

Ethical Considerations for Teachers

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Introduction

The concept of ethics has been developed since philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato sought a comprehensive understanding of the world (Polansky, 2007). Watkins and Kritsonis (2008) state that the fundamentals of all ethics in search of right and wrong by Aristotle and justice by Plato still serve as the basis of moral decision-making today. Individual ethical behaviors are partly contributed to by diverse experiences in the social environment and a person's level of analytical ability (Ashford, LeCroy, & Lortie, 2009), as well as their values and morals. The fundamental personal ethical values are formed by the various aspects of our lives. Values of parents in the earlier stage of one's childhood and later the influence of the teachers' ethical frameworks, whether apparent or hidden in their curriculum, are most vital to an individual's moral development. This essay will discuss the English-as-foreign-language teachers' ethical values, their personal influence on students, and the curriculum they provide for moral development among their students.

1. Personal Ethical Values: Honesty and Fairness

From curriculum planning to actual classroom practice, teachers contribute to the development of moral reasoning in their students. Piaget suggested that teachers should provide students with opportunities for personal discovery in searching justice, rights, equality, and human welfare (cited in Murray, 2008). Teachers' personal ethical values directly relate to their professional conduct and moral responsibilities. In particular, the value of honesty may be the fundamental ground for all ethical behavior (Vadi & Jaakson, 2006). Honesty is a crucial element and the basis of a moral character, particularly as possessed by educators. A definition of honesty includes concepts such as truth, sincerity, and most importantly, conduct free of fraud and guile. Fairness is another important value which leads to logical thinking and necessary conformity in our society. This value affects how each individual behaves in their personal and social life. From fairness, many other values are derived, such as respecting others and being courageous and compassionate. The action of standing up to right and wrong is part of such values. Honesty and fairness are qualities that make up the value of how individuals perceive their role as a citizen in our society, locally and globally. Individual ethical behavior derives from a set of values such as the qualities mentioned, and society is based on individual behavior according to a norm of ethics that ensures a safe and stable environment. This requires that those who possess the various values of ethics guide others (Watkins & Kritsonis, 2008). Teachers and all educators are on the frontline of imparting these values to our next generation.

2. Three Levels of Ethical Enactment

According to Starrett (2005), there are three levels of “ethical enactment” (p. 63), the acting out of ethical values among educators. The first and the basic level is what all humans possess: ethical enactment as a human being. This is the intrinsic humanity of dealing with nature, other human beings, and social organizations (Davies, 2005). A teacher’s ethical values are reflected in their daily actions, which may influence their students’ moral values. The second level of ethical enactment is citizenship (Davies, 2005). The responsibilities teachers have towards students, the community, and other educational professionals are part of behaving according to the ethical enactment of citizenship, which also includes the values of integrity and accountability. The interests of their students and working as a member of the community in turn play an essential role in educational success. The third level of ethical enactment for educational leaders is being proficient and professional in their tasks. Curriculum design and a desire for improvement to provide sufficient depth of materials taught is a valuable teacher ethic (Davies, 2005). Assisting every student with acquiring and understanding the material is the teachers’ responsibility. The confirmation of students’ learning progress and the teacher’s continuous professional development play another vital role in educational success.

3. Central Roles of Ethical Behavior in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

English as a foreign language (EFL) has been adopted as a part of compulsory curricula by many countries in the world (Herther, 2009). The

rapid growth of technology allows more access to international information and global communication. With approximately one-third of Internet information written in English (Herther, 2009), this has reinterpreted the purpose of learning English as a foreign language (Cunningham, 2005). In contrast to ten years ago when most EFL education focused on grammar and reading, the English language is currently recognized as a practical language for global learning (Igawa, 2008). Thus, there is a need to raise students' intercultural awareness and competence in EFL courses (Cunningham, 2005). New challenges of ethical responsibilities and behaviors are necessary for the English language educator worldwide.

3.1 Ethical enactment as a human being.

Through teaching and interaction with students, teachers' philosophies and thinking affect students' cognitive thinking development. Therefore, an unbiased teacher attitude and an attempt to foster logical and open-minded students are part of our ethical enactment as human beings (Davies, 2005). The enactment as a human being also extends to the teaching of tolerance, acceptance of differences, and logical decision making. Teachers must genuinely possess these values to guide their students to overcome their biases and learn to treat everyone and things fairly and with respect. Scenarios or factual issues which require students to draw out their moral awareness and ethical recognition should be part of the teachers' curriculum. The teaching of having a moral consciousness to decipher right and wrong should be part of a core curriculum. This is an ethical responsibility which plays an important role in education.

3. 2 Professional responsibilities: The ethical enactment of citizenship.

One essential ethical value EFL teachers should possess involves identifying their role as educators, which should be the same as all educators: to fulfill their responsibilities professionally as a teacher, colleague, subordinate, and member of society. This value of citizenship is the second level of ethical enactment mentioned by Starrett (2005). Supporting and assisting peer teachers by sharing teaching ideas, solving academic or student problems, and improving curriculum together are all examples of citizenship. Ensuring that students gain knowledge and skills by continually assessing one's teaching methods and improving teaching materials and strategies are elements of a teacher's basic ethical behavior. Responsible work ethics towards the institution, students, and their parents, and meeting community and society standards are all part of the ethical enactment of citizenship, which plays a central role in ethical behavior in education.

3. 3 Ethical Values for Intercultural Awareness and Competence: Global Leadership

Globalization is growing rapidly due to the advancement of technology and the continuing intersection of our economic and social sectors. This growth calls attention to the need for foreign language skills, which are essential in our globalizing society (Cunningham, 2005). The study of English as a foreign language has been introduced into the core curriculum of many countries because today, English is the most studied and used second language in the world (Herther, 2009). Teachers of EFL have the ethical responsibility to deliberately integrate intercultural activities into the course curriculum and deliver instructions accordingly (Briguglio, 2007; DeLoach et al., 2003; Ramburuth & Welch, 2005). This ethical value is the

recognition of oneself as a global citizen and thus having the responsibility to teach students to overcome bias and differences. Professional development by becoming cross-culturally competent and able to input positive values to students accordingly is an essential role of ethical leadership.

4. New Ethical Values in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language

Today, technology advancement and growing international collaboration present to us a multitude of values from various cultures. Many foreign teachers of English as a foreign language are carrying out classes with the purpose beyond the learning of the language skills and are incorporating education which promotes intercultural understanding and analytical thinking skills among students. These classes are valuable, as they are at the forefront of cross-cultural and international exposure. A wide range of topics in humanities, socio-economics, and the environment are being introduced in the English foreign language classes in many Japanese universities. Teachers present these topics at various depths according to their students' English level and personal logicalness. These materials are often current and contain dilemmas which require the ability to convert and analyze the information presented in class. Although not widely recognized, many English-as-foreign-language teachers have re-defined the purpose of their teaching toward a more meaningful, content-based curriculum for Japanese university students. This is an example of how teachers convert their roles from instructors to facilitators for fostering students' analytical skills. This change is a transformation and advancement of the ethical responsibilities as a global citizen and a leader.

5. Conclusion

Teachers as ethical leaders are essential to the moral development of their students. Their ethical values and behavior influence their pupils in the classroom and the people they service and are responsible for. Ethical behavior may be jeopardized by reasons such as selfishness, greed, and lack of motivation. Such attitudes will, of course, negatively influence students. Ethical concerns are vital to maintain integrity and to lead to the success of students' academic, ethical, and personal development. The fundamental ethical values towards others, locally and globally, are the foundation everyone should possess. These values should be practiced for daily professional activities and carried out in teachers' classroom instruction and curriculum.

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