Discussing the importance of teaching ethics in education

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Abstract

Today, ethics has an important place in all areas of life. Education is also a fundamental process of human life. Therefore, in education ethics has a very important and effective role. In order to be a good human, ethics should be placed as a course in educational system. In this paper, it will be discussed the ethics education in schools. In doing this, it will be also discussed why teaching ethics is important in education. Before discussing this issue, it is necessary to define what ethics is and what education is.

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1. Introduction

In our present age, ethics has an important place in all areas of life. Ethics has also become important in education, because education is a fundamental process of human life. Therefore, ethics is very important subject in education. We can easily reach all knowledge by technology. In education using technology reveals some ethical problems such as plagiarism. In order to understand the importance of ethics, ethics should be placed as a course in educational system. Before discussing this issue, it is necessary to define what ethics is and what education is.

Ethics is the most important and functioning branch of philosophy in today. In general, ethics is moral philosophy. The term ethics is derived from Greek term Ethos which means custom, character. It is related to our values and virtues. Therefore, our actions and our experiences in everyday life are the subjects of ethics. We have
the capacity to think about our choices, so we are responsible for all our decisions and actions. In addition to this, it can be said that ethics is the study of what is wrong and what is right. Good-evil, right-wrong, virtue-vice, justice and injustice are some ethical concepts. Ethics is divided into two parts: theoretical ethics and applied ethics. Theoretical ethics includes normative ethics, descriptive ethics and met ethics. Applied ethics refers to professional ethics.

**ETHICS**

- Theoretical ethics
  - Normative ethics
  - Descriptive ethics
  - Meta ethics
- Applied (Practical) ethics
  - Professional ethics

Normative ethics is the study of what makes actions right and wrong. Meta ethics is about the theoretical meaning and reference of moral propositions. Descriptive ethics is about facts. It examines ethics from observations of actual choices made by moral agents in practice.

Applied ethics examines the particular ethical issues of private and public life. Professional ethics is one of the important branches of applied ethics. In general professional ethics can be defined as standards or codes to provide people to guidance in their professional lives. In general, there are four basic principles in ethical codes:

1. Honesty
2. Confidentiality
3. Conflict of interest
4. Responsibilities

**2. Education**

In general sense, education is any act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character or physical ability of an individual. Etymologically, the word education is derived from the Latin *Educo* which means educate, train. Education is a process of learning and acquiring information. It means teaching and learning. Education affects on human mind, character and physical abilities. The history of education begins with the human history itself. Education is also a way to become civilized human individuals and it maximizes human potential. Culture and cultural heritage can be transmitted by education, because the main occupation of man is to pass knowledge, skills and attitude from one generation to other.

In ancient Greece some philosopher’s views of education such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle contribute to the development of our present educational system. In general, they all believe that the purpose of education is that improve humankind. Socratic Method is still used modern educational practices. In this method, teachers ask some questions to improve the intellectual abilities of students and students try to answer these questions by using their reasons.

Today's educational theories are based on the philosophies of these philosophers.

Plato, who was the founder of Idealism, claimed that the aim of education was to develop individual’s abilities to better serve society. He also was the founder of Academy, the first university of the world. For him both men and
women had the right to have education. He claimed that there were different stages of education. According to him, education was a key element for a society. On the other hand, Aristotle who was the father of realism believed that only citizens could be educated. He believed that educated person was fulfilled person. He defended theoretical, practical and technical education. Education helps development of bodily and mental faculties. In ancient Greece, education was seen as a function of the state and the aim of it is to serve the ends of state. Today, education also serves both the needs of state or society and citizens. Therefore, education is important for us. It builds character, gives knowledge and helps progressing of state. Education makes a man complete and it also plays an important role in developing society and state. Schools are basic frameworks of education. School helps children to become a good citizen and human being. This is possible only by ethical education, so teaching ethics in school is important.

3. The role of ethical education

Why Ethics is important and why ethics should be taught in schools? What kind of ethics should be taught in schools? In this chapter I will try to discuss this issue.

Ethics education can be divided into four stages:
1-Ethics education in family
2-Ethics education in school
3-Ethics education in university
4- Ethics education in business

In family, ethics education should focus on descriptive facts. Children observe their parents’ (role models) ethical behaviours and they learn social facts about ethical behaviour.

In school, students learn what is right and what is wrong. This is a value education or character education. In educational systems, generally ethics is associated with religion. Therefore, instead of ethics course students take religious course. However, students should learn values clarification, and making ethical decision. In addition, school fosters to students become trustful, responsible, and just person. Ethics in school can benefit to this.

In university, ethics should be professional ethics. Only some students can take ethics course related to their professions in universities, because in universities ethics does not give as a course in all departments. This kind of ethical education provides students to realize what is right, make good decisions about ethical issues in their professions. In addition, students learn evaluate different moral standpoints.

In business, people learn some ethical codes about their occupations. This kind of ethics tells how people should act in business life.

In Turkish educational system, in general ethics is associated with religion. These are two intermingled terms. Therefore, in educational systems instead of ethics students take religious culture course. Until university students do not take an ethics course in their schools. In universities, not all departments have an ethics course only a few departments have an ethics course like philosophy, psychology, psychological guidance, business faculties etc. In primary, secondary and high schools students take only religious culture and moral course. Moral and ethics are always mixed together, but they refer different subjects. Before as we said ethics is derived from Greek term Ethos which means custom, character. On the other hand, morality is a set of beliefs and practices about how to live a good life. Morality comes from the Latin term Mores which means custom and manner. The terms ethics and morality are often used interchangeably. They have same roots. Their meanings are the same; custom. However, there is a distinction between them in philosophy. This distinction can be stated as morality is first-order set of beliefs and practices about how to live a good life. Ethics is a second-order, conscious reflection on the adequacy of our moral beliefs.

In other words, Morality is used to refer to what we would call moral conduct while ethics is used to refer to the formal study of moral conduct. It can be claimed that morality is related to praxis, but ethics is related to theory.

Gardelli, Alerby and Perssons present three arguments about why ethics should be taught in schools. These arguments are socialization argument, the quality of life argument and the tool argument. According to socialization argument school should help students to become good citizens. To do this ethics is necessary in schools. The second argument, the quality of life argument claims that school helps to students to live a good life. “school has an obligation to foster the students to become persons who act in a morally correct way” This is possible by ethics in school (Gardelli, 2014: 19). And according to the last argument, the tool argument, “the students’ results in other
subjects would improve if the students had ethics in school”. From these arguments, it can be concluded that ethics is necessary in schools because it provides a better life to students.

4. Conclusion

In conclude, it can be claimed that education is also an ethical effort. Human beings can be either unfriendly or peaceful by education. The aim of ethical education is to provide people to make decisions by their free wills. You can teach norms easily, but you cannot teach easily to obey these rules unless you teach ethics. Therefore, teaching ethics has an important and necessary place in education. Students who graduated from universities may be well-educated persons in their professions but it is not enough. Aristotle also says, “Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.” I may close my remarks by quoting:

In USA, a high school director sent a letter to his teachers every year for opening ceremony. In this letter, he says:

I am one of the people who escaped a concentration camp. I have witnessed things that no human being should have ever seen: gas chambers built by highly trained engineers, children poisoned by well-educated doctors, babies killed by experienced nurses, women and children shot and burned by people who were high school graduate and post graduate. Therefore, I suspect education. My request from you is:

Help your students to become more civilized human individuals. Your efforts should not generate educated monsters to become skilled psychopaths. Reading, writing, mathematics is only important when they help your children to become more human. (Aydın, I.)

References