



Ethical Competence: Indispensable Ornaments For Teachers

Dr. Senapati Nayak¹, Dr. Sambit Kumar Padhi², Smt. Rasika Lonkar³

¹ Principal in Charge, Maa Education College, Pamgarh, Janjgir-Champa, Shaheed Nandkumar Patel Vishwavidyalaya, Raigarh, Chhattisgarh, India

² Associate Professor, Department of Education, Guru Ghasidas Vishwavidyalaya, Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh, India

³ Assistant Professor, DLS P.G. College, Atal Bihari Vajpayee Vishwavidyalaya, Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh, India.

ABSTRACT :

In education science, the concept of 'competence' is widely used, as a performance to achieve goals with students and in teacher education. Moral competence enables teachers to deal responsibly with the daily challenges arising from their professional roles. In this study, the aim is to support the illustration, description and development of moral competence for teachers. Morality now plays an important role in many aspects of life. As a result, ethics plays an important and effective role in education. Ethics should be included as a subject in the school system in order to become a civilized person. This article explains the role of ethics in education and teachers and how ethical competence is very important for teachers and their profession, the goals of ethics education for teachers, the challenges of implementing recommended teaching and learning strategies, etc. This paper highlights important gaps in the literature in the light of the findings of the review and gives a series of suggestions for further research.

Keywords: Education, Profession, Ethical competence, Ethical knowledge, Ethical skills, Ethical values

Introduction :

Moral competence is not a concept that is commonly used in everyday language, but it is mostly used in academic and professional contexts. Although moral competence is an attractive, powerful and promising concept that has many advantages for research and practice (De Schryver and Maschock 2013), scholars have often overlooked it. So far, most studies on moral competence have originated from fields such as medical ethics and business ethics. It also does not appear in national educational documents such as the Code of Conduct for Teachers or the National Professional Standards for Teachers, which support the consolidation of professional identity. It is education itself that has a strong normative dimension (Berlak and Berlak 1981; Buzzelli and Johnson 2001). Teachers have a fundamental role in transmitting the triad of Greek values (goodness – truth – beauty). Among these, moral values are essential. Teaching is a 'moral endeavour' (Hansen 1998) and the teacher plays the role of a 'moral agent' (Buzzelli and Johnson 2001). Before there is a teaching-learning relationship, it is a moral relationship involving people and their values. As Campbell (2008) has argued, the way teachers react to daily events related to teaching-learning-assessment must go through a selection process in which the moral dimension is crucial. Morality and teaching seem to be naturally compatible and inescapably intertwined (Campbell 2008, 358). The teacher does not necessarily have to deal with the personality of the student. Before a relationship can be formed for the purpose of building, it is a relationship between two individuals who must agree with each other and understand each other. Beyer and Noseworthy (2004) argue that the overall psychological balance of the student may be affected by slowing down or hindering the development of cognitive and emotional skills. We use the concept of didactogeny to specify the negative impact that certain undesirable behaviors of teachers have on students. Neglecting the moral dimension of pedagogical relationships can lead to pathologies such as anxiety, lack of self-confidence, fear of school and/or resistance to school requirements. Moral competence can be understood as psychological skills that help teachers find morally adequate solutions to daily professional problems. Moral knowledge, moral skills and moral values will be analyzed in the context of teachers' work.

Moral competence

Competence is the ability of each director, manager and worker to identify risks in operational activities and then apply the right measures to control and manage those risks. As a highly complex finality, competence has been at the center of debates and research in various fields such as psychology, human resource management, social sciences, science education, etc. Most commonly, competence is described as a set of skills, knowledge, attitudes and values that enable one to perform an activity efficiently. The more varied the experiences, the better the regulation of thought and action, resources and strategies (Perrenoud 1998). In a very general sense, competence involves dynamic knowledge, active in a multitude of situations, involving savoir-dire, savoir-faire and savoir-être (Minder 2003). There have been several attempts to theoretically outline the concept of moral competence. De Schryver and Maesschalk (2013) synthesize three types of definitions: general definitions, definitions based on the theory of James Rest (1986) and definitions based on the KSA structure (knowledge, skills and attitudes). Moral competence enables teachers to relate to their actions independently and autonomously. This does not mean compliance with institutional rules, superficial adaptation or circumventing rules, but rather reflecting freely in a space of professional freedom. Moral competence enables teachers to reflect on professional practices and pedagogical relationships. It makes professional autonomy possible,

as well as a genuine attitude towards freedom. Moral competence is not limited to the relational aspects of a teacher's work, but also relates to the entire set of a teacher's professional responsibilities.

Ethical competence for teachers

We will rely further on four elements of competence: moral knowledge, moral skills, moral values and ethical attitudes. The literature on the types of knowledge related to teaching is vast (Cochran 1993; Grossman 1990; Shulman 1999; Wilson et al. 1987). Various approaches have been applied to understanding the teacher's knowledge (political, economic, axiological, etc.). It is clear that the teacher's relationship with knowledge is essential, and that this knowledge is related to teaching in various forms.

Moral knowledge is explained by Cambell (2010, 33): Moral knowledge is the term given to the increased awareness that teachers – some more than others – develop in response to the recognition of their role as moral agents. As a kind of virtue-work, moral knowledge enables teachers to make conceptual and practical connections between core moral and ethical values such as honesty, compassion, fairness and respect for others and their own everyday choices and actions.

Moral knowledge can be regarded as an intuitive, tacit and experiential type of knowledge. For example, some psychologists claim that moral judgment is nourished entirely by intuition and tacit knowledge. In terms of processes, recent models focus on the role of unconscious and intuitive processes in moral judgment (Haidt 2007; Bortolotti 2011). Moral decision making often occurs in complex situations that cannot be addressed by standard inferential reasoning. Therefore, we should reconsider the role of non-inferential forms of cognition, including moral intuition (Voki and Kerr 2011). In many cases, reflection is compromising rather than promoting good decision making. According to Dreyfus (1997), competence reflects an unconscious, intuitive and instinctive functioning, but decision making is rational. Only at the expert level, decision making is intuitive. Therefore, we can speak of several types of intuition. On the other hand there is intuition that complements and augments quite deep analytical reasoning about the options available to the decision maker" (Patton 2003, 989).

Experiential knowledge also plays a relevant role in pedagogical practice, as each teacher forms over time and gradually learns his or her teaching roles. Among the elements of experiential learning would be maintaining valuable practices, assimilating a useful daily routine, constantly redefining situations, and introducing one's own framework of analysis of the educational environment. Building and exercising moral competence requires experience accumulated over time as well as the formation of the teacher's character. The teacher's response to critical events depends on the relationship with parents, students, and colleagues.

Ethical competence should not be equated with its strict application. Ethical erudition in the absence of ethical business is ridiculous (Plessu 2008). From the point of view of professional ethics, Kavattzopoulos (2002) identifies several elements of theoretical knowledge as components of ethical competence: knowledge of the normative foundations of the field; knowledge of laws, legal rules and professional ethical codes; knowledge of the structure and culture of organizations, as well as understanding of human behavior in organizations; knowledge of organization development and design approaches. Ethical skills support the teacher as a 'reflexive practitioner' (Schön 1983) who is involved in performing professional roles on a daily basis.

Code of Ethics to be followed

Considering the plethora of educational dilemmas and the subsequent assessment of the variety of situations we face as teachers and the competencies required to apply logic and reason in those situations are essential for moral and ethical teaching. Teachers face a lot of ethical dilemmas every day in the classroom, but what is important is the reason one considers for the right choice in that particular situation. In some professions like law and medicine, there is a code of conduct that talks about the responsibilities of a profession and it helps to develop one's belief system. These codes help to define the obligations of a profession. Ethical knowledge will enable both in-service and pre-service teachers to be aware of the possible path to be adopted in a given situation and can help to develop the necessary qualities like commitment to the profession, a certain level of ethics and values to be followed and the right kind of attitude and behaviour. Teachers face issues such as improper allocation of resources, careless or negligent colleagues. Ethical dilemmas and tensions arise due to situations in which choosing the right path is influenced by complex factors of system evils. Research shows that teachers are not empowered enough to make the right decisions on their own and often have to follow organisational rules and systems and it is essential that we enable our teachers at any level to recognise and deal with ethical dilemmas at the workplace. This does not mean that they have to become rebels to every situation, but simply follow this idea as a rule, where they no longer become a part of an unjust system, or follow unethical orders, they know where to stand and where not to. Throughout their career teachers have to decide when to fight, in both small and big ways, when to compromise and when to bow down, in both ways. There may be many times in their career as a teacher when they decide whether to go ahead or risk their safety and career.

Ethical attitudes and Moral values

Macaulay and Lawton (2006) have argued that the transition from virtue to competence is a principle of public service, noting that, despite different approaches, the concepts of virtue and competence are, in practice, very similar. Moral competence cannot be defined and measured without reference to a person's moral ideals or principles. He has elaborated a 'dual aspect model of ethical behavior', according to which moral competence is determined by a person's ideal values and ethical principles on the one hand and ethical actions on the other. A question to ask at this point is what are the ethical values of the teaching profession as outlined by various authors? The list is very long. Arguments have been identified for the inclusion of the following concepts in this list: the value of caring (Noddings 1984; Goldstein and Lake 2000), the best interest of the student (Stefkovich and O'Brien 2004), responsibility, honesty, tolerance, loyalty, courtesy, compassion, integrity, fairness, care and respect (Starratt 1994), and responsibility, justice, caring, truth and commitment (Oser 1991).

Ethical values are related to the belief in moral goodness as a universal value. Seven key values of teachers' ethical competence. These values are caring, freedom, autonomy, justice, respect, responsibility and integrity. The needs of teachers as professionals support the dignity of the teacher as the person who cannot conduct his activity under any material and spiritual conditions. These seven ethical values are relevant to the work of the teacher and, therefore, they are present in most ethical codes of the teaching profession around the world. Other professions also require similar values, but ultimately they are understood differently or even slightly modified depending on the nature of the professional duties specific to each profession. The focus is on a general framework for understanding these values, which Ghiotto (2013) goes into more detail about, but we present them briefly here as well:

1. Freedom - The general meaning of 'freedom' implies the ability to make decisions according to one's own will, in the absence of any obstacles. When we say 'freedom', we think of infinite possibilities. However, real freedom is based on respect for and adherence to rules. Absolute freedom beyond all interference is nothing but an illusion. Being free does not mean disregarding someone or something, ignoring moral values. Devoid of moral reasons, freedom is associated with human degradation.

In the school environment one should identify several signs of freedom: the possibility of creating space for free communication; the absence of obstacles in expressing opinions and the respect of colleagues for one's decisions; the absence of external obstacles in teaching and assessment (no interference practice); freedom in the search, development and transmission of knowledge. There should not be situations such as ideology, aggression and obscenity.

2. Autonomy - Normative morality depends on autonomy. Jean Piaget (1968) considered moral autonomy as a state of full moral development of a person, contrasting it with moral heteronomy. Autonomous people have their own motivation and are governed by their own reasoning. They recognize the presence of limits and constraints, but do not care about these constraints and what happens around them. Pedagogical autonomy means that the school system does not interfere with the work of teachers, assuming that they are fully competent in their work (Eden 2001). Pedagogical autonomy is much more relevant than physical autonomy.

3. Justice/fairness - The concept of justice in relation to education is not at all outdated or abstract. School has passed the stage of being seen as a place where 'teachers give orders and students obey' and justice is no longer the privilege of those whose power is granted by position. Justice, as a social value, is a universal aspiration. Justice in education can signify very different, apparently contradictory things depending on the context. In some situations, fairness requires that all students have the same opportunities. In other situations, fairness means treating students differently because they have different educational needs.

4. Respect implies, most generally the respecting subject is always a person, a human being capable of expressing gratitude. Respect implies concession, overcoming one's ego, without however abdicating oneself. Reciprocity of respect is the basis of interpersonal ethics. At the risk of appearing obsolete, Respect in the school environment has several forms:

- Respect for students' culture (ethnicity, race, gender, economic status); this type of respect implies appropriately designing and implementing the curriculum according to students' background and cultural differences.
- Respect for students' psychological characteristics (cognitive skills, social skills, language ability, etc.); any student deserves the teacher's attention to develop his or her potential according to his or her individual psychological profile.
- Respect for people who support education (teachers, counsellors, principals, etc.)

5. Responsibility - Establishing responsibilities by assigning rights and duties to each category of teachers will provide a clear delineation of this professional group. Directly or indirectly, the school is 'accountable' for the 'performance of students'. A high level of performance is, in the long term, reflected in the professional success of students.

6. Care - When I care for someone because 'I' want to care, I am engaged in natural caring. When I care for someone because 'I' should care, I am engaged in moral caring. Natural caring applies at the family level, while moral caring applies at the level of businesses. Caring is not just smiles and hugs (Goldstein 1998). This is a superficial approach. Caring is a way of connecting with someone, not a set of specific behaviors (Noddings 1992). It involves complex relationships, both intellectual and emotional, that help children develop harmoniously.

Isenbarger and Zembylas (2006, 132) have established a taxonomy of caring in education:

1. Pedagogical care - caring about children's educational expectations;
2. Moral care - caring about the values conveyed in learning;
3. Cultural care - responsiveness related to children's culture.

Research focusing on teacher care is concerned with the following problems: relationships between teachers and students (Doyle and Doyle 2003; Guzman et al. 2008), selection of teaching strategies (Gardner 2007), classroom management (Watson 2010), and curriculum (Apple 1979). Concern for caring in the teacher education system has long-term implications, as future teachers will replicate caring behaviors in their professional activities.

7. Honesty - Being honest means not making any compromises in applying ethical principles. Consistency between words and actions is essential. Honesty is the essence of ethical values, as it reflects a synthesis of qualities: honesty, courage, respect. It is, at the same time, attitude, goal and means. Tirri (2001) shows that teachers are not always aware of their honesty. But, when faced with a situation that involves feelings of anxiety and uncertainty, they ask themselves whether they are acting with honesty. Klassen (2012, 14)

Some values gain more relevance depending on the stage of development of the students. For example, for teachers working with young children up to ten years of age, the main value should be caring, followed by others. This is because young children need positive emotional support before other things. They need to build affection towards their peers and teachers.

Mitrofan (1988, 41) presents a number of qualities that are essential for the development of pedagogical skills. These are emotional qualities (kindness, cheerfulness, generosity, passion, and enthusiasm), qualities of will (perseverance, courage, perseverance, persistence, patience, self-control) and moral qualities (harmony between word and action, sense of measure, balance between need and tolerance, honesty, modesty, equanimity). These qualities can be part of the moral competencies of teachers.

Conclusion :

In this study, the focus is mostly on teachers' moral competence, as presented in the definition and based on a framework or structure such as knowledge - skills - values and attitudes. Thus, broadly, the following central ideas are highlighted that moral competence deserves special attention in the field of educational research, as it is a basic characteristic that teachers need to fully perform their role. Neglecting the moral dimension of the relationship between teachers and students can lead to disorders, such as anxiety, lack of self-confidence, persistent fear of school, resistance to school requirements, etc.; moral competence includes knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that support the teacher as a reflexive actor and moral model for students. Therefore, the teaching profession does not mean just the successful transmission of information from a sender to a group of recipients, but a constant intellectual and moral effort, a decision-making process and a struggle, the appropriate approach to moral competence for teachers should resort to both theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge; ethical skills for teachers include reference to the four main components of ethical behaviour which are receptivity, reasoning, motivation and implementation; although the essence of ethical values remains the same, regardless of the profession, their context in education adds some specific features, thus, enhancing knowledge in the field of professional judgement.

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