is up to the discretion of teaching staff and AECs
- ❖ Prohibited in primary and secondary schools in the Netherlands, Switzerland, Argentina, Slovak Republic and Israel

Ethical Issues and Positions- where do you stand?

- ◊ RSPCA Australia: RSPCA Australia supports and encourages the use of alternatives to replace animals in teaching wherever possible, both to introduce the concepts of reduction, refinement and replacement at an early stage, and to prevent animal suffering.
- ◊ *RSPCA Australia is opposed to the specific killing of animals for the purposes of dissection or other teaching use*
- ◊ National Association of Biology Teachers (US). NABT strongly supports teaching which allows for student interaction with organisms, both living and dead, that provides enriched, meaningful learning experiences. The involvement of students in first-hand interactions with living animals provides opportunities for increased understanding of content knowledge, the care of living organisms, and appreciation for the value of life. In like manner, the engagement of students in well-crafted dissections is a total sensory experience that removes abstraction as students learn about structure, function, adaptation, and diversity.

Discussion

- ◆ Do your teaching methods include animal dissections?
- ◆ For which reasons have your students objected?
- ◆ For what reasons have your students requested dissection?
- ◆ What alternative have you offered?



Teaching Methods v Learning Outcome

- ◇ Professor Schwarzkopf (James Cook University) said until virtual reality software could accurately mimic the practice of dissecting an animal, she could not foresee any change to teaching methods involving humanely killed animal specimens.
- ◇ "It's a really important experience; [students] see what's inside an animal and how an animal works," she said. I think that's just critical. It's an important part of life."
- ◇ Jonathan Balcombe (Dissection: The Scientific Case for Alternatives, 2001) 'Dissecting a foetal pig in a dissection tray and on a computer screen are manifestly different experiences. Repeatedly, one hears the empty rhetoric that nothing can replace the experience of using a live (or once-living) animal. This is true, but to what avail? The reverse is just as true: The live animal cannot substitute for the experience of using a computer simulation. The key question is not whether one method is equal to the other but, rather, how well a given method promotes learning'


The Real Thing?

3Rs Webinar Replacement in biology and medical training Nick Jukes_4-17-23_.pdf

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The real thing



Myth: Animal experimentation is 'the real thing'.
Alternatives are not.

Clarification: This confuses the method with the objective
Animal experimentation is just one method
The 'real thing' is effective gaining of knowledge,
skills and attitudes

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What are the intended outcomes?

- ◊ Living things can be grouped on the basis of observable features and can be distinguished from non-living things.
- ◊ Living things have structural features and adaptations that help them to survive in their environment
- ◊ Use equipment and materials safely, identifying potential risks
- ◊ Can these be met by non-harmful methods? How do the methods compare?
- ◊ Elisabeth Ormandy, Janella C. Schwab, Samantha Suiter, Nicole Green, Janice Oakley, Pamela Osenkowski, Christine Sumner "Animal Dissection vs. Non-Animal Teaching Methods: A Systematic Review of Pedagogical Value," The American Biology Teacher, 84(7), 399-404, (12 September 2022)



Alternative Methods

Future impacts of dissection

- ❖ Can deter from a career in science.
- ❖ Potential to deter sensitivity, compassion, empathy and respect for life traits which want to see in science and medical profession



Student Experiences

- ◆ I remember the different biology teachers in my high school, and there's a couple that I don't think I'd be able to approach and say, "I'm not comfortable with this." . . . If you have a really intimidating teacher, then you're not going to approach them about it, or you're less likely to approach them about it.
- ◆ Basically, our biology teacher told us that we would be participating in a dissection and he would give us a little bit more detail later on about the animal for the dissection. At that time I told him I was uncomfortable with it for moral reasons; animal cruelty; I don't agree with it. And he said, "Well, we can talk closer to the date. Depending on what the animal is, would that change your mind?" I said at the time, no. We found out about two days before that it would be baby pigs [sic], and I said to him at that point, "I really object to this. If there's an alternative assignment, I'd like to do that. I don't feel comfortable with this. I don't think it's right." And, instead of saying anything—like agreeing with me, or anything like that, or giving me the alternative—he said, "Well, you're wearing leather shoes. Or you've got a leather belt on. Do you not eat meat?" Sort of playing the defensive there, and saying, "Well, you do this, and you do this, and you do this, but yet you're against the dissection."

Student Experiences

- ◆ Although I did not feel comfortable doing this [dissection] as I . . . don't think dissection is right, I was told I had to be in a group, and even if I didn't do anything (i.e., cutting or touching), then I would still be able to pass the project. I was not impressed, but being young and naive I did what I was told.
- ◆ I was never offered an alternative but would have taken it. We were told we had to do it. I was disgusted and ethically opposed to it. The teacher gave us a consequentialist argument about the greater good (our learning) outweighing any possible opposition we may have had to it. That was the extent of the discussion.
- ◆ Oakley, Jan. "'I Didn't Feel Right About Animal Dissection': Dissection Objectors Share Their Science Class Experiences." *Society & Animals* 21 (2013): 360-378.

Instilling Animals Use in Science



Discussing Animal Use in Science with your Students

- ◆ European Schoolnet Academy 3Rs and Animals in Science
- ◆ PlayDecide is a card game for simple, respectful and fact-based group discussion. On this website you can download ready-made games or create your own. The game is suited for players aged 13+ and lasts 90 minutes.
- ◆ <https://playdecide.eu/playdecide-kits/167470>
- ◆ Discursive writing
- ◆ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zn64jxs/test>

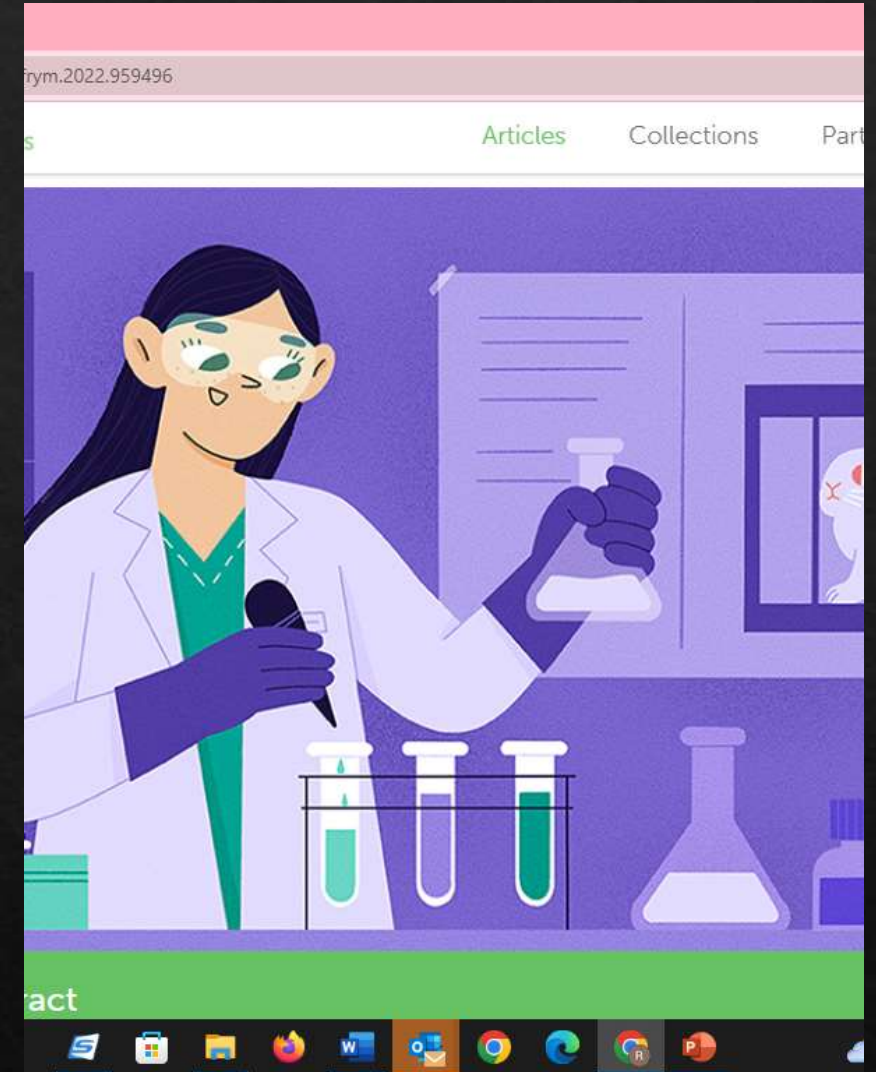
Teaching Resources

Frontiers for Young Minds

Phoenix Zones- older students based on panel discussion

FRAME- 30-minute scenarios exercise around drug approval for non-animal method

European Commission, Joint Research Centre, Holloway, M., Berggren, E., Dura, A. et al., Introducing the Three Rs into secondary schools, universities and continuing education programmes – Replacement, Reduction and Refinement of animal use in science, Publications Office, 2021, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/4378>



Discussion

- ◆ How have you approached animal use in science with you students?
- ◆ What has been successful?
- ◆ What has been less successful?





Resources

- ◇ HRA For Students and Educators
- ◇ <https://www.humanerresearch.org.au/humane-education>
- ◇ ANZCCART
- ◇ <https://anzccart.adelaide.edu.au/helpful-links/information-about-animal-ethics-in-schools-information-for-school-children>



Questions?

- ◇ Thank you for listening
- ◇ rachelsmith@humanereseach.org.au
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