

An Approach to Professional Ethics Education for Pre Service Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Literature shows teachers face ethical quandaries bombarding them every day in their professional life. Reports reveal unprofessional behaviour among teachers. To adequately deal with these challenges teachers must get trained in professional ethics. However, evidences suggest inadequate attention paid to ethics training in teacher education programs. The present paper makes an attempt to study professional ethics, its early habituation and proposes an improved case analysis as a suitable approach for delivering training in professional ethics tailored to teaching practices.

Keywords: Teacher education, teacher ethics, professional ethics education, moral education, case analysis approach, ethical decision making, philosophy

School teachers face moral dilemmas and decisions on a daily basis and are often required to make difficult choices between competing ethical demands and values. They 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 (Buzzelli and Johnston, 2001; Shapira-

Lishchinsky and Orland- Barak, 2009). However, studies, (e.g. Husu and Tirri, 2007; Jackson, Boostrom, and Hansen, 1993; Tirri, 1999) show that teachers are not aware of the ethical ramifications of their own actions and overall practice.

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. The goats of secularism, socialism, democracy and professional ethics are coming under increasing strain" (p.3). "Teachers' associations must play a significant role in upholding professional integrity, enhancing the dignity of the teacher and in curbing professional misconduct" (p.3). These results and reports serves

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to confirm the suspicion that a number of educators are not suited to the profession and, although the number of teachers whose behaviour is unethical is small, is enough to generate a negative reputation for the teaching profession. For this, can we blame the teachers alone? Have we formally trained them for professional ethics? The answer is for decades we did not. A journey through the teacher education curricula of various universities in India before the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE) (2009) underlines that we might not have thought about this dimension.

Pandey (n.d.) in his article 'professionalization of teacher education in India: A critique of teacher education curriculum reforms and its effectiveness' concludes that "the present teacher education programme is inadequate to meet the challenges of diverse Indian socio-cultural contexts and the paradigm shift envisaged in India's National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 for school level education. The pedagogic reform from this perspective need to invest on building on teachers capacity to act as autonomous reflective groups of professionals who are sensitive to their social mandate and to the professional ethics and to the needs of heterogeneous groups of learners" (p.12). He also adds that the teachers in the existing socio-cultural context of the country need to be logical and reflective because of increasing racial, ethical, and cultural and linguistic diversities in the schools and in society which demands broad minded citizens (p.9). Studies around the world (e.g. Bergdahl, 2006; Franberg, 2006; Mahony, 2009) indicate that teacher education currently has less attention to teachers' ethical understanding as a necessary element of their professional knowledge.

On this background of under ability of teachers to face frequent ethical quandaries bombarding them and take decisions based on professional ethics, their unprofessional behaviour and the insufficient attention paid in the teacher education programs to teacher ethics, mandate the inclusion of professional ethics education for teachers. Such training will supplement the professional competency of future teachers. Hence, it is imperative that there should be a suitable approach to professional ethics education for teachers.

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" (p.15).

Benchmarking statements and professional codes from science, engineering and a range of applied disciplines indicate that ethics is now seen as an integral part of a graduate's ability to function effectively in the workplace. As a result, ethics may be embedded in the rapidly evolving notion of what it means to be a 'Professional', an ideal that links ethical behaviour to interpersonal communication, professional competence and management skills. Ethics refers to principles that define behaviour as right, good and proper. Such principles do not always dictate a single "moral" course of action, but provide a means of evaluating and deciding among competing options (Josephson Institute of Ethics, n.d.). Glanz (2009, p.28) stated "An ethical educator strives to do the right things as well as to do things right." Ethics draws on human dispositions, attitudes and behaviours such as valuing, selecting and acting, and is concerned with desirable actions associated with human relationships and responsibility for other people (Norberg and Johansson, 2007).

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, and 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).

Early Habituation of Professional Ethics

Teacher education programs are the initial place to acquaint new teachers with moral decisions of their profession. Teaching is an occupation; where ethical issues are central and therefore the provision of ethics education to support the code of professional ethics is crucial. Snook (2003) and Campbell (2008) echo the views of others who have appealed for ethics i.e. moral philosophy, to take a more central role in pre service teacher education programs. Students need a moral compass to cope with the real ethical and moral dilemmas they face from their earliest training. This can be best accomplished by introducing future teachers to the principles and practice of teacher ethics before they move to substantive school experiences, though the best way to do this remains unclear.

Aristotle's (cited in Burns, D. P., Leung C., Parsons L., Singh G., and Yeung B., 2012, p.8) philosophy points out that the habits one develops in youth are central importance, because those early habits come to reinforce themselves. Good habits dispose us to good action, and those actions thereby further habituate us into the same good habits. An intervention when students are studying for teacher education programs, help them to form good habits (ethical actions) early in the career. To internalize the professional codes we need to include professional ethics education as a part of the teacher education curriculum. Thus ethics learning and teaching within teacher education programmes should lead the student teacher's ability to apply ethical principles to situations modelled on real life and ethics shall be taught as a means to Fitness for Practice that the student teacher's ability to apply ethical principles to their own conduct. The application of any ethics principle or ethical code to a particular case by a learner or practitioner cannot be haphazard, idiosyncratic, or a matter of individual bootstrapping (Fasser et al., 2007, p.35). Instead it should be done through moral reasoning by properly analysing the ethical relevance involved in it.

The effect of professional ethics education courses have not studied well, empirical studies (Winston, 2007) are few and, fewer still in the field of teacher education. The few empirical studies from other professional fields reveal that ethics education can make some difference, particularly with respect to measures of moral reasoning (e.g., Canary, 2007; Klugman and Stump, 2006; Smith, Fryer-Edwards, Diekema, and Braddock, 2004). With respect to other possible goals of ethics education, such as attitude change, Klugman and Stump (2006) showed that ethics courses had no effect on attitudes. However, Plaisance's, (2007) study shows significant attitude change after taking ethics courses. The findings of the study done by Walker (2011) on undergraduate students formally enrolled in the ethics class suggest increased positive cognitive and affective changes in student perceptions that inform one's value and belief system, the student's ability to remain open-minded and reconsider previous beliefs and actions from a 360 degree perspective, and the student's ability to apply new information to ethical dilemmas in the workplace. Research also suggests that different professions might require different forms of ethics education (e.g., McCabe, Dukerich, and Dutton, 1994). Thus, what works in medical, business, law or nursing education, might not work in teacher education. Hence it is high time to evolve a comprehensive strategy to deliver ethics education for pre service teachers.

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 and 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 and 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 (p.44-45).

Group Discussion of Real-world Cases and Dilemmas

Ray (2007) argues that a good way to deliver such ethics courses in an effective manner is the case study method, a method popular across the different professional fields and in teacher education. Keefer and Ashley (2001) in their study of ethics education for engineering students say, "The results of our empirical investigations support the position of those who argue for the pedagogical importance of case-based approaches to teaching professional ethics. Given the challenges young professionals face in interpreting the open-ended quality of professional codes and, given the ever-changing character of the professions themselves, the importance of understanding code principles in the context of cases is clear. In addition, case-based approaches may have a role to play in broadening our view of the components that are necessary for teaching professional ethics effectively" (p. 396).

The approach looks like this for example. The realistic case examples in Teaching Ethics are presented to students in an interesting way in a paragraph or other short pieces of writing. Often, the developers organise a series of cases around a principle drawn from common morality (ethical theory) such as 'honesty' or from a code of professional ethics for school teachers such as 'respects the value of being just and impartial to all students irrespective of their caste, creed, religion, sex, economic status, disability, language and place

of birth'(NCERT Code, 2010, Ch.1, 1.2).The casecontains a dilemma the student wishes to discuss. This will be followed by students' dialogue about competing perspectives, group and individual reflections and the collective and individual reconsiderations of value positions, depending on situations associated with teaching profession and end up with a justified decision based on code of professional ethics or ethical theories or a combination of these two.In this strategy students are guided by the teacher educator to do the above operations. Of course the pedagogical efficacy of such an approach relies on the willingness of students to work through the numerous case examples and to compare cases in light of the ethicists' detailed case analyses. However, it has the following advantages.

It helps students to bridge the gap between theory and practice of ethics (Ray, 2007), foster an increased level of interest and engagement (Delatte, 1997), and gain a level of vicarious experience of the dilemma (Griffith and Laframboise, 1998). It also develops dialogical competence what Strike (1993, p.111) called "acquiring facility with concepts that regulate our public life. It involves mastery of a form of discourse that integrates moral intuitions, moral principles, and background conception into dialogically achieved reflective equilibrium."

Celik, Cevik, and Haslam (2012) in their study on prospective teachers attending the third year of a computer education and instructional technology department in Turkey showed that the cases provided a valued opportunity to engage developing teachers in solving real life problems that tend to occur in actual teaching and that cases can help prospective teachers be prepared for their early teaching experiences in real classrooms by improving their understandings of how to respond to actual problems they will encounter in their fields and how to apply what they learned in classes to solve practical teaching issues.

Soltis (1986) wrote,"Realistic vignettes depicting classroom situations inwhich ethical dilemmas arise can be used to sensitizefuture teachers to ethical issues found in the classregarding such concepts and principles as fairness, respect for persons, intellectual freedom, the rights of individuals, due process, and punishment" (p. 3).

According to Strike (1993, p.105) through case analysis teachers develop the ability to talk about, reason about, and experience appropriate phenomena via a certain set

of concepts. Looking at specific cases can serve as inductive evidence for the construction of normative principles, as practice in grasping problems and constructing novel solutions, as opportunities to develop moral insight, or as chances to exercise the moral imagination (Bowie, 2003).

Soltis (1986) argued, "Teaching about the code and the systems of ethics needs to be supplemented with teaching that creates ethical sensitivity and develops knowledge and skills useful in ethical decision making" (pp. 3-4). Using a Kohlbergian framework, Schrader (1993) wrote, "Including components of moral dilemma discussion, case studies, personal reflection, or analytic journals in professional training programs can provide the support needed to facilitate moral stage development" (p. 96). She also pointed to studies showing that explicit instructions in moral theory can also contribute for moral development (p. 95).

Improvements to the approach of Group Discussion of Real-world Cases and Dilemmas

Warnick and Silverman (2011) in their article "A Framework for Professional Ethics Courses in Teacher Education" put forward the steps of a case analysis, adapted specifically to teachers."First, we believe that teaching this framework, and using it to help students examine cases, helps students to navigate a path between relativism and absolutism, between overconfidence in their ethical beliefs and moral nihilism. As we indicated, the literature suggests that this can be a difficult balance to achieve. Using the above framework gives teacher educators a way to evaluate ethical decisions in a more objective way (that is, in a way that ensures that a great number of relevant prima facie factors are considered), but it does not promise too much by offering a simple decision mechanism. This process will help students feel that they have gained something concrete and useful from their ethics course—something that will help them as they navigate real ethical dilemmas—but not something that will tie them down dogmatically"(p.280). They hope that the framework for ethical decision making presented in their article provides a strategy for bringing conceptual coherence to professional ethics courses for teachers (p.283). The steps from the framework are numbered from one to nine and briefed below as they are found in their article:

1. Compile Information about the Case:What are the facts? What more could I learn?

2. Consider the Various Participants: Who are all the people who care about this? How do they see things? Have the facts been adequately communicated to all that concerned parties?
3. Identify and Define the Ethical Problem: What moral values and rules seem to be in conflict?
4. Identify Some Options: What options are available?
5. Do a Theoretical Analysis of Your Options:
6. Consequentialism: What consequences are likely for all of the people involved?
7. Non Consequentialism: Would it be okay if everybody solved the problem according to each of your options? How would you like to be treated if you were involved in the particular case? Are any moral rules, laws or ethical codes relevant?
8. Consider Your Role as a Teacher: What special responsibilities are owed to students, the discipline or professional groups?
9. Educate Yourself as Time Permits: Are there any articles, experts, or experienced people that might help?
10. Make the Decision: With all of this on table what courses of action seems best to you? Give reasons why.
11. Decide How to Evaluate and Follow Up on Your Decision: How can the decision be monitored and relationships repaired? Would you do the same thing in the future?

As explained by Warnick and Silverman (2011) this frame work is primarily drawn from the influential textbook *Ethics for Teachers* by Strike and Soltis, 2009 by giving more objectivity through structured process of moral reasoning and decision making and also including elements of ethical thinking (such as follow-up and role-based considerations) that seem to be missing from the textbook. However, Burns *et al.*, (2012) point out the limitation of case analysis in fostering *phronesis*, the reasoning that allows an agent to cope with the rich complexity of real situations. He adds that it is the practical, contextual reasoning that allows one to sort out the complexity of actual life (p.6). Higgins (cited in Burn *et al.*, p.7) note that *phronesis* requires experience to develop and hence cannot be taught separately from gaining of that experience.

Their argument is logical hence I endorse it. If we consider this then the model case needs to include at least three optional decisions for the student to arrive from the ethical dilemmas for enriching with more contextual variables, and some cases Burn *et al.* (2012) say should not contain ethical dilemmas at all for students to identify problems and discern their ethical relevance and irrelevance. To increase the *phronesis* effect, their proposal to give practical experience in utilizing the dialogical competence while the student teacher is in practicum along with a mentor teacher, can also be introduced into this approach. This may make the learning more experiential. While the case construction is modified to include these, the steps of analysis should include one more at the beginning in between two and three that which identify whether the situation is ethically relevant or not.

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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