



Research Paper

Situating Professional Ethics in Higher Education Institution

Mandira Bora

Assistant Professor

Department of Political Science Golaghat Commerce College Golaghat, Assam

ABSTRACT: In view of higher education becoming more professional in the 21st century, it becomes necessary for people aspiring for college teaching careers to undergo a systematic training in ethical issues relating to teaching. The dictum that teaching is essentially a moral and ethical profession underscores the urgency of educating teachers, here college teachers, on professional ethics. But there is a wide gap between theory and praxis. While college teachers are regularly engaged in imparting ethical education to students as part of the syllabi—i. e., business ethics, medical ethics, legal ethics etc.—they themselves are least bothered about their own ethical responsibilities to their profession. Unless college teachers undergo rigorous training on professional ethics and inculcate ethical values, accountability to their profession will remain a distant dream even if there is provision for strict monitoring of their professional accountability. This paper is an attempt to explore the multi-layered professional ethics of teaching with special reference to college teachers in general. It is an endeavour to address issues relating to teaching and evaluating all students in ethical ways. The present study basically relies on secondary sources such as books. However, the data received from such sources are manipulated by the researcher on the basis of her firsthand experience of teaching in a college.

Keywords: Higher education, college teachers, professional ethics, ethical responsibility, accountability

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I. INTRODUCTION

A teacher has to play the dual role of a 'moral person' and 'moral educator'. His role is not merely confined to imparting morality to students, but is inextricably related to the upholding of ethical values such as fairness, compassion, honesty, respect for others, empathy, diligence, and consistency in his routine and daily life. Professional ethics of teachers, therefore, refer to his responsibility of 'teaching morally' and 'teaching morality'. In view of higher education becoming more professional in the 21st century, it becomes necessary for people aspiring for college teaching careers to undergo a systematic training in ethical issues relating to teaching. The dictum that teaching is essentially a moral and ethical profession underscores the urgency of educating teachers, here college teachers, on professional ethics.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

While college teachers are regularly engaged in imparting ethical education to students as part of the syllabi—i. e., business ethics, medical ethics, legal ethics etc.—they themselves are least bothered about their own ethical responsibilities to their profession. When we, therefore, talk about professional ethics of college teachers, we focus on 'ethical vision', 'ethical conduct' and 'ethical accountability', which are inextricably linked with the ideal of quality teaching. In other words, it is necessary to contextualize ethical behaviour within the institutional climate of higher education, while exploring at the same time ethical challenges and issues confronted by college teachers in their work place.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To explore the nuances of professional ethics in higher education.
- To examine the dimensions of becoming and making ethical teachers.
- To discover the challenges to acquiring and practising professional ethics.

III. METHODOLOGY

The present study basically relies on secondary sources such as books and the Internet. However, the data received from such sources is analysed by the researcher on the basis of her first-hand experience of teaching in a degree college.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What constitutes professional ethics?
- What contributes to the becoming and making of ethical teachers?
- What are the barriers to inculcating ethical principles?

V. DISCUSSION

Upholding and practising certain standard values by college teachers in their daily interaction with different stakeholders of their institutions to arrive at the professed institutional goal constitute professional ethics of college teachers. Such values may be referred to as doing no harm, benefitting the well-being of others, engaging in fair practices, and respecting each person as an autonomous individual. Other constituting elements of professional ethics are the principles of caring, doing one's best, fidelity, honesty, promise-keeping, confidentiality, loyalty, dignity, and integrity. Given teachers' 'role as models and exemplars', college teachers should both observe these principles in practice and exemplify them in their daily interaction. Without maintaining a curricular environment characterized by such ethical values, teachers can never provide quality education. As Chiranjib Sen has rightly pointed out, other core ethical principles of higher education include the search for knowledge and truth, freedom of thought and expression, and tolerance of others' perspectives. (Sethy 2018). These principles need to be applied in curriculum selection and representation, pedagogical approach, classroom management, assessment, and evaluation.

The basic issue at hand relating to professional ethics of higher education teachers is whether virtues can at all be taught. If "ethical teachers are necessarily ethical people", as argued by Campbell (2003), can professional ethics be taught to unethical people who happen to be teachers as well. Ethical values are inculcated by people as a part of their upbringing, their background, their life experiences, and close relationships. However, it is also true that ethical people do not necessarily and automatically become ethical teachers. Just as competent teachers need to be taught curricular and pedagogical knowledge, ethical teachers need to cultivate ethical knowledge. However, professional ethics education is not intended for the impossible task of teaching bad people to be good; instead, it is meant for those who have the inner good character to be capable of recognizing and distinguishing between ethical and unethical in the first place.

There are some challenges to ethical practice in higher education which are inherent in the individual teachers as well as in the system itself. Both collectively contribute to the lack of ethical earnestness on the part of the teachers to address important moral issues relating to teaching, learning and evaluation of students. For example, university and college teachers are engaged in both teaching and research activities. While for university teachers teaching is only one component of their professional profile and is frequently subordinated too, for college teachers teaching is expected to be their prime concern. However, certain college teachers are found to be over engaged with (pseudo?) research so much so that they get little time to prepare themselves for quality teaching and make them available to students for consultation. Though the professional requirements made mandatory by the existing system compel them to do so, they should not forget their ethical accountability to their prime objective of teaching. Another challenge is the question of who would teach ethics to teachers and when.

VI. FINDINGS

- In order to provide quality education college teachers must cultivate ethical values and practise the same in right earnestness in their interaction and dealing with the stakeholders of their institutions. However, it would be almost an impossible task to teach ethics to unethical people.
- College teachers must be taught ethical values associated with their profession in order to make them accountable to their duties and responsibilities as teachers.
- Many college teachers are yet to be ethically motivated to dedicate their time and energy to providing quality education to their students instead of being too much careerist and selfish.
- It is difficult to deduce who would teach ethics to college teachers and exactly when.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Discussion and exercise on professional ethics should be a part of every faculty development programme.
- At least a short-term course on professional ethics should be made mandatory for new recruits.
- Teachers must inculcate a habit of scrutinizing openly and constructively their own behaviours in order to be in a better position to meet the needs and expectations of their students, colleagues and the management.

- Teaching being their prime concern, college teachers should be ethically motivated to dedicate their time and energy to providing quality education to their students instead of being too much careerist and selfish.
- College teachers must be in guard against misuse of autonomy in teaching which leads to too much individualized kind of teaching thereby neglecting their accountability to the students, to the institution, and to society. The ethical dimension of mutual interference for a good cause should be upheld for a coordinating and dialogic environment where the advice of peers and colleagues should be valued.

VIII. CONCIUSION

Quality education in college level is almost impossible without the cultivation of ethical principles associated with the profession of college teachers. Although a systematic approach to professional ethics is yet to be introduced in higher education teaching, it can still be meaningfully practised at least in the individual and institutional levels.

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