

## ETHICAL DILEMMAS OF A TEACHER

Dr. Rashee Singh  
Head  
Deptt.Of Education, MRU  
Faridabad

Dr. Sheena Sabharwal  
Principal  
Rattan Singh Girls College of Edu.  
Faridabad

### *Abstract*

Teaching was never a pressure cooker job; this was supposed to be about the students being there in the classroom and the little victories they got every day. But now, it is so much more complicated. Teaching is considered as a very noble profession with high ethical values and moral integrity which stands true universally. The education profession is vested with trust and responsibilities with expectations of high level of professionalism. Teachers are expected to display high standards of behavior for the reason that they are trusted with the students well being. A teacher can make and break a child's career; he/she may guide the student to great heights and may even send him to dumps. It is a programmed notion in all our minds that for a teacher the highest ethical commitment is in the good of the student. Whatever we do in the classroom has a lasting impression on the minds of students and they may imitate and adopt any of the traits of the teacher. So many values are attached to this profession that sometimes it creates a pressure on the teachers in today's scenario. Sometimes such a situation may arise that the teacher may get in a dilemma about which path to follow. Any slip in the teachers' judgment may hamper his integrity and break the trust. Lot of ethical challenges may have uncomplicated ways to get through but some may require the teachers to use their finest professional judgment.

**Keywords:** Teaching, Ethics, Ethical Dilemma

### **Introduction**

“Scientific statements of facts and revelations indeed cannot produce ethical directives. However, ethical directives can be made rational and coherent by logical thinking and empirical knowledge” (Einstein 1953)

“Ethics draws on human dispositions, attitudes and behaviors such as valuing, selecting and acting, and is concerned with desirable actions associated with human relationships and

responsibility for other people” (Norberg & Johansson, 2007). “An ethical dilemma is an inner conversation with the self-concerning two or more available propositions. It is a choice between two or more courses of action, when obstacles on each side hinder the decision as to which course to pursue.”(Berlak & Berlak,1981). Teaching profession demands moral values and actions of highest level, henceforth the classroom environment has to follow the moral standards. Research also suggests that teachers at most times are unaware of the repercussions of their actions.

Ethics embraces a lot of approaches for the appropriate standards of moralities to be included in human life. In educational setting conflict may arise because of the knowledge of a person about ethics and the situation he is in. Hence, arises the ethical dilemma we may face in different aspects in life but teaching being a noble profession, may have a bigger share of it.

An ethical dilemma is considered to be an internal struggle within the person, regarding different existing choices. It is deciding between the possible options for, when impediments on each side deter the choice as to which course to take. Teachers are often naïve and usually are unaware of the results of their doings and the impact it may have in the light of ethical terms. Researches have shown that sometimes, certain actions of teachers who were forced or instructed by the higher authorities were considered as unethical by themselves and this may also lead to ethical dilemmas in teachers.

### Categories of Ethical Dilemma's

Ethical dilemmas may include concerns like misreading of any kind of interaction with a student or any personal judgment by the teacher of any situation or any practice that is being followed at micro or macro level. So these are broadly divided in four categories as follows:

- Situations with students
- Professional ethical situations
- Community and family situations
- Bullying situations

The objective of this paper is to create awareness in teachers to share their perspectives with the students, community; fellow teachers and administration which can lead to the bigger purpose

i.e. student welfare and consider alternative considerations/strategies to deal with ethical dilemmas.

It is comprehended that teachers are immoral if they make any changes in the marks that their student's attain by sometimes making them pass the exam even when they don't deserve it or sometimes ignoring the wrong answers. Sometimes it is seen that the teachers may engage in activities like leaking the paper beforehand so that the students pass the exam with good marks and the teacher is appreciated for the good result but this in turn can have serious repercussions on the whole career of the students which is a serious question on the ethical integrity of the teacher.

Teachers have other duties besides acting as role models to the students and the entire community. They are the face of the learning institution. This means that they have to live up to the ethical values that come with their roles in these institutions (Omar Adams, 2018). It is very important for teachers to know and understand that they have to walk on a very thin line between the right and wrong paths and do their work with integrity and dedication without becoming participant of the corrupt practices of our system on the basis of their professional and ethical commitments. How should a teacher go about the ethical dilemma whether he or she should engage in the various activities such as test tampering, excessive test preparation, or get students to the proficiency level or be considerate for the students' stress, substance abuse etc. or should voice their opinions regarding the student related issues.

Knowledge about the professional ethics of any job is about knowing the values and belief systems of any profession and to give awareness about how to use the different skills wisely.

In teaching profession a lot of stakeholders are involved, parents and community are very important stakeholders with whom a teacher has to interact directly or indirectly. Now a days, the expectations about the role of teacher is very high among parents as they feel that when they are paying for the education and the child spends about 8 hours daily in school, so teachers should take care not just of the academics but beyond that too. It can lead to situations where a teacher may feel dilemma about what he is being paid for includes these responsibilities also. Teachers are expected to be aware about the diversity in the class and should act accordingly without any personal bias where students regardless of their diversities in terms of religion, caste, socio economic situation, abilities or disabilities are treated fairly by him/her. Sometimes there is a difference in perception of parents and teachers as they may differ in the point of best interests

of students based on their experience and about the students aptitude and abilities for which the parents may have a different take as they may want to impose their thoughts about the choice of career or any other subject regarding the child. The current education policies do not allow the teachers to be very strict with students and they may feel that parents should be the ones who should be stricter with students, situations like these may create ethical dilemmas for teachers.

### Code of Ethics to be followed

Considering the superfluity of educational dilemma's and their subsequent assessment of the diversity of situations we face as teacher's and the abilities required to put logic and reason into those situations which are essential for moral and ethical teaching. Teachers have to face lots of ethical dilemmas every day in the classroom, but it is important that what reason he considers for the right option in that particular situation. In some professions like Law and Medicine, there is a code of ethics talks about the responsibilities of a profession and it helps to develop one's belief system. These codes help in defining the obligations of a profession. But, unfortunately no such code of ethics is in place currently for teachers to help them face their challenges. Ethical knowledge would enable both in-service and pre-service teachers to be aware of the possible path one may follow in a certain situation and may help in developing essential traits like commitment to profession, a certain level of morals and values to be followed and the right kind of attitude and behavior.

The magnitude of ethical dilemmas that teachers face globally is enormous. Teachers encounter issues like improper allocation of resources, negligent or reckless coworkers. Ethical dilemma followed by stress arises due to situations in which the choosing of right path is influenced by complicated factors of the evils of the system.

We may broadly divide the ethical dilemmas in four categories:

1. Ethics of Justice
2. Ethics of Critique
3. Ethics of Care
4. Ethics of Profession

Ethical dilemmas in the teaching profession are diverse in nature and huge in number because of the varying roles and responsibilities, a few examples are stated here:

- If a teacher cares for his students and fellow teachers then he may be right in his course of action on individual or social level but if he abides by the organizational rules and maintaining educational standards, then he may have a conflict with the students or his colleagues.
- Now-a- days because of the social media, the interaction between a student and the teacher goes beyond the classroom, some teachers maintain a very casual relationship with the students to develop a rapport with the students and it may result in a conflicting situation where the student may cross the fine line between the two. The teachers should know how to strike a balance between being an ally with the student and simultaneously maintaining the authority to allow the students to respect him or her.
- Confidentiality vs organizational rules can also be a cause of an ethical dilemma when the teacher has to decide between upholding the trust of the student who shares something with the teacher and also following the organizational rules which necessitates him to share the confided information with the stakeholders. Teachers must always remember not to share the confidential information about students and if need be only do in a manner which is appropriate and specialized knowing well when to share the information and when to stay silent.
- Another type of dilemma may arise between loyalty to fellow teachers and the rules of the school (eg. shielding students). Many a times we as teachers see a colleague mistreating a student and one may find it difficult to confront that teacher due to numerous reasons and the situation can be otherwise also if a teacher is too soft or liberal for some or all the students.

Another ethical dilemma that is being discussed now a lot is some teachers erase and correct the answers on their students' tests; some teachers give marks to the students so that they pass and their year is not wasted but up to what extent is this prevailing practice right or fair to those students who study hard and regularly because in many incidents it has been observed that those students are in competition with the hard working students for job opportunities and they bagged the position/post instead of the other student. It is unethical, but such fraud has been widespread. Related to ethical dilemma emerging from Students' assessment, (L.C.Ehrich,2011)a study was conducted involving 103 educators in the United States who were asked to describe a difficult ethical situation relating to assessment of students, Pope et al. (2009) found that 62% of the coded responses related to ethical dilemmas about 'pollution' of grades. Pollution of grades refers to 'misrepresenting the students' mastery of the assessed material' (Pope et al., p. 779).

- Today, teachers ask the students to practice the sample paper's or ten year paper's, or studying from the books published by test-making companies, which may help the student get good grades in the exam but may not prepare them as professionals. Students join coaching institutes which prepare the students to sail through the entrance of the competitive exam and parents pay huge amounts for that without realizing the implications and these are also considered as good institutes also and unfortunately it has the approval of the school authorities also, but this is not how we should influence our students, it is unethical, corrupt, but legal.
- In schools, sometimes we observe low-scoring students are debarred from giving exams due to less than the required attendance. Here for a teacher dilemma is whether to give attendance to that student who is otherwise a brilliant student but due to some genuine reason is short of the required number. In one particular incident a student was debarred by a teacher in one semester but in the next semester the student became regular, one day the student was absent and asked the same teacher to give him attendance and the teacher thought that the student is improving now so should give him some relaxation to motivate him and marked him as present but that student then informed the higher authorities about the same teacher and that teacher was fired from his job , how fair was it for the teacher to get fired on this basis, he was apparently trying to motivate the student but the student was taking revenge from him because he was debarred in the earlier semester by the same teacher.

Incidents like this indicate that that teachers are either not empowered enough or they lack confidence in their abilities to deal with situations and sometimes may feel powerless when dealing with organizational ethical dilemma.

Researches show that teachers are not empowered enough to take the right decisions by themselves and often has to abide by the organizational rules and systems and it is essential that we equip our teachers be it at any level that they recognize and handle the ethical dilemmas at work.

It does not imply that they have to become rebel for every situation but just abide this idea as a rule where they no longer become a part of an unjust system, or of becoming compliant with unethical orders, to know where to take a stand and where not to make waves. Throughout their careers the teachers have to decide when to fight, in both small and big ways, when to find a settlement, and when to yield, in both the ways. It might happen time and again in their career as a teacher when they decide whether to go along, or take a risk, with your security and career.

## Conclusion

Most of the teachers when they start their careers are not prepared to deal with ethical dilemmas or situations which do not consider as right. It is proposed that all pre-service teachers should be informed about not just how to teach but also the various problems such as cheating, bullying, violent behavior and pestering they may face and how to tackle such circumstances. It is also suggested that ethics education should be a foundation course in their teacher training program, rather than by setting in codes of conduct into different courses. In the words of Sockett(1990) Code of ethics was “something to be hammered out as professionalism develops...as we discover what best practice is...” The ultimate goal is to enable them to meet their professional requirements with a better understanding of the ethical contingencies and definitely a code of ethics can persuade the conversation on the issues and improve how people tackle with ethical dilemmas.

The experiences which we have about the foundational ethics develop teachers into honest, dedicated professionals with necessary skills required to handle the intense areas of concern in schools. As a human nature we learn from our mistakes and it is imperative for teachers also to do so. There should be a dialogue regarding discussion of ethical dilemmas faced by teachers and some guidelines should be shared.

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