

Ethics in the Romanian Academic System

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Abstract

Ethics is necessary in the academic system of education as it studies moral issues often encountered in such teaching activity. In Romania, ethical issues seem abstract, lacking any real significance as the focus is on the enhancement and optimization of theoretical or practical notions related to the abilities necessary to the beneficiaries of the teaching process. Therefore, it has been necessary to enforce the codes of ethics, which are seen as moral contract between the parties involved in the teaching process, namely teachers/professors, students/pupils, parents, etc.

Keywords

ethics, moral values, ethical issues, academia.

Branch of philosophy, ethics is a discipline studied in the academic system of education, focused on the study of moral issues. It approaches specific issues of the education and seeks viable, solid and applicable solutions. In today's Romania, ethical issues often seem abstract, lacking any real significance as the focus is on the enhancement and optimization of theoretical or practical notions related to the abilities necessary to the beneficiaries of the teaching process.

In Romania, the law maker has stipulated the enforcement of codes of ethics. They work as a moral contract concluded between the participants in the teaching process, respectively teachers, professors, students, parents, administrative employees and the academia in its entirety. The role of the code of ethics is meant at filling in the space left empty between moral behaviors and the law and to make the connections between contractual relations and the responsibility and trust of each academia member.

Based on theoretical and practical aspects, this paper aims to examine ethics and ethical issues that arise in the course of the teaching profession in the Romanian academic education.

To make a responsible decision, we must establish the parties involved and how they will be affected by our decision.

1. Duty to ourselves. The best alternative in many situations is to maintain our integrity and follow our conscience. However, we should

not use our conscience and act only in our favor in terms of career choices.

2. Duty to students involves self-knowledge, love for the teaching profession, focused on pedagogical optimism and the ability to form and develop in children an energy, a value, which is itself creator of cultural, material and spiritual values¹.
3. Duty to the institution of education where we work. Loyalty to the employer can be considered a moral good, often manifested by exposing people who harm the reputation of the institution.
4. Duty to peers. It is one of the strongest obligations of a professional towards their peers. However, professional loyalties must be considered when the most appropriate action to be taken must be considered.
5. Duty to the society. It is an increasingly important perspective of applied ethics and it has been defined as "social responsibility". Loyalty to the community is the one that guarantees moral quality.²

Landmarks of the ethical decisions

Ethics is a landmark to the extent that the teacher decides to take account of the ethical principles in their work, and to the extent to which the educational institution is based on such values. An effective communication is essential between teacher and superior hierarchical structures and any ethical issues must be reported immediately. It is also important to have knowledge of the external and internal audiences to find the most appropriate ethical solutions. In this context, Shannon Bowen recommends a series of landmarks that must be considered in solving an ethical problem.

The first part is to know the ethical principles. At the beginning of a crisis, it is too late to talk about what is ethical and unethical if the institution's values are not focused thereon and undertaken by the members of such institution. Personal moral values can contribute to ethical dilemmas, but they should be combined with the institution's values to establish a stable relation.

Teachers must be alert to ethical issues that arise within the institution. Anticipating ethical issues and discussing them can prevent a crisis. It is therefore

¹ V. Pavelcu, 1967, pp. 20-21.

² Clifford G Christians, Mark Fackler, Kim B. Rotzoll, Kathy B. McKee, *Etica*, Editura Polirom, București, 2011, p. 31.

important to study permanently provisions of codes of professional ethics in an attempt to identify and resolve any ethical issue.

The organizational culture should serve as essential ethical landmark in decision making. For this reason, the ethical values and principles of higher education institution must be promoted through the code of academic ethics, the ethical behavior should be encouraged and rewarded, ethical issues must be clearly defined and ethical debates should be conducted to predict and prevent ethical conflicts.

The limits between ethical and unethical. The legislation governing the ethical conduct in the Romanian academic system of education

The essential problem of ethics is the boundary between ethical and unethical, good and bad. The difficulty of labeling an action as ethical or unethical depends on whether the standards of behavior vary from one individual to another and from one culture to another. The ethical activity of teachers is currently tied to the ethical codes developed by specialists. Generally, such codes of ethics and professional conduct prohibit certain actions and provide a set of principles to be followed.

The ethics of the higher education system, but also in any other field, is defined as a system of principles, values, norms and codes of conduct are moral imperatives leading the obligation to observe them.

Law no. 1/2011 provides for the operation of an ethics committee in each university. The ethics committee structure is proposed by the Administration Board and is composed of people with professional prestige and moral authority, but will not include persons holding management positions such as rector, vice-rector, dean, managing director, head of department or unit of research and development, design, etc.

According to Law no. 1/2011, the university ethics committee has the following duties:

- It analyzes and settles any infringements of the academic ethics, based on complaints, as per the Code of ethics and professional conduct;
- It prepares an annual report on the observance of the academic ethics and ethics of the research activities. This report is submitted to the rector, university senate and it is a public document;
- It participates in the preparation of the Code of ethics and academic conduct, which is submitted to the university senate for approval and inclusion in the University Chart;

- The duties indicated in Law no. 206/2004, as further amended and supplemented;
- Other duties stipulated by this law or by the University Chart and according to the law³.

Codes of ethics in the academic system of education

The codes of ethics and professional conduct apply to all people working in education institutions, private and state-owned and which are responsible for training and educating of pupils/students.

Compliance with the code of ethics is required to enhance the quality and prestige of education, a goal that can be achieved through the following objectives:

- Self-discipline of people responsible for training and education, through undertaking such codes;
- To keep a high level of professionalism while carrying out duties and functions;
- To improve the relations between the parties involved in the education process;
- To reduce improper and/or immoral practice which might occur;
- To improve the cohesion degree of the personnel involved in the educational activity;
- To facilitate and express values and principles applicable to the educational environment;
- To sensitize the public opinion in order to support educational values.

The values and principles promoted by the code of ethics are designed to promote quality education and focuses on the following concepts: impartiality and objectivity, moral, social and professional responsibility and integrity, compliance with the legislation of the field and personal autonomy, respect and tolerance, interest and responsibility for personal training, rejection of improper conducts of teachers/professor.

As regards peer conduct, the code of ethics provides a set of rules in this regard, among them: collegial relationships based on respect, solidarity, loyal competition, freedom of opinion regarding political and religious beliefs, non-discriminatory behaviors, evaluation criteria concerning only professional results and performance, encouraging dissemination of professional knowledge.

³ Excerpt of Law no. 1/2011

The restrictions of the teaching activities are another chapter of the code of ethics and professional conduct. Thus, it forbids teachers/professors to perform the following deeds and actions:

- Consumption of drugs and/or alcohol;
- Gambling;
- Use of equipment of the educational institution for personal benefits;
- Destruction of the institution's material facilities;
- Use of materials forbidden by the law;
- Organization of activities which endanger the health and safety of students/pupils or of other persons from the educational institution.

In drafting a code of ethics, breaking the law in force in the field of education shall be prevented. From a legal perspective, the changes to a code of ethics and professional conduct are made by a specially organized group, and such changes come into effect the following academic year.

The ethical principles governing the higher education system are about the same that one finds in any other field. Ethics is to be a good professional, to make efforts to evolve in the chosen profession, to consider the interests of others and to keep your professional honor and dignity.

Each university has a code of ethics and professional conduct to be observed and involving a set of rules. The code of professional conduct advocates a professional conduct focused on truth, professional responsibility, tolerance and concern for others. No teacher will engage in actions likely to diminish the fairness and transparency of the educational process.

Ethical and moral issues are, in fact, life situations and may not be regulated by law because, as we already know, people always find new ways to avoid the law. An ethical behavior can resist in a university only if its management, academia and staff understand its importance, encourages and reward ethical conduct and sanction immoral acts and deeds. Ethics will always be promoted from the higher level and will influence all other levels of the institution.

An effective moral education in any University must be based on a type of behavior that leads to the development of proper relationships. The moral conduct of each member must be flawless. Each member brings to the institution their own system of values and we all face, over our careers, ethical and moral dilemmas. They may not always be solved, but the person in such a situation must always keep in mind the ethical and moral principles, especially when involved in the educational process.

In our opinion, the key of the ethics in education depends on how everyone understands to apply some basic ethical principles such as intellectual honesty, kindness, tolerance, respect for others, personal autonomy – in other words, universally applicable values.

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