

## Teachers' professional ethics and its implications

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### Abstract

*'Teaching is a noble profession' is an oft repeated adage that we have heard and will continue to hear in the future. This saying is pregnant with meaning. As a profession it (teaching) is laden with risk and responsibility. It calls for greater commitment, personal integrity and ideal service to society at large. Teachers, as professionals, are engaged in one of the most ethically demanding jobs, the education of young people; thus it is important that teachers should constantly reflect on the ethics of their activities to ensure that they exhibit the best ethical example possible in their work to those they are morally educating.*

*There is a felt need that teachers as professionals need to conduct themselves befitting the type of profession they practice. This paper is an attempt to bring to light some of the important aspects of professional ethics and its implications in the field of teaching that are essential for the attainment of professional excellence and self-satisfaction among the teachers and other stakeholders.*

**KEYWORDS:** Professional Ethics, Teachers, Profession, Integrity, Self- Satisfaction

### Introduction

In the history of education, the teacher has occupied a very important role. A number of books and eminent thinkers/writers have rightly pointed out the significant of the teacher not only in the teaching-learning process but also to the society at large. Dr. Radhakrishnan observed that the teacher has a special place in the society; they are the transmitters of knowledge and value, and are responsible for keeping the lamp of the civilization burning. Society on the other hand has its due share to honour the teaching profession and to ensure that teachers are given due status which will command respect from the students.

In the twenty first century we find that there is a change in the concept of education and the different roles to be played by a teacher. Teaching is now seen more as a profession than a passion. In ancient times, teachers with plain simple living, high thinking, disciplined routine, abstinence from pleasure, mental control and sincerity of purpose were considered to be ideal and exemplary. But in the present scenario multi-tasking and multi-talented teachers are considered to be the most admired.

Teaching as a profession, as it is seen now a days, is full of risk and responsibility (Goodlad, n.d; Hutchings, 2016). It very encouraging to see a great majority of teachers carry high this noble tradition and even innovate and teach beyond the classroom setting; other teachers have lost the passion to impart knowledge and are simply going through the motion of teaching, for the sake of fulfilling an obligation. The teaching profession can fall prey to corruption. Hence it has become necessary that just like any other professions, the teaching profession should also have its own code of professional ethics to ensure the dignity and integrity of the profession (NCTE, 2010).

### **Ethics and Professional Ethics**

Ethics as branch of study deals with the proper course of action for man. It is the study of the right and wrong of the human action (Jayamma & Sumangala, 2012). At a fundamental level, it is the method by which we categorize our values and pursue them.

Ethics is a requirement for human life. It is a pointer or it sets a standard for all the actions that we take. Based on this standard we are able to assess the success of the endeavour that we undertake. Professional ethics concerns one's conduct of behaviour and practice when carrying out professional work such as consulting, research, teaching and writing. Its most common components are knowledge, honesty, accountability, integrity, loyalty, compliance with laws and mores, etc., (Kannan, 2016).

Professional ethics are acceptable standards of personal and business behaviour, value and guiding principles for performing or

carrying out job/function/duties according to sound and consistent ethical standards. Teaching as a profession challenges the teachers to be not only effective and efficient (professional competency) but also to practice professional ethics while carrying out the task (Wayne, 1995).

### **Professional Ethics in Teaching**

Teaching is one of the largest professions in the country. As a profession (Seghedin, 2014), teaching needs to evolve a self-regulatory mechanism in the form of professional ethics to regulate the conduct of the teachers and other stakeholders in the teaching-learning endeavour. It is to be noted that a country like India is in a state of transformation and teachers have the responsibility to bring about positive and acceptable change in the mindset of the students to embrace or reject the changes in the society. It is also the expectation of the society that teachers have the responsibility to help students to overcome and meet the challenges of life both from the society and as well as individual needs. Moreover educators around the world are faced with new challenges of balancing local, national, and global norms and moral as well as ethical values in the process of educating children. The absence of code of ethics in the teaching profession may only confuse the individual teacher in taking or arriving at a proper action/decision in highly nuanced issues.

Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education, Act 2009 (RTE) entrusts teachers with some onerous professional responsibilities to be internalized by them in the performance of their duties. NCERT and All India Federation of Primary and Secondary School Teachers' organisation jointly developed the code of professional ethics for the teaching profession (for Indian teachers) in 1997. The code provides a framework of principles to guide teachers in discharging their obligations. The preamble of the code reiterates the resolve of the country's teachers to uphold their professional integrity, strive to enhance the dignity of the profession and to take suitable measure to curb professional misconduct. The following categories of professional obligations of a teacher are included in the code:

- Teacher in relation to the students
- Teacher in relation to parents and guardians
- Teacher in relation to the society and nation
- Teacher in relation to profession, colleagues and professional organisations and
- Teacher in relation to the management and administration

The code highlights that a teacher is not only a purveyor of knowledge for the cognitive development of pupils but also a democratic and socializing agent, responsible for helping children to gain social and emotional maturity and become useful and self-supporting citizens. It is noticed today that teaching is suffering. It is plagued with various misconceptions. It has become more a profession than a passion and thus there is a paradigm shift in the perception of teachers; there is an erosion in the values, responsibilities and commitment in the profession. The availability of varied and financially rewarding opportunities in other sectors has affected teaching profoundly, changing demand and supply ration in this sector, thus undermining its importance as a noble profession. Commercialization and profit making is the buzz word. Above all, it's no longer a service but an occupation with unclear roles, vision and mission. Hence, the professional ethics in the teaching profession will serve a long way to erase and clarify the misconceptions of this once considered noble profession. Thus, it calls for a redefining of teachers' professionalism.

## **Implications of professional ethics in the teaching profession**

### **1. Teacher as a guide**

He teacher has the sacred duty to guide and lead students in the teaching-learning process. As a leader and guide, the teacher is called upon to conduct himself justly and impartially with students irrespective of their physical, mental, emotional, political, economic, social or religious characteristics (Cupino, 2006). S/he is expected to recognize and identify the individual differences of the students under his/her care and encourage students to develop the habit of

attaining excellence in whatever endeavour they undertake. Every teacher has the moral duty to inculcate and respect the democratic principles and values and to respect the right of each and every student to have confidential information about them.

## **2. Co-operative relationships**

The success of teaching-learning process depends very much on the type of cooperation between the teacher-parent/home-school relationship. Both teacher and parents have their due share in educating students. Therefore, teachers are required to establish friendly and cooperative relationships with home or parents. Such a relationship will facilitate the communication process between teacher and the parents. This kind of relationship will instill hope and confidence among student in his own home and avoid disparaging remark that will undermine that confidence. Sharing of information between the home and school will also provide parents and teachers with the information that will serve the best interests of their children and teachers will be able to keep parents informed about the progress of their children.

## **3. Good inter-personal Skills**

A teacher needs to conduct him/herself in such a manner that befits the kind of profession that s/he professes (Kumari, 2016). It is therefore the duty of the teacher to adhere to any reasonable pattern of behaviour accepted by the community for professional persons. Teachers are expected to perform the duties of a citizen and participate actively in the community activities with due consideration for his/her obligation to students, own family and him/herself. The teacher has the obligation to respect the community in which s/he is employed and be loyal to the school system, community, state and nation. S/he has the duty to connect the school with the community by encouraging lay participation in shaping the purpose of the school and strive to keep the public informed of the type of education provided to the students. Strike and Soltis (2004) proposed that teacher(s)

has the duty to work for the improvement of education in the community and to strengthen the community's moral, spiritual and intellectual life.

#### **4. Obligation with respect to employment**

Teacher has the duty to conduct himself/herself through proper channels. Every teacher is obliged to refrain from discussing confidential and official information with unauthorized persons, to seek employment in a professional manner such as refraining from seeking or accepting a position through unprofessional activity or the bending of professional policy.

It is expected that teachers adhere to the conditions of a contract until service there under has been performed, the contract has been terminated by mutual consent or the contract has otherwise been legally terminated. In case of change in position the teacher has the obligation to give and expect due notice or to refrain from engagement in gainful or no gainful employment outside his contract, where such employment affects adversely his professional status or impairs his standing with students, associates and the community.

#### **5. Maintaining quality professional relationship**

In the work place teachers are obliged to deal with other members of the profession in the same manner as he him/herself wishes to be treated such as extending support and encouragement to other colleagues in their endeavours or to speak constructively or well of other colleagues; but in case of eventuality to report honestly to responsible persons matters involving the welfare of the students, the school and the profession. It is also the obligation of the teacher to make personal effort in their professional growth by capacitating themselves by way of further study, research, attending conferences and other professional meetings.

#### **6. Obligation towards students**

Teachers are the caretakers of the students. They are the moral substitutes for parents (Bergem, 1990). This role obliges the teachers to conduct themselves in a fitting manner to ensure the welfare of the students. They have the responsibility to respect the human dignity of the child, treat all students with love and affection and be just and impartial in all their dealings with them. They are expected to transact the curriculum in conformity with the values enshrined in the constitution, make systematic effort to actualize students' potentials and talents by actively involving in their physical, social, intellectual, emotional and moral development, and paying special care to meet the individual needs of the students.

**7. Obligation towards the profession and colleague**

The golden rule in the teaching profession is that each and every teacher should cultivate a sense of pride in the task that they do and treat other member of the profession with respect and dignity. They are expected to create a culture of mutual trust and support. An atmosphere of this sort will encourage purposeful collaboration and dialogue among the colleagues and stakeholders. They have the onus to refrain from making unpleasant statements or untested allegations about colleagues or higher authorities, especially in the presence of students, other teachers or parents, etc.

**8. Obligations towards parents, community and society**

Teachers as a central figure in the educational system have a special connectivity with students both in and outside the classroom, his/her colleagues and the parents. The quality of relationship maintained by the teacher with the parents can go a long way in understanding the child and also in laying the foundation for a better atmosphere of understanding between students and his/her parents which is but essential for the child to achieve success in the academic arena.

We are living in the land of plurality, therefore it becomes all the more essential for teachers to develop a healthy

philosophy of composite culture which calls for tolerance and respect for all cultures of the land. This philosophy needs to be inculcated and nurtured among students through all curricular areas of school; and teacher's personal approach towards this philosophy is likely to produce the desired impact on the minds of the students.

## **Conclusion**

A teacher is known to be the builder, guide and leader of the nation; hence, they are expected to possess the essential qualities, viz., profundity of learning, clairvoyant vision and intellectual regeneration. His responsibility is to impart man-making and character-building education to his students, through his good conduct and ideal behaviour. It is also a universal truth that teaching creates all other professions and the teacher is considered as a candle that burns itself to light up the life of others; they should develop appropriate ethics among themselves so that the same values can be developed among students.

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