



PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AND EDUCATION FOR TEACHERS

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Introduction

School teachers are expected to offer solutions tailored to each individual student, colleagues, organization and community while simultaneously embracing powerful code of conduct and adhering to uniform professional standards. Involvement of moral actions is frequent in teaching. Teachers are considered as moral agents everywhere in the world and hence classroom interaction should unavoidably moral in nature Also there are cases of teachers who do not display appropriate behaviour as reported in news papers, on television channels or on the Internet. Study results also point to unprofessional behaviour among a number of teachers. This has been identified long back by the National Education Policy (NPE) (1986) of India. According to the Policy statement “India's political and social life is passing through a phase, which poses the danger of erosion to long-accepted values.

Professional Ethics

National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE) (2009) of India states “teaching is a profession and teacher education is a process of professional preparation of teachers. Preparing one for a profession is an arduous task and it involves action from multiple fronts and perspectives. A profession is characterized by a sufficiently long period of academic training, an organized body of knowledge on which the undertaking is based, an appropriate duration of formal and rigorous professional training in tandem with practical experience in the field and a code of professional ethics that binds its members into a fraternity. These dimensions acquire critical importance in view of several factors. There is, first of all, the traditional idealism, the esteem and importance attached to the role of the school teachers and very high societal expectations from them. Teachers are concerned, in an important way, with the total development of human beings – physical, intellectual, emotional, social, moral and spiritual. While the dimensions of teaching other than the

informational and cognitive may have suffered neglect in modern times due to a variety of factors, one cannot deny that they constitute an integral part of the teachers' role and functions. The implication of this is to give due emphasis to developing reflective teachers with positive attitudes, values and perspective, along with skills for the craft of teaching”

Code of Professional Ethics for School Teachers

In pursuance of the recommendations of the NPE (1986) under the leadership of India's National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) a draft Code of Professional Ethics for School Teachers was prepared. The NCERT (2010, p.3) has prepared this document as a facilitative mechanism for professional bodies of teachers to use it as a template for discussion amongst them, make any amendments, if necessary, and adopt it to give dignity to their profession. The introduction to the draft code of professional ethics for school teachers (2010), reads “It is universally felt that like all other professions, the teaching profession should also have its own Code of Professional Ethics which indeed is a pre-requisite to ensure its dignity and integrity. It is also significant that the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 entrusts teachers with some onerous professional responsibilities to be internalized by them in the performance of their duties. Accordingly, it is considered necessary that the Code of Professional Ethics be evolved and adopted by the teaching community. The Code of Professional Ethics for teachers provides a framework of principles to guide them in discharging their obligations towards students, parents, colleagues and community. Increased awareness of the ethical principles governing the teaching profession is essential to ensure ‘professionalism’ among teachers” (p.5). A teacher's fundamental responsibilities include constructing courses and classroom environments that encourage learning, evaluating learning fairly, and treating students respectfully. Ethical teaching means engaging in behaviours that meet these responsibilities in ways expected by students, your institution, and your discipline (Keith-Spiegel, Whitley, Balogh, Perkins, & Wittig, 2002). Quality teachers are considered to be those individuals whose pedagogy is grounded in values and beliefs that lead to caring, positive teachers-student relationships, embedded in trust and high standards of professional ethics (Boon, 2011, p.76).

Professional Ethics Education for Teachers

In his review of Elizabeth Campbell's book, ‘the ethical teacher’, Vokey (2009, p.379) views that the author hopes a wider appreciation of teachers' ethical knowledge will contribute to a sound conceptual basis for teacher professionalism, to school cultures in which ethical issues are openly addressed and ethical perspectives are shared through discussion and debate, and

to teacher preparation programs in which participants learn to apply their moral values to the complexities of educational practice in schools.

Following the NCFTE 2009, majority of the Indian universities which are responsible for teacher education to secondary level teaching have restructured their teacher education curriculum to include professional ethics education. However, one can see that, it is treated by integrating professional standards into individual pedagogical courses. Tobias and Boon (2010, p.1) argued that ethics education should be taught as an explicit and intensive subject, perhaps as a foundation unit, rather than by embedding codes of conduct or professional standards into individual subjects, as is currently the case in Australia. Mere memorisation of codes of professional ethics may not make a difference in moral reasoning. So it should be analyzed, debated or examined thoroughly from an ethical perspective. Cummings, Harlow, and Maddux (2007) showed that pre service teachers score poorly on moral reasoning compared with other undergraduates. The study by Tobias and Boon (2010, p.1) found that 'pre service and classroom teachers were observing or experiencing unethical behaviour in schools. Many felt underprepared to cope with ethical dilemmas or school-based situations that they personally felt were wrong.' This may be presumably due to the absence of an appropriate strategy to ethics education for future teachers.

Many of the few empirical studies in the effectiveness of professional ethics education courses point out that ethics education programs seem to work best when they include separate ethics courses that focus on group discussion of real-world cases (e.g., Canary, 2007; Klugman & Stump, 2006; Smith et al., 2004). Enhancing teachers' ethical knowledge through ethical programmes can empower them to develop pluralistic attitudes and more complex moral understanding of the choices open to them (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011, p. 655).

Employing a qualitative longitudinal research design involving 25 graduate students as participants, the study by Caulfield and Woods (2013, p.31) explored the question, does experiential learning, when designed specifically to heighten awareness of a significant social problem, evoke socially responsible behaviour specific to that problem in the long run. Findings indicated that 94.7% of participants who reported a high impact learning experience when participating in experiential learning while enrolled in a graduate class also reported engaging in socially responsible behaviour because of that learning experience. They added that in some instances, the socially responsible behaviour continued for as long as three years after the class had ended. They found nine courses most frequently identified by the graduate students as most impacted their life in some way (p.37). Among these, Leadership & Ethics, and Ethics in Public Sector courses ranked third and fourth respectively. And the experiential components respectively were the leadership panel discussion that the students organized and facilitated with community leaders they had selected, and students had to apply ethical

concepts to a current work experience in which they found themselves facing an ethical dilemma

Conclusion

School teachers need to be trained to face moral dilemmas and make decisions based on professional ethics, which eventually supplement the augmentation of their professional competency. For this professional ethics education has to be started in the pre service teacher education programs to make the teachers able to form good habits of teacher ethics early in their career. Professional ethics education courses have impact on the life of graduates when they are provided in the form experiential learning as stand- alone courses. I hope that ‘group discussion of real world cases and dilemmas’ with a practicum experience may be a suitable approach to train future teachers for internalizing the professional ethics.

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