



Code of Ethics for school Teachers: A means of facilitating learning of students- A critical Analysis

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Abstract

The teacher–student relationship is viewed as integral to successful teaching and learning but, outside of a few exceptions, ethical boundary issues in this relationship have not been explored. The purpose of this study was to examine teachers’ perspectives of their relationships with their students as well as how they described and negotiated relationship boundaries. This case study, conducted in a B. Ed college under IP university that RCIT and in-service students of IGNOU, and designed to document examples of ethical dilemmas faced by pre-service and practicing teachers, to explore pre-service teachers’ perceptions of ethics education and to examine the B. Ed course curriculum for ethics subjects across the one-year and two year degree course. Results highlight a need for teacher training courses to include ethical philosophy units. This represents a sustainable way to support professional practice and enhance teacher quality, by preparing and equipping teachers with techniques to explore and teach complex ethical issues in the classroom and ultimately it will help the teacher to create a conducive environment within the college which is needed for best learning.

Key Words: *outweighing, dreaded, perchance, transitioning, notoriety, vulnerable, myriad*

Introduction

The school environment creates the context for a variety of emotional experiences that have the potential to influence teaching, learning, and motivational processes (**Goldstein, 1999; Hargreaves, 1998, 2001; Meyer & Turner, 2002; Sutton, 2004; Zembylas, 2005**). As such, emotions are an integral part of educational activity settings, which makes the understanding of the nature of emotions in the school context an important goal. One purpose of our research was to develop an understanding of teachers’ perspectives of teacher–student emotional involvement

and emotional interactions in the classroom. The literature on the ethic of care and the emotional dimensions of teaching provided much of the framework of our research (see Hargreaves, 1998, 2000, 2001; Noddings, 1984, 1995). In this study, one of the major themes that emerged from initial analysis of our interviews with students and teachers was their struggle with relationship boundaries as part of their emotional interactions with Teacher's/students; therefore, we chose to expand our literature search to explore the boundary theme in more depth.

In this connection we found that, Teachers share a significant responsibility in preparing young people to lead successful and productive lives. The National Professional Standards for Teachers (the Standards) reflect and build on national and international evidence that a teacher's effectiveness has a powerful impact on students, with broad consensus that teacher quality is the single most important in-school factor influencing student achievement.² Effective teachers can be a source of inspiration and, equally importantly, provide a dependable and consistent influence on young people as they make choices about further education, work and life. Internationally and locally, education systems are developing professional standards for teachers to attract, develop, recognize and retain quality teachers. 'High performing school systems, though strikingly different in construct and context, [maintain] a strong focus on improving instruction because of its direct impact upon student achievement. So there is a need to get understanding of perceptions and attitudes of the both teachers and students regarding their attitudes and expectations on teacher-student relationship which was the major thirst of the study.

Conceptual framework

Teacher–student relationships: An Overview

In my mind now students are the God and teachers are the Priest within the temple (School). So it is crystal clear that both are made for each other within the system without one other will be value less. So before highlighting the relationship I want to highlight the concrete presence of teacher within the system "A school without a teacher is just like a body without soul, a skeleton without flesh and blood, a shadow without substance".

Teacher–student relationships are widely recognized as being important to student motivation (Birch & Ladd, 1996; Davis, 2003; Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006; Noddings, 1992), intellectual development (Goldstein, 1999), and achievement (Muller, Katz, & Dance, 1999; Nieto, 1996) as well as to an overall supportive, safe classroom environment that encourages learning (Day, Stobart, Sammons, & Kington, 2006; Lomax, 2007). Additionally, the importance teachers place on developing positive personal relationships with their students has been suggested as one aspect of effectiveness and expertise in teaching (Carr, 2005; Cothran & Ennis, 1997; Davis, 2003; Smith & Strahan, 2004). Effective teacher–student relationships cultivate engaging pedagogical conversations that "hold the interest and imagination of young people" and serve to enhance students' lives (Carr, 2005, p. 265). It is often through personal interest in students that teachers find ways to bring students into these important conversations.

Much of the recent literature on teacher–student relationships has focused on the role of caring (Noblit, 1993; Noddings, 1984,1995; O'Connor, 2008;Wright, 2004). An ethic of care privileges the emotional connections between teacher and student and emphasizes the significance of the reciprocal nature and "synergistic power" of the relationships between teachers and students (Marlowe, 2006, p. 94). Thus, caring and the resulting shared "power" can manifest itself in student success and teacher satisfaction (Graham, West, & Schaller, 1992).

Rational of the Study

Think back to when you were in school. Who was your favorite teacher? Who was the teacher you dreaded having? Almost everyone will instantly be able to answer these two questions. We've all had good teachers and unfortunately most of us have had teachers that were not effective. So what qualities does an effective teacher have that an ineffective teacher does not? The answer is that it takes a perfect blend of several qualities to create a truly effective teacher who can have a lasting impact on virtually every student. In this article we examine and tried to suggest some qualities that virtually every effective teacher will possess. If we all silently think over this burning problem we must conclude that this is the real cause for which not only the school education but also the teacher education also deteriorated. Because now a day's Teachers, who consider their job as a profession, work only for pay cheque. Their work is considered useful for their own shake. Since perchance they have occupied a professional chair they try for their own good, at the cost of others. But our cultural heritage proves that true teachers are those who consider their job as honourable. Their activities become honourable only when they work with a sense of self-fulfillment and self-realisation. But this sense of thinking is now deleted from the mind of teachers in India.

Therefore, in this paper an attempt has been made to analyze the present status of educational environment within the school prevails and the teacher taught relationship.

Research Questions

The study addressed to answer the following questions.

1. How do teachers experience their relationships with students?
2. How do teachers construct meaning related to their interactions with students?
3. How do they talk about this experience with others? And
4. What could be possible measures to enhance guidelines and procedures of developing teacher-student relationship?

Methods

We approached this study from a phenomenological perspective. Using a phenomenological perspective allows us to investigate new, unanticipated themes and understandings to emerge by exploring a small number of cases in great depth and rich detail (de Marrais, 2004; Smith, 2004). Specifically, we were interested in, 'what is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?' (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002, p. 104). In applying that phenomenological question to this study, we asked the above questions.

We bracketed, or set aside as much as possible, our own experiences, assumptions, and beliefs about emotions and teacher– student relationships to transcend our perceptions of the nature of the phenomenon (de Marrais, 2004). Our ultimate goal in bracketing was to look at the data with fresh eyes. Using a phenomenological perspective also facilitated our attempt to answer the more specific questions we asked of our data: how do teachers define their relationship boundaries in dealing with emotions in the classroom? With what types of issues do teachers typically have difficulty? How do teachers make decisions regarding relationship boundaries?

Participants

One hundred in-service teachers from both high schools and primary schools from IGNOU admitted under IGNOU and hundred pre-service teacher's trainee from RCIT B. Ed College. So the sample of the study comprised two hundred teacher trainees.

Tools:

The following tools are used in collection of data for this study.

1. Interview schedule for obtaining direct information from both in-service as well as pre-service trainees.

For Example:- Interview questions included: (1) tell me how you went about building rapport with your students? (2) What types of things do you share with your students? (3) What do you think that “getting too involved with students” means? (4) How do teachers talk about teacher–student emotional involvement or “emotional distance” from students?

Data analysis

We adapted Strauss and Corbin’s (1999) open coding as a technique to analyze participants’ statements relevant to teacher–student relationships and emotional interactions in the classroom. Each transcript was simultaneously coded by all the researchers.

We then compared and discussed our decisions among the research group. Several passes were made over the transcripts, and the development of categories was an ongoing, iterative process, based on common codes across transcripts. We reevaluated and refined both the codes and the categories to mirror participants’ descriptions of teacher–student relationships. Then we began looking for patterns in the data across all participants. We allowed the boundary themes to emerge inductively from the data, but subsequently went through a second process of comparing the data deductively to the relevant literature on professional boundaries.

Multiple readings of the transcripts ensured that codes, categories, and emerging issues reflected the overall context as well as the meaning making of each participant (Groenewald, 2004; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989).

We report our findings with quotes from our participants, meant to capture the essence of participant beliefs about and experiences of teacher–student relationships, the emotional involvement inherent in those relationships, and the boundaries teachers established in their relationships with students. Pervasive throughout the findings are both ideas from the teachers about how they construct meaning of their relationships and the underlying reflectivity with which they share their thoughts about their relationships.

Perspectives/procedures

Ethic of care in teacher–student relationships

The teacher should take a pledge to follow the code of Ethics which may bring credit to the entire profession. The basic concepts of care mentioned in the literature review are evident in the actions of our participants. In establishing rapport with the students, one can say he wants the students to know “we’re going to have to respect each other and be open and accepting to others’ points of view. I think the main issue is trust. Then one can believe that the positive classroom environment is the product of taking the time to talk with the students in her classes about things in which they are interested whether it is a current event or an ethical dilemma.

Proactive rather than reactive

This can be one of most difficult aspects for a teacher to conquer. Intense planning and organization can ultimately make your job all the more less difficult. Teachers who plan ahead, looking for aspects that they might have issues with, and proactively looking for solutions to solve those problems will have less stress on them, then those teachers who wait until a problem arises and then tries to address it. Being proactive does not replace being adaptive. No matter how well you plan, there will be surprises. However, being proactive can cut down on these surprises tremendously, thus making you more effective overall.

Demonstrates a caring attitude

Even teachers who love their job can struggle in this area, not because they don't care, but because they get caught up so much in the day to day routine of teaching that they can forget that their students have lives outside of school. Taking the time to get to know a student on a personal level takes a lot of time and dedication. There is also a line that no teacher wants to cross where their relationship becomes too personal. Elite teachers know how to balance this without crossing that line and once a student believes the teacher truly cares for them, then there is no limit to what that student can achieve.

Use Objective and Fair Assessments

Course assessments of student learning must be objective, valid, fair, and directly related to learning objectives as outlined in the course syllabus or other written materials distributed to students. When designing course assessments (i.e., tests, out-of-class assignments, and even extra credit), ethical teachers are cognizant of assessments that do not match course objectives. For example, ethical teachers assess content objectives, critical thinking, or writing objectives that are specifically stated or emphasized in the course objectives.

Ethical teachers are aware of factors that may affect fairness in grading. They use best practices to design valid and reliable test questions. Teachers should also avoid letting unrelated factors or personal biases affect their grading of student assessments (e.g., a student's attendance or classroom behavior, a theoretical disagreement with a student, grading the expected "best" or "worst" papers first or last).

Boundaries in teacher–student relationships

As our participants shared stories about their relationships with students, their ideas about relationship boundaries emerged. We present the boundaries, derived both inductively and deductively from our data, in 11 different categories however, the categories cannot be considered mutually exclusive as they often blurred when examining specific transactions between teachers and students. Communication, emotions, and relationship boundaries were the most salient in the interviews, but that was to be expected, in part due to the focus of our interview questions on teacher–student relationships and the emotional involvement inherent in those relationships.

- **Communication boundaries**

Communication boundaries seemed to centre most often on issues of self-disclosure to students. Participants frequently shared basic information about their families, where they had lived, and their past teaching experience. While initial information was shared at the beginning of the year, self-disclosure continued at various times during the school year. For example, the majority of these teachers wanted their students to perceive them as "real." Palmer stated, "I think you really should share as much as you can with the kids so they can see you as a human being, and they can see how you react to frustration." The act of modeling emotional regulation for his students served as the impetus for self-disclosure in this instance.

- **Cultural boundaries**

Self-disclosure can also be construed as a vehicle for cultural sharing. Most of our participants stated that their school districts were transitioning to a higher level of diversity as students of various ethnic backgrounds moved into their areas. Donna's willingness to discuss her personal background and celebration of family holidays with her students suggests the importance of individual openness to different cultural backgrounds in the classroom. Helping students understand the various influences on not only the teachers, but also on their peers, may lead to

better understanding, communication, and cooperation in the classroom as students respect cultural differences.

- Emotional boundaries

Emotional boundaries can be among the most sensitive for teachers. Patterns of emotional boundaries fell along several dimensions. Emotional regulation, appropriate levels of emotion shared in the classroom, and comfort levels with others' emotions were among the responses we encountered. Keeping emotions "in control" seems to be a common theme in teachers' talk about interactions in the classroom. What are sometimes perceived as "unpleasant" emotions: anger, frustration, and even hate were mentioned as emotions that should be masked or expressed with care. Participants also talked about boundaries of emotional intensity. Many thought they could share a wide range of emotions with their students, but it was a matter of the level or intensity of emotion shared, not the emotion itself. Theresa was cognizant of this as she interacted and conversed with her students. "There are levels of emotions you shouldn't share. And what's appropriate for one child might totally be inappropriate for another."

- Personal boundaries

One of participant finds that teaching consumes her day. She finally decided on a strategy of taking a break from anything related to school over her lunch hour, though sometimes she finds herself grading papers to catch up on work. However, she still struggles with mentally leaving work at work. Also other has similar feelings about teaching. She has been admonished by both friends and family to separate herself from student issues at school, but Theresa admits she is still "too involved."

- Relationship boundaries

By and large the boundaries surrounding the teacher–student relationship have received the most press and notoriety in India situation. Stories in the news of intimate teacher–student relationships have decreased over the last several years. Some of our participants had knowledge of this type of boundary violation occurring in their school or school system.

When we think about older students we can see how that could be romantically involved. I think if it got to the point where the teacher's emotions depended on a student that could be pretty dangerous. It's a real delicate balance because you have to care and be genuine but at the same time you can't let yourself get carried away. You have to have stability of your own personal life and not put that into a student. That would be where you would be crossing the line and getting too involved.

- Institutional boundaries

School rules and regulations create boundaries in which teachers are required to function. However, there are times when those boundaries are ignored, crossed, and even violated. Participants in this study for the most part appeared to operate within institutional boundaries. Nevertheless, each participant knew of examples of institutional crossings or violations. The culture, belief of the school and administration same for all, so we cannot lead to individual school rules and norms in this juncture.

- Curricular boundaries

When dealing with vulnerable populations, curricular boundaries naturally come into play. Although participants shared that they took time to discuss topics of interest to students, at times related to content, they carefully approached this endeavor.

Limitations and future directions

We recognize certain limitations in this research. First, all the teachers in this study were from one region of the IGNOU and IP University, so our findings must be viewed as being from this social historical context. To gain a better perspective of teacher boundaries, we must look further afield in the future to other areas of the Indian Universities and other social historical contexts in the world. The article was also limited to the teachers' perspective based on self-report data. Adding the student perspective would give us a better understanding of the reciprocal nature of the teacher–student relationship and the boundaries that are negotiated. The student perspective would also create triangulation of the findings of our current research. Next, though our discussion alluded to a connection between teachers' ideas about boundaries and their conception of their teacher role, a full discussion of the possibility of this relationship was beyond the scope of this article. Future research could be conducted to better elucidate this connection. Finally, this work opens the discussion to other useful topics. For example, teacher identity, emotions and boundaries when working with more racially and economically diverse students to describe the professional perplexities they may face. Future research on this topic is needed to better isolate and describe teacher emotions within this area.

Conclusion and Implications

Although the ethical principles we summarized previously are common to most ethical codes for teachers, the application of a particular principle in a specific situation may not always be clear-cut. Because most ethical codes for teachers constitute behavioral guidelines, not explicit rules of behavior, discussions among teachers as to whether a particular behavior is or is not ethical can often generate diverse opinions and perspectives. Thus, we recommend that teachers take a proactive stance by developing a deeper understanding of ethical teaching and reflecting on these principles and their application to teaching. Then it may possible to start a better journey towards concussive environment within the school with better teacher taught relationship.

A code of conduct exists to support teachers in their activities in classes working with children and support children as they work with their teachers. A code affects the school community-students, parents, colleagues both teaching and non-teaching and most importantly the teacher. The intent of the code is to guide teacher behavior reflecting the responsibilities of teachers and stake holders. A “good teacher” knows and applies a variety of teaching strategies in presenting the content, treats students with respect, reflects on the class to improve teaching, and completes the myriad of activities associated with teaching and schools. This deception of a teacher speaks to the technical end of teaching but not the core of teaching. Integrity is at the core of being a teacher: at the end of the day, integrity (as one aspect of ethics and conduct) is what remains.

“The true teacher is he who can immediately come down to the level of the student, transfer his soul to the student soul and see, understand through his mind. Such a teacher can really teach and none else.”

Swami Vivekananda

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