Conceptual Analysis of Professional Ethics in Teaching

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Abstract

Background/Objectives: Professional ethics in teaching is an abstract and obscure concept. Analyzing this concept is key to reach a common sense, setting behavioral standards and preparation of measures of evaluation. Methods/Statistical Analysis: This study was a qualitative research and the concept of professional ethics in teaching analyzed using Walker and Avant method. Review of literature was done to carry out the eight stages of concept analysis. The sample was 38 studies and the saturation was reached by 21 of them. Findings: The results showed professional ethics in teaching is form in deference to professional obligations and has four constituting elements consist of professional etiquette, intrapersonal professional values and beliefs, professional-exclusive social behavior and, professional encountering with technical issues and problems. Forming this concept needs ethical competencies including ethical sensitivity, ethical knowledge, ethical reasoning and ethical self-regulation. Applications/Improvements: Identification of these elements and attributes contributes to optimization of teaching professional ethics as a necessity for high quality assurance of professional performance of teachers and designing its evaluation measures.

Keywords: Concept Analysis, Education, Professional Ethics, Teaching

1. Introduction

Applied ethics or practical ethics which are used interchangeably in texts, was brought in first in 1986 by Childress and was defined as the application of ethics in certain activities of individuals such as business, politics, medicine, etc¹. A number of other definitions of this notion were also set forth later, but the common point in all these holds that the professional ethics is a set of principles and standards of human conduct which determines the behavior of people and groups within a professional structure, and its concept is taken from the science of ethics². The professional ethics is aimed at the ethical responsibilities of which a person is in possession in his/her occupation. For instance, a physician, as an individual person, is required to observe some ethical responsibilities which could be different if he/she changes his/her occupation. Every occupation, therefore, demands certain ethical responsibilities based on its requirements¹,⁴. Different occupations demand particular ethical criteria in line with their circumstances and duties to the society. Generally speaking, each profession is in need of ethical and legal guidelines with bylaws committed to the mentioned ethical and legal standards in order to win the trust of the public; without this trust, no profession may last².

Profession is different from occupation due to some particular attributes including a set of specialized knowledge and technical skills, the need to official education and experience, possessing ethical codes or standards of conduct, commitment to offer public services, possessing an official organization to be supported for professionalism, having high level qualification regulations and standards, the need to acquire especial training certificates and required capabilities, and also a high degree of autonomy for an efficient work⁵. Given the attributes, the professionals have theoretically as well as practically expertise. Benefiting from great
knowledge and technical skills gives professionals a high power and authority which may be subject to abuse if it is used by ineligible people free from compliance with ethics\textsuperscript{6,7}. According to David Carr\textsuperscript{5,8}, if it is something to distinguish profession from business or other services more than factors of social and economic conditions, it lies in distinguished ethical attributes of the profession and their application in occupations like medicine, law, and teaching.

Teaching, accordingly, as a profession, benefits from some professional ethical principles and rules which should be observed essentially by anyone embarking on this profession\textsuperscript{9}. Ethics and teaching are inherently interwoven, and various scholars and philosophers have investigated the nature of ethics in teaching\textsuperscript{10,11}. Although arguments concerning the ethics of teaching had been basically discussed in the United States at the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, as well around the world in the past two decades\textsuperscript{12}, no comprehensive definition of professional ethics of teaching has been proposed as yet\textsuperscript{10,11}. The present study, thus, attempts to shed light on the notion of professional ethics in teaching and its different aspects and attributes in order to present a comprehensive definition of the concept.

## 2. Method

The present study is aimed at elaboration of professional ethics concept in teaching. In order to achieve the purpose of the study, the qualitative design with concept analysis method was used. Concept analysis is used basically when it is needed to clarify different concepts and their attributes and the relationships among them\textsuperscript{13}. A number of theorists like Norvis (1982), Walker and Avant (1995, 2005) believe that concept analysis brings about transparency, identification, and sense to the words, and contributes the basic knowledge for performance through transparency and perception rise\textsuperscript{14}. In order to clarify the concept of professional ethics in teaching, this research used the Walker and Avant method of concept analysis. Walker and Avant consider the purpose of concept analysis as “the process of examining the basic elements of a concept”\textsuperscript{15}. Review of literature was done to carry out the eight stages of Walker and Avant concept analysis. Since the research was not date-dependent, no delimitation was put; however, the only used literature texts were in English with the whole text available. In the current study, the literature review was continued up to the point that no new item or attribute related to subject of the study was found.

## 3. Results

In line with the eight steps in Walker and Avant method of concept analysis, the findings of the study are explaining in the following:

### 3.1 Concept Selection

Selection of concept is the first step in concept analysis process. The selected concepts for analysis are often the important ones in the profession desired to the scholar, or the concepts with different definitions, or the concepts of high abstraction with obscuration in meaning\textsuperscript{16}. Professional ethics in teaching is a concept which has not been given a broad definition on its aspects and elements. Even for the notion of professional ethics there is not a unanimous definition, and many different ideas set forth hitherto like “applied ethics”, “practical ethics”, “professional ethics”\textsuperscript{1}. This vagueness and the importance of the concept motivated the interest of researchers to study it.

### 3.2 Purpose of Concept Analysis

On professional ethics in teaching, what is critically important is lack of general consensus on the definition of this concept. The challenge of ethics in education has been commenced since the early twentieth century\textsuperscript{12}. The mentioned challenge has faced with diverse words and definitions with no clear semantic scope, such as professionalism, applied ethics, professional behavior, professional manner, codes of professional conduct, ethical codes. Meanwhile, organizations need to set especial standards and evaluation criteria in different professional aspects for their policymaking and plans, and assurance for high quality performance of their professional members, and the first step in setting the right standards is proper understanding of the subject matter as well as being aware of its various attributes\textsuperscript{17}. The main purpose of this study, therefore, is to present a clear, comprehensive, and operational definition of professional ethics in teaching through identification of the internal structure of this concept and its basic elements so that a common sense on the notion is created and the possibility of defining its standards and determining its evaluation measures is made.
3.3 Uses of the Concept
Analysis of a concept requires its application cases to be identified and determined\textsuperscript{18}. The professional ethics in teaching may be used for evaluation of teachers' professional ethics. Evaluation of any capability at first requires it to be defined operationally and objectively in order to prepare its measurement means and methods\textsuperscript{19}. Identification and evaluation of teachers' disposition is one of professional essentials in pre-service training courses. Professional disposition and conduct, significant in efficient teaching, is stressed by many national exams to the same as teaching knowledge and skills. Many institutes and accreditation programs also put significance on this and evaluate the professional ethics in teachers\textsuperscript{20}. Based on the mentioned notes, it is advisable to give a precise definition on professional ethics of teachers and its details in order to make primary evaluation of teachers at the time of employment or the secondary evaluation during in-service performance, in formative or summative forms, possible.

3.4 Defining Attributes
The most important step in concept analysis is determining its defining attributes. Defining attributes are those features which make the desired concept distinct from the other similar ones, and clarify its semantic field\textsuperscript{16}. In order to find the defining attributes of the concept of professional ethics in teaching, in line with investigating relevant literature, each reference was studied precisely and the defining phrases on the subject of the study or some certain aspects of that were identified. According to this, defining attributes of professional ethics in teaching can divide in three domains: professional obligations, constituting elements and necessary competencies.

3.4.1 Professional Obligations
The professional ethics in teaching will shape in line with fulfillment of professional obligations includes commitment to\textsuperscript{17,21-23}:
- The value norms and expectations of the society,
- Regulations and standards of the professional organization,
- Training learners and their moral development through role modeling,
- Self-professional development.

3.4.2 Constituting Elements
Sub-constructs and constituent aspects of professional ethics in teaching are:
- a. Professional Etiquette: Behavior in accordance with the norms and values of society, and consistent with the status and social prestige of the profession\textsuperscript{24,25}.
- b. Profession-Exclusive Intrapersonal Values and Beliefs: The values and beliefs in a profession which are internalized within the teacher in the process of forming his/her professional identity, and are considered as internal incentives of behavior and the professional conduct, independent from professional rules and regulation strategies\textsuperscript{12,26}.
- c. Professional Social Interactions: A part of the professional ethics on which the conducts and interactions in teaching (with learners, colleagues, parents, society) is based, according to professional responsibilities and obligations as well as social norms and values\textsuperscript{27,28}.
- d. Professional Encountering with Technical Issues and Problems: A part of the professional ethics on which the performance, judgment, and decision making for technical issues and problems in teaching is based, according to the current circumstances as well as the standards of the profession\textsuperscript{25,29}.

3.4.3 Necessary Competencies
Coming off constituent aspects of professional ethics in practice is in need of enjoying certain ethical competencies include:
- **Moral Sensitivity:** The ability of identifying the situations and issues that need call-up and activation of moral reasoning mechanism to be dealt with\textsuperscript{27};
- **Moral Knowledge:** Familiarity with all ethical principles and advices related to the profession such as how to behave in an ethical way\textsuperscript{30};
- **Ethical Reasoning:** A mental process resulting in judgment, decision making, or justifiable actions in terms of ethics\textsuperscript{12,31};
- **Moral Self-regulation:** The ability of an individual to constantly monitor his/her behavior and improve and optimize his/her ethical level\textsuperscript{28,32}.

3.5 Case Model
The fifth step of concept analysis is delivering a case model. A case model is a sample capable of indicating the desired concept with its all defining attributes. The
scholar, actually, ensures that he/she has provided a real example of the concept under study via presenting the case model\textsuperscript{15,16,18}.

Sara is a university teacher. She prepares her curriculum as well as the educational material consistent with the objectives of the course. Prior to starting the class, she reviews the contents and updates her scientific knowledge, and attends in class in time with a decent appearance free from any luxury-oriented manner. She addresses the students with courtesy and respect. She answers the questions of the students to ensure there is no ambiguity for the students. She also waits after the class to answer the unasked questions of the students if any, especially those which should be asked privately. She corrects the assignments of the students and provides constructive feedbacks timely. At the end of the course, she makes objective assessment of the students and corrects the papers with justice and fair. She welcomes criticism and suggestions, goes over them impartially in her consciousness, and embarks on correcting her shortcomings, optimizing her professional performance and improving her conduct. Sara struggles constantly to help students out with their problems with patience and empathy, and with full awareness of ethical codes of conduct in her respective organization tries to resolve the problems of the students by avoiding personal relationships out of the social norms and university regulations. She participates in the department' sessions on a regular basis and contributes efficiently with a sense of cooperation. She feels committed to her colleagues, and if necessary, presents her experiences to her younger colleagues and novices freely without any harm to their dignity to help them improve in their works. In order to prevent herself from academic stagnation, she plans and takes part in programs on empowerment courses for teachers.

This case possesses all main defining attributes of professional ethics in teaching. Sara in this example is committed to professional commitments and considers professional etiquette and ethical professional interactions. Certain values such as altruism, respect for identity of others, feeling of commitment and responsibility as profession-exclusive intrapersonal values are formed in her, causing her to make ethical decisions and show ethical performance when facing with technical problems relevant to her profession.

### 3.6 Alternative Cases

The concept analysis completes when samples include identified attributes interfering with the model case and inconsistency or conflict with the defining attributes of the main concept is marked. This stage aims at strengthening the model case and often helps clarify with certainty what is the concept\textsuperscript{15,16,18}. These alternative cases can be grouped into borderline case, contrary case, and related case.

#### 3.6.1 Borderline Case

A borderline case is an example which includes only some defining attributes of the concept and not all of them\textsuperscript{15}.

Elizabeth is a teacher of the Faculty of Humanities with 25 years of experience. Everyone knows her as a polite, kind, humble, and well-behaved person. She addresses the others politely, gently and courteously. She attends her classes in time and addresses the students with respect. She is available all the time to students for helping them out in their educational and personal problems. She welcomes the words of the students patiently, and by keeping those confidential, she gives her best to guide them in dealing with the problems. Elizabeth takes part always in sessions of the department timely and the director of the department as well as other members benefit from her intellectual contributions. She has not any precise course plan and this make a major part of educational content to be left untaught usually so that the students have to study the rest by their own. Her using references are old and not up to date. Elizabeth makes assessment of the students often by open-ended questions. She has not any definite structure for correcting the exam papers; thus, in the case of any objection by a student to his/her score, or if he/she is in need of a higher score for coping with special conditions like failure or conditional acceptance, Elizabeth grants him/her the required score on sympathy regardless of his/her competency.

Elizabeth is considered a borderline case for professional ethics in teaching, for she lacks some of its defining attributes. For instance, when she faces with the incompetent students for higher score, she cannot do ethical reasoning; thus, her decisions are in conflict with justice and are not justifiable in terms of ethics. On the other hand, she is not committed to self-development in the profession, and does not consider professional ethics of technical issues such as updating the knowledge, holding standard and objective tests or covering educational content and course plan.

#### 3.6.2 Contrary Case

Walker\textsuperscript{15} believes that “contrary cases are clear examples
of not the concept.” The contrary cases are those which are short on the attributes of the desired concept, and thus, are not the true example for the concept. The following example demonstrates a teacher who lacks all the defining attributes of professional ethics in teaching such as professional commitments and ethical competencies. He does not respect the professional etiquette as well as ethics in professional social interactions. He does not consider also ethics in technical issues and problems, and as the following paragraph unveils, no profession-exclusive intrapersonal values are formed within him.

George is a teacher at the engineering faculty. He spends his time mostly in business activities out of the program of the university. Moreover, since he has executive position in the university, he holds his classes with delays or does not hold some classes without early notices to the students. In the case of any complaint in this connection, he deals with students disrespectfully and keeps his practice going. He answers his business calls during the class. George does not have any precise course plan, and as a result, the assignments he determines for the students do not seek any certain learning objective. The assignments are often related to his personal business projects without any gain in these projects for the students. No student has the right to objects to the score of any exam, and in the event of the objection, a deduction to the score would be made. On account of performing executive responsibilities, he is not available to students. He does not attend sessions of the department on a regular basis, and he does not contribute efficiently for his own professional development.

3.6.3 Related Case

Although similar to the concept under analysis, related cases, however, are those that have subtle differences with that. Providing a related case contributes to identify a network of concepts similar to the concept under study. For example, professionality is one of the proposed concepts within the network of the concepts related to professional ethics. Higher earnings for better performance among the other colleagues, being known as a successful person within the professional society, and wining more respect in the occupational group due to providing services of higher quality are the issues by which the concept of professionalism is ascribed to people. Based on these attributes, professionalism is a related but different concept from professional ethics.

3.7 Antecedents and Consequents

After presenting model case and other cases to more clarity of the concept, according to Walker and Avant method, antecedents and consequents of the desired concept should be identify.

3.7.1 Antecedents

Antecedents are the terms and attributes as prerequisites for occurrence of a concept. Establishment of the professional ethics in teaching requires some antecedents so that the concept develops practically. These antecedents are:

- **Enjoying Good Morality and Certain Significant Human Characteristics**: such as respecting the human integrity and individual rights of people, welcoming criticism, and positive thinking; because in addition to training the learners, a teacher is responsible for their moral education, and this is not realized unless the teacher owns in practice the human and ethical attributes.

- **Mastery in Teaching Skills and Subject Matter**: Content knowledge and pedagogical skills are essential prerequisites to set the highest standards for representing the best practice in the profession and the subject matter of related professional ethics.

3.7.2 Consequents

Consequents are happenings which take place following occurrence of a concept, and may cause forming new ideas on specific notions. Realization of professional ethics brings about benefiting from professional ethical teachers that may pave the way for developing the following consequents:

- **Public Trust**: Since in addition to proficiency and scientific training, the parents and society expect the educational system to prepare students to be good citizens for a good social life, dealing with teachers who are committed to professional ethics with its all attributes creates a public trust to the profession of teaching and accordingly, the whole educational system to do its responsibilities perfectly.

- **External Control**: One of the main functions of professional organizations for quality assurance is to provide control mechanisms, set relevant regulations, and put them into effect. Identification of aspects
and infrastructure of professional ethics clarifies behavior and performance standards of teachers, making control and monitoring of teachers’ behavior and disposition possible within the profession and respective organization.

- Moral Influence: A comprehensive commitment and adherence to the principles of professional ethics makes the teacher an ethical exemplar for learners.

3.8 Defining Empirical Referents
The last step includes association of the critical attributes of the desired concept with its empirical referents in reality. Designing and applying the measures of evaluation for a concept is an indicator of the empirical referents and realization of the concept in the external world. Given the fact that the concept of professional ethics in teaching has not been defined comprehensively as yet, the measures of evaluation of the whole concept are not available at present, however, the existing evidences go to show that a number of its attributes and sub-constructs have been investigated separately. For instance, the measures as Rubric forms were prepared and used to evaluate the disposition of teachers which covered assessment of some certain attributes like punctuality, how to interact with others, and attention to the academic duties, appearance, innovation, creativity, empathy, professionalism, and commitment to long life learning. Thien et al. introduced a method for evaluation of commitment of teachers to the functions of teaching. Michel presented a tool for assessing the ethical sensitivity of high school teachers.

The aforesaid samples reveal that the concepts of professional commitment, ethical sensitivity, and professional etiquette have empirical referents in the real world; although it seems in order to make a precise and comprehensive evaluation of the professional ethics in teaching, a broad measure consistent with the critical attributes and definition of this concept is required.

4. Conclusion
The professional ethics in teaching is a concept which should be distinguished from its similar concepts. The analysis of this concept offered a deeper understanding of the significance of this notion and unveiled its essential elements and attributes. The concept of professional ethics in teaching shapes complying with professional obligations and its crucial elements and sub-constructs are divided to four professional attributes which observing them in an ethical manner needs some ethical competencies. Adhering to personal ethics and mastery over subject matter and pedagogical skills are of antecedents to establishment of the concept and its occurrence results in public trust, external control, and moral influence on the students. The most important usage of this concept analysis is to introduce the proposed framework as a criterion for a real and objective evaluation of this concept in teachers and to make attempts for its improvement, and this is while the existing empirical referents have not been able to evaluate the concept comprehensively and perfectly.

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6. References