TNAAC SPONSORED NATIONAL WORKSHOP AT MAR IVANIOS COLLEGE

*TOWARDS FORMULATING BEST CLASSROOM PRACTICES IN TEACHING, LEARNING AND EVALUATION*

***DOES ETHICS MATTER IN TEACHING: A SEARCH IN THE CONTEXT OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN KERALA?***

***10-11 September, 2015***

Please allow me to begin with a couple of personal remarks. They are remarks of joy and nostalgia. First and foremost, during my early stages of professional life, I must have been in my late twenties or early thirties, I did a summarizing of a one day seminar here in this college. Just fifteen minutes of reporting. I got a raving feedback. One of the organizers went even to the extent to announce that I did better than all the resource persons of the day. I am sure he was being kind to a young priest beginning his career. Let that be. But the feedback did magic for me. I felt very excited. My self esteem went up. See what an example of best practice. May be we all should give one such feedback to a youngster around here so that this workshop itself becomes a memory for them.

The second personal remark is about Prof. Thangamuthu. When Loyola, Sreekariyam went in for its re-accreditation and as principal I was really worried. We had a five star and we had to perform better. Prof. Thangamuthu as the chairperson was such a magnanimous man, critical, objective and extremely supportive. I still remember the words he murmured in my ears, as we bid him goodbye. ‘Fr. George, I know you are anxious. But, because of confidentiality I cannot tell you the score we have recommended. But I can guarantee one thing. You will be happy to hear the result.” Indeed we were delighted, when the results came. A grade with 3.7 out of Four, one of the best results in the country. Thank you for that great memory, Dear Dr.Thangamuthu.

And the final personal remark. A congratulatory note to Mar Ivanios. You are doing well. A model campus and to the IQAC team under Dr. George, great home work for this workshop. Keep up the tradition. And may we soon hear the day Mar Ivanios College becomes a University.

I have titled my presentation: Does Ethics Matter in Teaching: A search in the context of Higher Education in India, particularly in Kerala. Being part of a panel, I would propose this methodology: As key note speaker, I would take around 20 minutes, and then the co-panelists, will be given 7 minutes each, after which the session would be thrown open to the participants. In conclusion, we all will take roughly three minutes each to conclude. All that should be over in about 70 minutes, on time for lunch. Now back to the title. Why do I ask this question, does Ethics matter at all in Teaching? The question comes in a context. Given a particular mode of teaching, evaluating and awarding degrees which have become so prevalent in India today, the ethical dimensions have become either neglected or just not visible. A ‘good teacher’ in a college can take ‘good classes’ which students indeed like and conduct examinations in a ‘proper manner ‘ without ever touching the deeper dimensions of the process of teaching and learning. Hence, this search has to be in a context. I propose to consider this topic by looking at the context in which we live, specifically in Kerala, and then look at what it means to look at the ethical dimensions, and look at ten areas in which ethical considerations play a role. Incidentally these ten areas will also be the same topics for our group work to identify best practices. Finally I would like to conclude by opening up the topic to other panelists to raise questions, respond to issues and then we can move to the participants for their responses.

**The role of Ethics:**

We often define Ethics as the ‘science of morals’; or as the world of moral principles or codes. In practical terms Ethics asks the down to earth question, what is the proper course of action for a human being? In one sense, it is a question of what is right and wrong in what I do. At a more fundamental level, it is a method by which we identify, categorize and prioritize our values. Ethics becomes important in human life because it is going to decide the course of our life. Our goals and values are going to decide on the course of action. It is obvious then that to the degree which rational ethical standard is taken, we are able to properly organize our goals and actions to accomplish our most important values. Any flaw in our ethics can reduce our quality of life or success as we define it.

One major hurdle we face in today’s world is the lack of certainty of what is right or wrong. One of our writers remarked that when they were young there was a huge dividing wall between right and wrong. Today, not only there is no wall, if you dig deep, you don’t even find a foundation stone dividing right and wrong. So there you have the ethical dilemma faced by every human being in the contemporary human societies.

**Ethics of Education**

Two specific questions are of importance when we consider ethical issues in Education. One, the moral behavior of the teacher. Two, the morality students learn in the school or College. In a sense both these are the two sides of the moral behavior of a teacher and a student. Both are so interlinked that one cannot think of one without the other. The sadness of modern education is a kind of thinking that a teacher can teach, draw his salary and get away, even while leading an apparently ethics-less life. What does it matter even if the student or teacher does not lead ethical lives, so long as classes are taught, exams are done and results are achieved. This kind of instrumentalization of education is very antithetical to the purpose of education itself. From a very liberal notion of education say as characterized by Cardinal Newman’s articulation in ‘ The Idea of a University ’ , in which he said, ‘ The principle of real dignity in knowledge , it’s worth , its desirableness, considered irrespective of results, is this germ within it of scientific or philosophical process. This is how it comes to be an end itself; this is why it admits of being called liberal” (Newman 1959:138)

In contrast, the post Industrial Society and ‘the emergence of Knowledge economy promoted an increasingly instrumental perception of the purpose of higher education as being directly linked to future employment prospects’. (Joanna William, 2013: 38)

It is in these contradictory views of higher education that engagement with the Ethics of education plays a major role. It can do three things: raise consciousness about the norms and ethics of the teaching profession; help increase job satisfaction and enhance status and self esteem. Thirdly, it can increase respect for the profession in communities. Concretely this means DEVELOPING STANDARDS FOR THE BEHAVIOUR AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTIC OF TEACHERS THROUGH

* A CODE OF ETHICS: A SET OF ASPIRATIONAL GOALS BASED ON THE VALUES OF INTEGRITY,RESPECT, RESPONSIBILITY
* A CODE OF CONDUCT: A MORE DETAILED SET OF STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL CONDUCT . PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE BASED ON THE VALUES SET OUT IN THE CODE OF ETHICS
* STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE; A SET OF STANDARDS WHICH APPLY TO ALL REGULAR TEACHERS THAT ARTICULATE WHAT ALL TEACHERS SHOULD KNOW NAD BE ABLE TO DO

**The context of discussion:**

Coming down to the more concrete context of the discussion of Ethics in Education is the concrete socio-political context in which we live. Discussing ethics in Teaching and Education has to be within the macro social situation. The simple sociological insight is valid here . Every sub system is a reflection of the macro system of which it is part of. The Indian Society and much more the Kerala Society is marked by, pardon me if I am over simplifying it, certain anomic tendencies. If we apply Durkheimean insights an anomic society by its very nature is normless and more suicides are only a manifestation of it. The student community has become a very vulnerable group, vulnerable to the temptations of post-modern technology, particularly media, the a-political or party political nature of their lives and absolute control of neo-colonial values and projects. Doublespeak , of the Orwellian type, is the characteristic of today. Hence, for example, we would talk of development, while , almost 70 per cent of its population will not benefit from the so called development.

Now , coming to the University system itself , most of our universities have become almost non-functional. To look at the least parameters, examinations are not conducted on time, results are not published, research is not upto any international standards and so on. And the worst, as one of our own Vice Chancellors remarked at his retirement, our universities have become slaves of party politics.

Now this creates dilemmas which are not easily answerable. For instance, one key question will always remain, how can I, why should I be ethical when the whole society is not ethical? A million dollar question, but a question, which we teachers and students must negotiate in some way.

Thus the major premise I want to start with is this: While it may be difficult to be ethical in my profession as a teacher, the basic responsibility remains to be ethical and to be able to train our youngsters in a life which is guided by ethical principles.

Let us now quickly look at the ten areas where ethical issues confront us every day.

1. **Teacher as a Professional**

Professionalism is marked by thoroughness with the body of knowledge, skills, a long period of training, a passion for the profession or the subject and finally a code of ethics which we follow. Teachers need to assess themselves continuously on how professional we are.

1. **Teacher and Pedagogical practices**

Gone are the days of chalk and talk. Technology has come in, in a big way. But how ethically conscious are we in critically assessing and improving our pedagogical practices. Just one example, how do we desist from and teach children to avoid plagiarism? Or how participative are we in our pedagogical approaches.

1. **Teacher and Students**

In this area probably we have the largest and deepest ethical dilemmas. The loss of the personal relationship between teachers and students is something many lament about in private and in public fora. Major concerns here are how teachers become role models and educators of moral or ethical living.

1. **Teacher as a Researcher**

The University Grants Commission is very articulate about the role of a higher education teacher as a researcher. How ethical are we in getting our own research degrees and in being faithful to a life dedicated to scientific research which generates new knowledge. Don’t teachers continue to be peddlers of outdated knowledge?

1. **Teacher and the Practice of Evaluation**

In many ways teachers in higher education have become victims of experiments and ad hoc measures by half baked innovators. But how, faithful and ethical are teachers to the basic principles of objectivity, honesty and truthfulness.

1. **Teacher and Parents**

Involvement of parents at the higher education level is a pretty mixed reality. While some parents are overly involved, quite a few have lost all control of their children and getting creatively engaged with their lives has become a serious concern for parents and teachers. Here, the creativity and sensitivity of the teachers in partnering in the mission of teaching is a huge challenge

1. **Teacher and Colleagues – Teaching**

Collegiality is a value with powerful impact on students and the larger society. Our teachers are often divided in lines of party, vested interests and often sacrifice their basic ethical responsibilities for their own vested interests. How do we ensure ethical living in this area?

1. **Teachers and Colleagues – Non-Teaching**

Every stakeholder in the business of teaching becomes a partner. Non-Teaching colleagues are in that sense very significant partners in the process of teaching too. How respectful are we to them?

1. **Teacher and the Local Community**

With the emergence of centres of excellence and purely instrumental view of education local community has ceased to exist for many institutions of higher education. However, in this the University Grants Commission is very articulate, when it asks institutions of higher education to come down from their ivory towers and move with the people.

1. **Teacher and the Civil Society**

Presuming the concept of Civil Society to be a familiar one , the biggest challenge from a social analytical point of view is to challenge the overpowering of the state and market over the citizens . Let me cite one example. The space for dissent is diminishing hugely in this country. Rationalists, Human Rights Activists and whistle blowers are murdered with absolute impunity. Even satire is resisted . Nissim M , wrote recently: “ …the space for satire and humour that can challenge dominant thought is decreasing, and the ‘ban culture’ is spreading its tentacles..Laughing at the political ruling class is completely absent. When the social realm acquiesces so easily to the political establishment, the forces of majoritarianism run amok.”

Prabhat Patnaik(2015) in a recent article spoke of the destruction of education in India today. He cited two directions in which it happens: the commoditization of education and the ‘communalization of education’. He goes on to say that ‘the co-existence of these two tendencies in the sphere of education is the counterpart in the realm of education of the corporate-communal alliance that is holding sway in the sphere of polity. And there is no contradiction between these two tendencies of commoditization and communalisation’.

The Teachers have a role in critiquing these realities. Are they at least aware of it?

1. **The Teacher and the State**

The state is in many ways a key stakeholder in higher education, in setting the goals, the procedures, in funding and legislating. Hence, the teacher has to negotiate with the state at every juncture. In fact, the state holds absolute hold over the higher education. Ethical concerns are pretty high in this area and often the teacher is unable even to raise questions.

**Conclusion**

Ethics does matter in teaching and education. The above listed areas spell out the magnitude of the ethical dimensions. The greatest challenge for teachers is to sensitize themselves to these challenges. Hopefully the workshop on best practices will give a chance to familiarize themselves with the issues as well as learn from the best practices around.

**References:**

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