

## Concept paper on Ethical Principles in University Teaching in Sri Lanka

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### Abstract

The purpose of this concept paper is to provide a set of basic ethical principles that define the professional responsibilities of university professors in their role as teacher. Ethical principles are conceptualized here as general guidelines, ideals or expectations that need to be considered, along with other relevant conditions and circumstances, in the design and analysis of university teaching. This study extends current literature by distinguishing between moral/ethical and legal/ethical matters and then re-evaluating the effectiveness of ethics training. A cohort of academics with significant ethical training evaluated ethical scenarios. Half were moral and half contained legal as well as moral components. After further ethical instruction they re-evaluated the scenarios. Ethical attitudes towards legal/moral issues improved, but attitudes towards moral- only issues did not. Are fundamental ethical principles being ignored in an effort to prevent more obvious accounting wrongdoings? Accounting ethics training needs to be reassessed if true ethical improvement is to be achieved.

**Keywords:** Ethical principles, Teaching, University

### Introduction

Education systems all over the world have been evolving for a long time, which includes from infancy to fellowship. Education systems are the indispensable for the societies to sustain in the rapidly changing world. It should not be only comprehensive, sustainable, and superb, but must continuously evolve to meet the challenges of the rapid and unpredictable globalized world<sup>1</sup>.

Thus, it has evolved into systemized set up in the world includes quality assurance and related checklists<sup>2</sup>. There are performance indexes to maintain the quality of education provided (Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. Even though, ethical and moral education is well developed, there is a lack of ethics and morality in practice in all the fields<sup>3-5</sup>. For an example, in teaching, the moral and ethical frame works were addressed on a narrow focus, though the character and moral development theory and practice in education conceive a broader aspect<sup>4</sup>. The teacher performance assessment systems as well as the lack of room in the teacher education curriculum for moral education and ethical matters lead to the narrower focus<sup>6</sup>.

The sectoral learning rather than a holistic approach further aggravated the narrow focus in almost all the fields. Moreover, the Post-industrial revolution has led to machine learning, which also fails to give higher values for ethical and moral values.

This phenomenon doesn't leave out the religious education, spiritual development or spirituality. The religious educators also looked at gaining knowledge or information rather than considering ethical or moral changes and the ultimate ethical changes. It reflects in following example: parent-children relationship, teacher-student relationship, medical practitioners-patient relationship and consumer-client relationships. The professional value and attitude dramatically declined over the years. Thus, there is a gap or lack of focus on current education system, which is mainly due to the practical applications of moral and ethical values<sup>5</sup>.

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Moral refers to human attitude where morality is the practical application, whereas ethics defined as the theoretical, systematic, and rational reflection upon that human behavior<sup>7</sup>. Broadly, values are linked to culture, belief systems and attitudes, which shape cumulative human behavior<sup>8</sup>. Morals, values, and ethics are strongly attached to the society, spirituality and culture, where an individual thrives<sup>9</sup>.

Campbell in 2008 discuss on how ethical knowledge can best capture the essence of teaching through professionalism as it enables the teachers to appreciate the complexities of their moral agency<sup>10</sup>. Ethics is firmly connected to virtues of responsibility, trust and credibility. It should always be fair, honest, transparent, and respectful of the rights and privacy of others in society<sup>11</sup>. There was another concept discussed among the scholars, named as ‘Character Education’, which has history over the years. This has been looked from different angles under broader spectrum, thus, getting an exact definition is hard<sup>12</sup>. The lack of moral and ethical values is not limited to some of the fields such as education, but it has been discussed almost in all the fields.

Medical ethics has a long history<sup>13-14</sup>, where the ethical and moral values were questioned at different aspects such as in pharmaceutical industry, effectiveness of drugs and side effects, diagnostic procedures vs costs and root cause identification vs treatment. Due to these issues some of the areas are suffering some kind of drawback. Even though, diagnostic tools and medical practitioners are increased, the number of patients should be decreased but we cannot observe this phenomenon, why is that? What are the causes and consequences of this? The main reason could be the gap between the moral and ethical values practiced in medical ethics. The inclusion of this could show a different dimension of the issue. This can be looked at rather than obtaining knowledge and information on any area, cognitive involvement might fill the gap. When we go through the system prevailed before between the scholar and follower could enlighten our understanding as well. Before the development of evidence-based medicine, patients were comfortable because of the approach of the medical care. Rather than cure, care and a wholistic approach was contributed a lot. Even in the medical education, in those eras, from the teacher to student, there was a system called “*Gurukula*” system. This style brought a hidden curriculum, where teacher inspired the students. Therefore, we

need to revisit our all medical education system like Ayurveda, Unani, Greek, Arabian and Chinese.

**Solutions**

According to our concept paper like to suggest the following principles to be a good academic in the field of medicine and it was adaptation from Ethical Principles in university teaching by Harry and the team.

***Principle 1: Content Competence***

A university teacher maintains a high level of subject matter knowledge and ensures that course content is current, accurate, representative, and appropriate to the position of the course within the student’s program of studies. In didactic lectures it is used to be a teacher centric and with the new development teachers should divert their teaching practice towards student centric and be a facilitator. Whatever the field teacher must have a thorough knowledge on content.

***Principle 2: Pedagogical Competence***

A pedagogically competent teacher communicates the objectives of the course to students, is aware of alternative instructional methods or strategies, and selects methods of instruction that, according to research evidence (including personal or self-reflective research), are effective in helping students to achieve the course objectives. In new teaching concept teacher will be a facilitator therefore competence on transferring materials should be based on pedagogical competence only.

***Principle 3: Dealing with Sensitive Topics***

Topics that students are likely to find sensitive or discomforting are dealt with in an open, honest, and positive way. Teachers must always need to maintain absolute confidentiality in all times.

***Principle 4: Student Development***

The overriding responsibility of the teacher is to contribute to the intellectual development of the student, at least in the context of the teacher’s own area of expertise, and to avoid actions such as exploitation and discrimination that detract from student development. The mediocre teacher tells, the good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires. So we need great teachers to develop the country like Sri Lanka.

**Principle 5: Dual Relationships with Students**

To avoid conflict of interest, a teacher does not enter dual-role relationships with students that are likely to detract from student development or lead to actual or perceived favoritism on the part of the teacher. In this country our teachers are lack in dual relationship towards betterment of the child. As a teacher always need to help the student without thinking the return. So the best model will be one-way student teacher relationship for the sake of cultural aspect of Sri Lanka.

**Principle 6: Confidentiality**

Student grades, attendance records, and private communications are treated as confidential materials, and are released only with student consent, or for legitimate academic purposes, or if there are reasonable grounds for believing that releasing such information will be beneficial to the student or will prevent harm to others. As an academic if you fail to maintain the confidentiality that will be the end of this trade.

**Principle 7: Respect for Colleagues**

A university teacher respects the dignity of her or his colleagues and works cooperatively with colleagues in the interest of fostering student development. Now world is talking about multi-disciplinary studies, if we want to excel in this section need to have a good repo among fellow academics.

**Principle 8: Valid Assessment of Students**

Given the importance of assessment of student performance in university teaching and in students' lives and careers, instructors are responsible for taking adequate steps to ensure that assessment of students is valid, open, fair, and congruent with course objectives. Assessment drives the learning if without proper assessment no proper knowledge, skills and attitudes will be gained.

**Principle 9: Respect for Institution**

In the interests of student development, a university teacher is aware of and respects the educational goals, policies, and standards of the institution in which he or she teaches. In 1942 declaration on academic freedom it stressed to respect for institution.

**Discussion**

The implications are considered significant for ethics educators especially for teachers. The overall question as to what the fundamental point of ethics training is must be considered. Is it to raise the overall ethical level and awareness of the students or to simply get them to try and act appropriately in specific teaching in ethical situations, such as bribery and/or cheating dilemmas, they are likely to encounter? If the former is the case, then how we proceed with ethical instruction at universities, colleges may need reviewing. But this was only reflected in their attitude to teaching professionals. Their core ethical moral attitudes showed no sign of improvement. As per the introductory section of this study, it was hoped to shed more light on whether teaching ethics education actually improves ethical attitudes or simply teaches ethical codes. It suggests that the latter is the only goal being achieved using current methods. The studies referred to in the literature review similarly appear to attest to students gaining a better understanding of ethical codes of conduct post-instruction. No evidence of improved moral understanding has been ascertained, thus querying the real impact of teacher's ethics education. Currently it does not appear to result in improved behavior or awareness, merely improved application of appropriate rules for professional behavior.

**Conclusion**

This concept paper explains with all nine principles must follow all the academics in any fields and mostly in Medics. Although the ethical principles we summarized previously are common to most ethical codes for teachers, the application of a particular principle in a specific situation may not always be clear-cut. Because most ethical codes for teachers constitute behavioral guidelines, not explicit rules of behavior, discussion among teachers as to whether a particular behavior is or is not ethical can often generate diverse opinions and perspectives. Thus, we recommend that teachers take a proactive stance by developing a deeper understanding of ethical teaching and reflecting on these principles and their applications to teaching.

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