

# Inadequacies of Relying Only on Teachers' Deontological Professional Codes of Ethics in Teacher-education: Why Virtue-ethics Might Offer a Complementary Option

John Mary Vianney Mitana<sup>1\*</sup>, Gyaviira Musoke Genza<sup>2</sup>, Anthony Mugagga Muwagga<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Education, Luigi Giussani Institute of Higher Education, Kampala, Uganda

<sup>2</sup>Department Foundations & Curriculum Studies, School of Education,  
College of Education & External Studies, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda

\*Corresponding author: [mitanavianney@yahoo.com](mailto:mitanavianney@yahoo.com)

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**Abstract** This article's point of departure is the normative position that nurturing the ethical behaviour of teacher trainees requires something beyond mastery of a professional code of ethics. Although a codified professional code of conduct, as a form of deontological ethics, might be helpful in ushering teacher trainees into the teaching profession by explaining expected norms of behaviour, it is associated with certain critical weaknesses. This article argues for the complementarity of virtue ethics, which emphasises the interrelatedness of agents and commitment to the professional code of conduct and other institutionalised social values. Related teacher education management implications are highlighted.

**Keywords:** *professional ethics, virtue-based ethics, professional code of conduct, philosophy, teacher education, educational management*

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## 1. Introduction

This article discusses the relationship between teacher education and professional ethics within deontological and virtue ethical theories. The aim of this article is to explore the central role of virtue ethics within professional development of teacher trainees. Specifically, the article addresses three objectives: (i) to explain the role of deontology within teacher education, (ii) to highlight the shortcomings of the deontological approach to ethics within teacher education and, (iii) to explain how virtue ethics might provide a complementary yet pivotal role in teacher education through forming teachers' professional character and agency.

It starts from the position defended by Becker [1], nearly two decades ago, that a deontological understanding of applied ethics is far too narrow, and that it is virtue ethics that prevents this narrowness because it considers social embeddedness of human activities and tensions in human life. Just like Becker, we draw our insight from MacIntyre's, work *After Virtue* [2]. Rather than discuss the inadequacies of deontology in relation to general applied ethics, we focus on nurturing professional behaviour within teacher education. We start by discussing deontology as rules of morality, then explain

how these rules relate to teacher education. In this section, we appreciate the role of deontological professional code of ethics in teacher education. For example, professional codes of ethics help in initiating teacher trainees within the profession as well as keeping the treasures of the profession which would have been lost without a code of ethics. It also brings cohesion within the big body of teachers as professionals. This prevents individual teacher trainees developing behaviours or actions according to their own whims. We then explain why deontological ethical theory is far too narrow in understanding how to nurture professional ethical behaviour of teacher trainees. While we acknowledge the contribution of the deontological ethical tradition towards the development of applied ethics in the form of professional ethics, we also explain why a deontological tradition of adherence to fixed rules, often highlighted in a professional code of ethics, has serious weaknesses. Finally, we explain how virtue ethical theory could work in teacher education and why it might offer a better and complementary option.

## 2. Deontology as Rules of Morality

The father of deontological ethics, as autonomous morality, is Kant [3]. His main theses of moral philosophy are: (a) if the rules of morality are rational, they must be

the same for all rational beings, and; (b) if the rules of morality are binding on all rational beings, then the contingent ability to carry them out must be unimportant – what is important is their will to carry them out [2]. Deontological ethics is about following universal norms that describe what people ought to do, how they ought to behave, and what is right and wrong. It is about the “whatness” of behaviour rather the consequences; its basis is practical reason expressed through human will. It is more about the will of the moral agent than the agent’s character. The best-known maxim for rule setting is Kant’s Categorical Imperative: “Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal rule” [4]. This maxim may be based on human rights, a belief in fairness or equity, among others, if these are applicable to the principle of universality to all rational beings [5]. This maxim yields to an imperative which may be hypothetical – “if you want this end, you must use these means” or categorical – “you must do this absolutely” [3]. For instance, the right of learners to quality education implies that teacher trainees, as future classroom teachers, must not only be made aware of their future duty to teach in such a way that learners receive quality education but also develop the will for such duty; a brief that boys and girls require equity in access to educational opportunities might require that teacher trainees are prepared to develop the will to respond to a moral duty of providing equitable learning opportunities in their future classrooms; and respect of an intrinsic value of a person might require that teacher trainees are prepared to have a moral duty to respect human dignity of their learners.

An important implication of Kantian deontological ethical theory to teacher education is that all human beings have equal rights and dignity and therefore no one should be treated to reach another individual’s ends. People, whether learners, fellow teachers, or parents are to be treated as ends in themselves. This calls for mutual respect and the protection of human dignity which consequently assumes certain moral norms as bottom-line limits to human behaviour irrespective of the consequences of such moral norms to the sphere of education or human life in general.

## 2.1. Deontology in Teacher Education

At first glance, it appears that deontology and teacher education are not compatible. While teacher education is about nurturing teacher trainees’ (human) behaviour related to their future professional teaching career characterised by choices and actions, deontology focuses on human behaviour characterised by moral duties and limitations [5]. Whereas teacher education is about knowledge and professional development related to human behaviour, deontology is concerned with setting rules and norms for knowledge use and professional control. Looked at this way, it appears that teacher education and setting moral rules and norms are at odds and that deontology has a limited role to play in teacher education. This may however be a hasty conclusion. As widely acknowledged, education is about the process of socialising young people into the norms and behavioural patterns of society. Partly, this socialisation process can be

understood in terms of moral norms. In the case of teacher education, it can be understood as socialising teacher trainees into the norms and behavioural patterns of the teaching profession. Education is also understood as a human right implying that teacher trainees have a (potential) moral duty to provide quality teaching and learning experiences to the learners once they graduate from the teacher training institutions.

Norms and rights have been widely understood to influence private and public decisions about education especially in terms of the principles of access, quality and equity. These principles have been used to design and explain the 2000 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and now the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The goals explain the global commitments to education as not only an undeniable human right in terms of access but also emphasise the need for quality and gender equity. These global commitments imply, to teacher education, that teacher trainees should understand the nature and magnitude of the moral duty of trained teachers (their future duty) in the sphere of education and how their actions and behaviour will impact the right of learners to education.

In this paper, we acknowledge the role of deontology in teacher education for two reasons: First, a professional code of ethics as general norms guide teacher trainees’ behaviour towards objective norms instead of simply following their individual opinions and preferences [6]. In this way, teacher trainees appreciate what kind of behaviour is acceptable within the profession and what is not; what is deemed right and what is taken as wrong. Therefore, teacher trainees are more able to compare their choices and actions with those of their professional colleagues. Second, by following prescribed code of rules or conduct can help to keep within the professional memory any moral aspects of practice that would otherwise be forgotten without a professional code of conduct.

Notwithstanding these advantages, relying on teachers’ professional code of ethics alone might present serious shortcomings regarding teacher education. Watras [7] argues that the code of ethics is inadequate in guiding teacher training. His argument is based on the notion that any code of conduct might conflict with another which might drive teacher trainees into ethical dilemmas. Additionally, Schwimmer and Maxwell [8] argue that most codes of ethics tend to promote blind adherence to pre-established norms and the authors suggest having codes of ethics with more “openness of meaning, space for dissidence, and avoidance of moralistic language” (p. 141). Similarly, other studies such as [9] and [10] conclude that codes of ethics are not suitable to helping teacher trainees to develop a professional life. Their conclusion rests on the premise that codes, rules, principles, duty or constraints to utility are applied to a situation in a way that is “outside in” and thus cannot build a teacher trainee’s moral character. They argue in favour of a virtue ethics approach because it is applied to a situation from the “inside-out”, thus being more suitable to form a teacher trainee’s moral character. An “inside-out” approach aims to produce autonomous moral agents with internalized and personalized ethical principles, that they will apply as a habit “even when no one is watching” [10].

Moreover, a deontological theory takes a generic approach to moral decisions in terms of time and space. When applied to teacher education, it implies an assumption that teacher trainees' future operational contexts and professional environment can be determined *a priori* so that teacher trainees can be instructed on how to deal with such situations using fixed rules about norms of behaviour. To the contrary, this might not be possible as a person's conduct is influenced by the complexity of both external and internal factors such as environment, feelings and emotions [11], which codes of conduct can hardly explain. Based on this complexity, one can easily argue that "no generic strategy will of itself lead to making preservice teachers more ethical beings..." [7]. Watras does not totally ignore the role of generic and formal rules and regulations in teacher education but advocates for a wider perspective of a teacher trainee's interaction with reality which can hardly be determined *a priori*. In this paper, we agree with Watras [7] on the notion that while formal rules and regulations [in this case, the professional code of ethics], are necessary and unavoidable in any realm of life including teacher education, relying on such abstract formalism alone cannot be relied upon in nurturing professional ethical behaviour of teacher trainees. In the context of teacher education, it would be more self-fulfilling and professionally beneficial if teacher educational institutions focused beyond the prescribed professional code of ethics. This would avoid the tendency of perceiving teachers' professional ethics as context-transcending as if teacher trainees were to work in idealistic conditions which can hardly be the case.

To avoid the above context-transcending problem – which is neither plausible nor a desirable goal for teacher education and their ethical conduct – we build on the work of Giussani [11] on morality. He suggests a threefold approach to human conduct: the necessity for realism, being reasonable and understanding the dynamic of morality. By necessity of realism, Giussani argues in favour of the need to pay attention to the object, situation or context rather than a focus on "a scheme already in our minds" [11]. He advocates for an existential investigation, starting with the context so that the results of this existential investigation could be used to compare one's results with the "views of others on the matter" (p.5) – the codes of ethics. Actions which start from others' views, Giussani argues, are a result of an alienating opinion which inevitably cannot lead to a mature human being. A blind following of the codes of ethics culminates into one's immaturity if a teacher trainee is not educated to be attentive also to the reality of their professional life as it unfolds. By being reasonable, Giussani calls for the need for *adequate* reasons for one's conduct. He gives an example,

*I might approach the same audience and address it using a shipboard megaphone, explaining that I have brought the enormous instrument into the hall because I have lost my voice. My action would not be considered reasonable. Although it would have explained the reason for using the instrument – the loss of my voice – my listeners would not perceive it as adequate because such an instrument would seem out of place in an auditorium. However, using the same object on a ship*

*would not raise a problem: although the reason would be the same, it would then match the circumstance* [[11], p.13].

Argued this way, one's conduct might be judged as right because it has adequate reasons – it is reasonable to act in such a manner, and yet wrong in another context – it is unreasonable. On the contrary, it would be difficult to find a suitable code of ethics, as *a priori*, teacher trainees can rely on to act in their future professional life.

Even after focusing on the object and with a sound reasoning process, Giussani [11] concludes that this is not enough. He argues that it requires another important factor, "the attitude of the person – usually called morality" (p.23). He adds that a person's attitude informs their affection – the human dynamism. When this dynamism is not awakened during the teacher training process, it is possible that the teacher trainee will mostly act mechanically towards his or her professional duties – responding to codes of ethics and at times acting for the sake of another's approval or in avoidance of a disapproval.

Giussani's arguments reflect the need and relevancy of complex moral judgements in given contexts and the imminent inadequacy of codes of ethics in responding to such complex moral situations. For example, in many of the codes of ethics, a teacher is expected to be responsible for the safety and wellbeing of students; develop and maintain good relationships with parents, guardians and carers. If a teacher has information which, once released, strengthens his/her relationship with parents and the colleagues but risks the safety and wellbeing of a given student. In this case the teacher might face a moral dilemma with either concealing or revealing the information. This requires a moral complex judgement beyond the scripted code of ethics. Let us consider another scenario. Suppose a teacher is confronted with a situation in which he or she must reveal information for the safety of a student, but the school administrative staff and the colleagues are not agreeing that he or she reveals the said information. Recall that the same code of ethics exhorts a teacher to work in a collaborative manner with colleagues and other professionals. An interpreter of Giussani (2006) might argue that instead of a code of ethics, a teacher requires the awareness of reality – which is the basis and object of one's acts. This is in line with John Dewey's situationist stance in which he argues that the "most recalcitrant error in philosophy (he calls it simply 'the philosopher's fallacy') [sic] is the neglect of context" [12], p. 330). Like Giussani, Dewey is a critic of moral theory in which moral agents are expected to follow a pre-given code, rules or moral principles. He notes,

*[A] man's duty is never to obey certain rules; his duty is always to respond to the nature of the actual demands which he finds made upon him – demands that do not proceed from abstract rules, nor from ideals, however awe-inspiring and exalted, but from the concrete relations to men and things in which he finds himself* [12], p. 330)

## 2.2. Deontological Ethics and Its Limitations

According to deontological ethical theory, rational morality lays principles which ought to be held by all

individuals “independent of circumstances and conditions and which could consistently be obeyed by every rational agent on every occasion” [2], p. 45]. This implies that the main focus of deontological ethics is human behaviour and rules governing such actions as opposed to the character of the agent. In this way, it rejects any teleological view of human nature of a person as having an essence of their true end [2]. Deontological ethics locates morality in the universalisation of moral rules. The rules guide teacher trainees about their moral duties towards their profession and help to socialise them into the profession.

However attractive the deontological moral theory may seem, it has several shortcomings. First, not all moral problems can be solved by rules. Human life is so complex that it cannot be reduced to a set of rights, duties and rules. Many, if not most, of human acts involve asking questions like: What should I do? Why should I do it? How should I do it? Whereas these questions have practical implications, they also bear significant ethical implications. For example, giving extra assistance to a struggling student might not easily spring from a mere adherence to a written code. Similarly, putting in additional effort and sparing time for personal and professional development to be a better teacher is not necessarily a consequence of following a prescribed code of conduct. These behaviours, as human acts, might largely spring from the sort of a person one is, rather than from the fact that one is a teacher. [2] locates the failure of the deontological framework of ethics in its deliberate attempt to deny the human nature (physiological non-rational side of a person). By denying human desires and emotions a place in the deontological framework, it implies that the theory might not be suitable to regulate all teacher trainees’ professional behaviour as some aspects of such behaviour could be regulated by developing a strong character rather than following a prescribed code of conduct. In this line of reasoning, [2] argues that human desires and emotions can be put in order and educated by cultivating those habits of action which the study of ethics prescribes while “reason instructs us both as to what our true end is and as to how to reach it” (p.53). Argued this way, a teleological ethical framework considers a “totality” of human nature, both the habitual which might be non-rational and the rational aspects – a combination that could lead to intellectual and moral excellence of teacher trainees.

In Nicomachean ethics, at the beginning of Book II, Aristotle [13] explains how intellectual and moral excellence is acquired by doing acts of excellence. Since professional behaviour entails practice of moral acts (moral virtues) and as said by Aristotle, moral virtues are acquired through repeated acts of the same moral acts, then it can be true that to make teacher trainees steadfast in their professional ethics, they need virtue ethics rather than only relying on professional code of conduct.

For example, the Teachers’ standards of the United Kingdom [14], it is evidently clear that the standards require a teacher to portray a life of moral competence and conviction. For instance, in Standard four, a teacher is expected to “promote a love of learning and children’s intellectual curiosity”. This is a dispositional characteristic which a teacher develops, not by referring to a code of ethics, but by repetition of the same corresponding acts.

Aristotle illustrates this by asserting that “to become just, people must do just things or, to become moderate, do moderate things” He however adds that repeating such acts is not enough except: “first, if he acts knowingly; second, if he acts by choosing and by choosing the actions in question for their own sake; and, third if he acts while being in a steady and unwavering state” [[13], p. 31]. This implies that for teacher trainees to develop a professional ethical behaviour, they must have adequate knowledge of what they are to do or not (which a deontological framework can do) and develop the agency to do what they do by choice and not just because the code of conduct specifies it (which a deontological framework cannot do). This requires an internal disposition – becoming one’s habit to act in given manner rather than by chance or situational choice. This implies a need to nurture one’s character which can best be done through virtue ethics. This therefore, requires teacher education institutions and schools to cultivate a culture in which the desired moral behaviour is well modelled – and teachers are encouraged to do the same. Teacher trainees can develop a disposition of intellectual curiosity by living in a community or culture which cherishes the love of learning and intellectual curiosity. In this case, it is only a teacher educator with intellectual curiosity who is in position to promote the same, first for him/herself, and then for the teacher trainees.

In the above example of promoting a love for learning and children’s intellectual curiosity, one might argue that failure to promote a love for learning and children’s intellectual curiosity is *prima facie* wrong. Another person might as well argue that if the failure of a teacher to promote a love for learning and children’s intellectual curiosity arises from *actus hominis* (act of man) rather than *actus humanus* (human act), then the teacher’s failure must not be judged based on moral or ethical parameters [16]. Let us take an example of a teacher who is forced [by the school owner] to use transcript lessons. In that very school, teachers are aware of their teaching mandate and what they are supposed to do in the classroom. They are however directed (forced) to do the reverse – they however still have the freedom to reject the directives, though with dire consequences such as loss of a job. An ethical dilemma might arise as to whether follow the directive, well knowing that it is a wrong choice, or follow what one knows is right with a possible consequence of losing one’s job.

In the above scenario, it is practically hard to determine a priori what one ought to do. It requires a mature character which can enable a teacher to act according to Aristotle’s principle of the “mean” while consistently aiming at some noble end [15]. This consistency in behaviour might initially require one to take recourse to an external guide, in form of rules or code of ethics; but gradually withdraws the attention from external rules towards what is personal and internal to the individual teacher.

### 3. How Virtue Ethics Might Work in Teacher Education

Unlike a professional code of ethics, virtue-based ethics focuses on big questions such as: “What is a Good Life?”,



“How do I go about living a Good Life?” Aristotle, in Book II of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, gives the purpose of virtues – practical wisdom (*phronesis*) as not so much about right action but rather the cultivation of a good character [13]. Virtues, within the spectrum of teachers’ professionalism, focus on how to live one’s life, in addition to fulfilling certain rules of conduct – precisely because of the central aims of teaching, at least as a moral enterprise, is to enhance “human well-being and flourishing” [17]. Professional ethics should be more related to character building than merely fulfilment of social or any external obligations – including the code of ethics. The contribution of virtues to teachers’ professionalism is not just to know what virtues are but to develop a mature professional character. In Book II of *Nicomachean ethics*, Aristotle noted “we are not inquiring merely in order to know what excellence or virtue is, but in order to become good; otherwise it would profit us nothing” (Aristotle, 2011, p... ). Virtues are, therefore, referred to as good habits which perfect one’s nature (character) in terms of conduct; whereby good habits are virtues and bad habits are vices [3]. However, habits which are merely routine, and which require a voluntary act each time they are performed such as going to church on Sundays, or a teacher preparing a lesson plan every time he/she goes to teach are not virtues but habits/customs. However, these habits, properly called customs, require an internal disposition for one to perform them well and in the frequency in which they require. This is precisely important, especially if we define ethics as the “study of the principles of human conduct or human actions” [[18], p. 57]. For a teacher to develop an ethical character is not just a result of how he/she feels about something. It is rather a reasoned process which becomes habitual or intuitive once one trains the self to subject the other parts of one’s being to reason [3,18].

According to [16] and [3] there are three sets of virtues, namely, intellectual virtues, moral virtues and cardinal virtues. Intellectual virtues reflect excellence of thought and they include knowledge, understanding and wisdom. Intellectual virtues make one “a better student of ethics but not a better living man” [[3], p.228]. Teachers’ professional codes of ethics are very good building blocks for a teachers’ intellectual virtues. With thorough knowledge and understanding of the teachers’ professional code of ethics, a teacher is better prepared to practice what is deemed essentially ethical. This is because, intellectual virtues, also called speculative virtues of the mind, relate to truth which is the goal of the intellect. [13] gives us five modes of attaining this truth: practical virtues of the mind which include science which demonstrates what is attainable or unattainable; art which demonstrates what individuals can make; prudence which calculates what can be done between given extremes; intuitive reason which is the basis of demonstrative science; and wisdom which is the union of science and intuitive reason. Put together, practical virtues relate to the good habit of “making” and the good habit of “doing”. For example, prudence being the virtue that controls other virtues “by pointing out the golden mean and suggesting ways of securing it” [[3], p. 232], enables a teacher to make ethical decisions which might be based on or beyond teachers’ professional code of ethics.

The virtue of prudence, as [3] suggests, does not apply to only a single prudent decision of a teacher but rather it is a required habit for a teacher to always or nearly always use the right means to good ends. For example, the Uganda teachers professional code of conduct forbids a teacher to come to school or teach while under the influence of alcohol; “not teach while under the influence of alcohol or drugs and shall not come to school while intoxicated” [19]. This requires an interplay of prudence and temperance virtues. Following this code without prudence might not help a teacher in a holistic sense to perform his/her professional duties hence need for both virtue and rules. For example, in instances where a code of ethics forbids teachers to drink alcohol while at school might not help a teacher how to deal with issues of dealing with alcohol. Assuming there is a party at school and there is alcohol. Both the teacher and alcohol are at school, should one drink or not? And in case one drinks, how much should he/she take? All these questions can remain unanswered without reference to one’s internal disposition of prudence, which would guide a teacher on how to meaningfully deal with the situation.

Cardinal virtues are the hinge of a person’s moral life [3]. They include one virtue of the mind, prudence and three virtues of the will (temperance, fortitude and justice). Temperance is a virtue which regulates the appetite in the use of senses. Thus, it regulates excessive indulgence in food and drink as well as the use of sex. In this case, a temperate teacher is said to be characterised by sobriety, chastity, continence and humility. Humility is a characteristic of a temperate teacher which moderates his/her “self-esteem, meekness, anger and modesty outward deportment” [[3], p. 233]. A teacher who has insufficient temperance is characterised by pride, gluttony, drunkenness, lust, cruelty and vanity all of which are often the opposite of what most teachers’ professional codes of conduct espouse.

On the other hand, excessive temperance might yield to insensibility, stolidity, sullenness, moroseness and fanatical austerity which are also often implicitly or explicitly indicated in many of teachers’ professional codes of conduct. A virtuous teacher is not so much bothered about observing the dictates of the code but rather conducting one’s self in a manner that is moderate in matters of food, drink, and sex. For instance, a deontological professional code of conduct might forbid teacher trainees to engage in sexual relationships with the learners but does not explain or guide a teacher trainee how to handle the concupiscible passion of love. What might happen, as it sometimes does in practice, a teacher trainee might be forbidden to have sexual relationships with his/her immediate students but can engage in a similar relationship with other students he/she does not directly teach. A virtuous teacher trainee on the other hand, would be guided by the virtue of temperance and thus shun the relationship, not because of the rule but because the act is not part of his/her habitual behaviour. Fortitude is another virtue which enables one to incline towards toil and face professional challenges with zeal and courage. It implies patience, perseverance and constancy in one’s professional work despite unexpected challenges which often engulf a teacher trainee along his/her professional life (to be) and yet, which cannot be explained by the

professional code of conduct alone. For example, in many of the low-resourced contexts, teachers are expected to devote a great deal of hours of work towards their professional work including regular assessment and evaluation of learners, giving attention to individual learners' work and progress within large classes, often beyond 100 learners. Following a prescribed code of conduct might fall short in preparing a teacher trainee how to handle such a situation. On the other hand, a teacher trainee who has developed a virtue of fortitude might be helped by his/her zeal and courage to deal with such a professional challenge, often resulting into professional creativity and resilience in one's professional life.

Also, justice is a virtue which every professional teacher trainee ought to develop to give potential students what is due to them as well as recognising the fact that education is a human right thus learners require the best of it. Therefore, in this paper we argue that virtue ethics can complement the teachers' professional code of ethics and lead to more professional ethical maturity because it is the development of ethical virtues that enables a teacher to grow a "habitual and firm disposition to do the good" [20], p. 5] rather than just following a prescribed code of conduct.

#### 4. Conclusion and Implications to Teacher Education Management

World-wide, teachers are educated and expected to follow prescribed codes of behaviour or conduct. Although these codes reflect certain ethical theories, they remain largely external to a teacher. Yet, a teacher requires the development of an internal disposition to act in certain ways in given situations. Thus, virtue ethics should form a strong basis for teacher education and training, and the way teacher education is managed should reflect this. In this way, virtues become the starting point, before training in other approaches such as professional codes of conduct. The cultivation of virtues becomes very essential because it builds the level of stability of teacher trainees' character which enables them to encounter their future daily professional life and practice instead of only focusing on a list of a code of conduct.

In the Nicomachean ethics, [13] espouses virtues as the internal efficient principles of moral action. Together with the conscience, virtues guide a person's ethical life without which one would err and get entrenched into vice. Teaching others consists in guiding them in both word and deed. This means that enabling teacher trainees to develop a life of virtue is essential in creating a learning community in which students can learn from their teachers' certain behaviours which in turn become their (students') own virtues through practice. Thus, promoting virtue ethics in teacher education does not only help teacher trainees in their (future) profession but also in nurturing their (teachers' and students') characters as human persons.

Since virtues are best learnt through "habituation" (repeatedly performing corresponding acts) and through "moral exemplification", teacher training institutions ought to exemplify the virtues which they intend to develop within teacher trainees. This is because, teachers tend to teach, largely according to how they were taught,

and model their behaviour according to the behaviour of their teachers. This implies that administrators of teacher training institutions ought to live exemplary lives. Here, institutional culture is important in helping teacher trainees to develop the sought virtues. This could be achieved in two ways. First, exposing teacher trainees to the knowledge about moral truth so that their intellect is trained about moral behaviour; and, second, promoting a behavioural culture in which teacher trainees can foster an inclination to do good through the exercise of virtues.

The work of teachers as professionals is not an easy one. It sometimes happens in an unpredictable environment in which the codes of conduct might not be so helpful to a teacher; so, codes need to be supplemented by virtues. In this way, when teacher trainees develop professional ethical maturity, they can handle ethical dilemmas with certainty and stability of character. For example, a code might forbid drinking alcohol but silent on issues of food. This requires a teacher trainee to have virtues of prudence and temperance to decide and act professionally and humanly. Referring to a code is necessary but not sufficient in guiding teachers' professionalism, hence the need for inculcating appropriate internal dispositions among teacher trainees – under the auspices of virtue ethics.

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