

On Ethics Grounds: Where do we stand at UNA?

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Abstract

At a time when there is a very clear need for ethical practices in the workplace, this paper presents ways to invite ethics into our classrooms, particularly a university setting. A general review of key concepts such as morals, values and ethics is addressed first, and then the discussion leads to how these concepts become intertwined until they result in a real reflection of the principles that guide our choices and finally our actions in everyday life; and most importantly, how these actions have an impact on society. An analysis is provided of the role that the literature has traditionally assumed to be ideal for leaders, professors and students in modern societies. This is done through the discussion of the elements that play an important role in achieving this goal and that can be identified clearly as markers of successful ethical grounds. Special attention is given to the concept of *ethical culture*, which is subdivided into *ethical culture* and *ethical climate* and how they impact what can happen in the workplace. Several practices that are applicable to the classroom are also described to exemplify how these ethical practices can be part of our classrooms, regardless of the students' major.

Key words: ethics, ethical practices, ethical culture, ethical climate, leaders, Higher Education

Resumen

En momentos en que la necesidad de prácticas éticas en el lugar de trabajo es imperante, este artículo presenta una invitación a incluir tales prácticas en nuestras clases, muy especialmente en nuestro entorno universitario. Se inicia con una referencia a una serie de conceptos básicos como la moral, los valores y la ética; luego se discute cómo dichos conceptos se entrelazan para, posteriormente, llegar a una

reflexión real sobre los principios que guían nuestras decisiones, cómo estas últimas influyen nuestras acciones diarias y, mucho más importante aún, cómo a su vez estas acciones impactan nuestra sociedad. Se analiza el papel que la literatura ha asumido tradicionalmente como ideal para líderes, profesores y estudiantes en sociedades modernas. Esto se lleva a cabo a través de una discusión sobre los elementos claves para alcanzar una función ética, elementos que pueden identificarse claramente como señales de prácticas éticas exitosas. Se presta especial atención a los conceptos de «cultura ética» y «clima ético» y a cómo afectan lo que ocurre en el ambiente de trabajo. Adicionalmente se describen algunas prácticas que podrían aplicarse en el contexto de la clase para ejemplificar cómo las prácticas éticas pueden estar presentes en nuestras aulas universitarias sin importar cuál sea el área de especialización del estudiantado.

Palabras claves: ética, prácticas éticas, cultura ética, clima ético, liderazgo, educación universitaria

Preliminaries

Throughout history, people have looked for ways to explain and to some extent determine human behaviour. Progressively, they have assumed roles in society and have created rules for what is proper and what is not. Ancient philosophers strove to find definitions and provide explanations for moral behavior that could govern our society. Spinoza (2000), considered by many to be one of the greatest philosophers of all time, set himself to define the terms “good” and “bad” and concluded that “each person judges what is good or bad in accordance to his own emotions” (Parkinson, 2000:62). Many would agree with this statement and would then find themselves debating as to whether this or that action could

be good or bad. He goes on to explain however that, for him, “that is good which we know to be useful to us, and that is bad which we know to hinder us from possessing something good.” (2000:63). In our modern days, if we apply these words to our everyday activities many possible interpretations could be given to them and some could even turn out to be problematic. Some may assume a dangerous take and understand that just because something is “useful” one may simply “possess” that thing. These days, if someone were to assume that, this assumption could carry serious implications, even legal ones, for that person. While this explanation could apply perfectly well to feelings and morals (we could “own” joy, we could “own” positivism, we could “own” honesty), its application for dealing

with material things in our modern age would not suffice.

That is when our judgement comes into play. Common sense tells us that we could actually apply the quote in the previous paragraph, as long as we respect and value others and their possessions in society. These ideas will eventually lead us to approach and discuss the areas of morals, values and ethics in modern society. But before we do that, we can look back and review Aristotle's position on how to value morality in our daily actions. For him, "A morally responsible agent is someone who is properly subject to the demands, expectations and evaluations of morality. ... Only morally responsible agents merit praise and blame for what they do." (Sauvé Meyer, 1998: p.221). This does not always happen in modern days; people are not always held accountable for their actions. We would expect people to be evaluated based on previously set expectations; and more than that, they need to be able to accept that evaluation openly. In the development of this paper we will see why the application of these concepts becomes important. Aristotle's analysis of this idea does not stop there. He also insists that an activity that is worthy of praise or blame is an "activity of which the agent is 'the cause'". Such action, he explains, is one whose 'origin' is in the agent (or the agent *is* its origin), the action is 'up to' the agent to do or

not to do and the agent is in control of whether the action occurs." (1998: p.224). In days when some take credit for other's work and most are not held responsible for their actions, these quotes come sometimes as foreign to us as if just recently stated. Some may be wondering how to determine what is "up to us" and what is not. Well, for Aristotle something that is "not up to us" is that activity "whose occurrence will not be affected by anything we do." On the other hand, something is "up to us" if "what we do makes a difference" (p.228). Hence, following this claim, we should be held accountable if we promoted an idea or action from beginning to end, and we should receive praise or blame for that too. If the case is the opposite, we should not be held accountable or receive any praise either. This can be useful as a very simple rule to follow when we want to set responsibilities for particular actions in our school settings.

Furthermore, Begley (2003, pp. 5, 7) presents an interesting approach to explain what he calls the "Syntax of Values". Through his explanation we can also see what I believe represents human nature in how each person's values are reflected in the different ethical decisions and actions people put into practice. He represents this as an onion type of figure containing different layers, each of which represents a different stage that a decision goes through from the

moment it is conceived to the moment it becomes an action. For me, this clearly represents the way we initiate an act, give way to a thought and go through a process until we finally make ethical (or unethical) decisions, and yes, he is right in the sense that a number of different elements add up until we reach the point of acting out on our inner feelings or ideas. Thus, for Begley (2003), it all goes as follows¹:

self → motive → understandings
→ value → attitude → action²

As I interpret this, in this proposal something is born inside of us, we can call that idea or desire; it is an expression of our *self*. Then, it becomes a motive and thus we find reasons to believe we have to act on that, we have developed the possibility of a justified purpose. After that, we analyze the situation and apply our understandings of things to this motive, and we reason the possibilities that could be involved in this motive, good or bad, positive or negative; as a consequence of this, we run our understandings of the motive through the set of values we use in our everyday life and which each one of us as individuals is part of. Then, we assume a particular attitude towards this motive, we may

here decide whether to continue with this idea, and if we decide to continue we finally take action.

This is a very clear illustration and representation of the role our values have in the decisions we make and which later become actions. But for me, while this is an excellent portrayal of how these things take place, it still lacks an important component once we try to match it to reality. Something seems to be missing, our actions do not really end there. We are not isolated entities that act just in reference to ourselves. We need to add something else to the above proposal so that it becomes a real reflection of our society and our constant interaction with other individuals.

What happens once our action takes place? How does this action affect us or how does it affect others? I propose that we add at least one more element to the chain, namely, the consequences of our actions in society. We should consider those too, shouldn't we? That is what makes us an active part of society. If we include an element that refers to that, the chain above will really represent what we do as we interact with others as members of society. To consider how our actions relate or may sometimes affect others, I propose that we add what could be called *impact on society*. The above chain would then look as follows:

self → motive → understandings
→ value → attitude → action
→ *impact on society*

1. I am adapting Begley's layered onion to a chain of elements.
2. Begley explains that he is closely following in his proposal, Hodgkinson, C. Educational leadership: The moral art. Albany: SUNY Press. 1991. Print.

Now, as we all may know, this impact can take different forms. This brings us back to the concepts of good or bad, moral or immoral, positive or negative. The idea is that we, as responsible members of society, should aim at having a positive impact on society; that should be our underlying intention, at least. If the process goes the way it was described above we would be in possession of something useful to us (and hopefully to our society) and we would be involved in an activity that is “up to us” for which we can consequently receive praise or blame, thus becoming fully responsible not only for our actions but for the impact those actions may have on society.

Let us now consider the concept of ethics a little more directly. Our society has set standards that guide us in our decisions to determine what is good or bad; these standards will eventually result in us making ethical decisions. Kenneth A. Strike (2007) claims that different features should characterize ethical decisions. I will mention what he considers important and I will explain a little, from my perspective, on how I see these could apply to our own decisions.

According to Strike, ethical decisions should be made under legitimate authority, meaning that the person who makes the decision is the right person to make it. The decision-maker would be the one held accountable for it.

Ethical decisions should have a valid purpose or a specific end. That is, when the decision is made, that decision is aiming at something in particular, one has a real purpose. Ethical decisions are respectful of people’s rights, which means that we do not place our interests above anyone else’s interests, and we are respectful of others’s personal, intellectual and material possession. Finally, ethical decisions have good bases and they are clear, understood and open for discussion. In other words, we do not make decisions on a whim. If these decisions are conceived and reasoned, we should be able to defend and stand for them when the moment comes. After analyzing these ideas related to ethics and others discussed above, we see how closely related these terms can be. If all the requirements are met when we make an ethical decision, we can ensure that our very set of moral values is reflected in the decisions we make and that once we get to our projected ends they will be legitimate as well.

In literature on the topic of values, morals, and ethics there seems to be a general tendency to use all of these terms interchangeably. I would say that there is a very fine line that makes them different. For me, *values* are inherent to our nature, they may be inherited genetically or instilled in us as part of the personality and character formation we undergo during the early years in our family; these run in our very core.

Morals have a more social orientation and have to do with the aspects that as humans we have learned and adopted through the ages and have to do with culture, societal ideals and patterns passed down, socially, from one group to the next. *Ethics* and *ethical* decisions have to do with how the previous two apply to our daily lives, whether we are at work, on the street or in a classroom, and how we follow and respect the set of rules and regulations established in relation to different tasks in our society. This is what will finally turn out to reflect whether we did the right thing in a given situation.

I cannot deny, however, as it is an evident fact, that there is a strong connection among these three and that many times they interact with one another to influence the way we act in society. The reasoning behind this initial debate and attempt to define these different elements is that they would serve as a basis for the sections that follow. In the following subsections I would like to present a series of features that I believe (and the literature supports) should characterize the role of leaders, professors and students at UNA, with the purpose of creating awareness and hopefully a sense of analysis as to the ethical grounds upon which our institution stands. The idea is that within each of these following groups there should be a reflection

of values, morals and ethics in every one of the decisions we make, and in each and every one of the actions we undertake. This could serve as an exercise to determine whether we are doing the right thing in whatever role we have in the moment we read these lines, either as a leader, professor or student in our institution.

Our Leaders

I want to start by saying that for the purposes of this paper a “leader” is not a single person in our institution. It is not only our president or the vice-chancellor of academic affairs. Leader here refers to anyone holding any kind of power and making decisions that affect others in our institution. So, it does include the president of the university, as well as the chairman of our department and its administrative staff, the person in charge of directing one area of a department, or the instructors in a classroom. These are all leaders in the sense that they make decisions which have an impact on others and which others have to respect. Of course some of these people make decisions that have consequences for a larger number of people.

However, no matter how many people we affect with our decisions, what is important is that we do have an impact on society; whether that impact is large or small, it does not really matter for the purposes of this paper. What

matters is that there is an impact and that we as leaders have a series of responsibilities for which we should be held accountable.

When we think of leaders, different ideas come to mind. A leader is somebody we follow. Leaders are people with a clear idea of what they want and they can transmit that idea to their followers clearly and directly. Leaders usually are able to keep others on the track and they are able to provide an environment where people feel comfortable and at ease. Leaders certainly hold power and authority, and if they are in a positive environment, they are able to use that power and authority successfully while they work with the people under them.

If he is in the right environment, people working for (and with) they will respect both their decisions and the integrity with which these decisions are carried out. Kenneth A. Strike (2007:54) discusses some features of a good leader. He states that a good leader should hold authority but should never abuse of it; a good leader should respect others' points of view and acknowledge evidence and support of the ideas presented by others. He adds that leaders never should assume that they are always right; a good leader should set standards and expectations as to what is required from others; and a good leader should also encourage and direct involvement

from the people he works with, so that everybody works actively to reach one general objective.

These certainly sound like really good features for somebody in charge of guiding others. But, how can one achieve these features? How can one succeed in doing the right thing and having full support while doing it?

According to the Ethics and Compliance Officer Association (ECO): The Foundation one fundamental role of a leader who wants a strong ethical environment is to provide clear "*mechanisms*" to establish rules to follow in the workplace, and to promote the "*culture*" that ensures respect and compliance for these mechanisms. This makes sense for us when we assume that a true leader should be able to guide others in following mechanisms both by means of setting examples and by a clear and readily application of the mechanisms that have been created for that purpose. That means the leader should know the mechanisms and he should be able to refer to them when necessary and explain them to others when they are not clear.

Many times this first part is easier than the second one. In Latin America, there are many mechanisms that try to establish the rules to follow; unfortunately, that does not ensure that people will comply with these mechanisms.

That makes the second concept monumentally important. I believe that if we had a culture that acknowledged the importance of these mechanisms, then people would be more likely to follow them. ECOA emphasizes that an *ethical culture* has two different systems that, when working together, provide the right ground for ethics in general and for ethical culture in particular. They define these elements as *ethical culture* in reference to the effort that an institution makes to show and strengthen the values that are important for the institution.

The institution would have a way of showing what is important, what are considered good outcomes, what is valued and what the expected thing to do is. The second element is called *ethical climate*, and this refers to the psychological view that we, as employees, have of our workplace. This involves our perceptions, attitudes and to some extent the decisions we make in regards to our institution. This information begs a few questions: Are we developing an ethical culture at the UNA? Are there any campaigns that invite us to do the right things and show what these right things are for our institution? Are there formal ethics programs that are available for leaders, professors and students in general?

Here are two aspects to which our leaders should pay attention. As

stated earlier, the presence of rules to follow (mechanisms) should not be difficult to establish, as we already have many of them. However, the second element in the formula is not that evident in our institutions.

The foremost important task I would suggest a leader to assume, as his own, is the creation, promotion and implementation of an *ethical culture* including both *ethical culture* and *ethical climate*. The reasons for doing this are very clear if we assume that these would warranty an ethical environment, which will automatically bring positive outcomes for everyone who feels part of that environment.

If people are aware of the regulations, given that they have been well informed about them and they agree on these things as the right things to do, and at the same time they have a positive feeling of respect towards them and value them, then, it follows that they would abide by them. This would result in a much more positive work environment where people would have a clear idea of the rules, knowing them and knowing how to put them into practice; they would have a good perception for their leaders, perceiving them as the ones who set the standards and the ones that implement them whenever they are necessary; they would feel content with their own work and the work of others because they would have the feeling that everyone is working under

the same requirements and towards one single goal; and they would eventually do a better job, becoming more productive and participative which would consequently render positive results for the institution itself. All of this at the same time would reduce ethical conflicts in the work place and create a better, relaxed, more positive work environment.

If we focus on the university context, professors are probably the second most important group needed in that academic context so that it can function smoothly. Assuming that the above elements are present in our institution (i.e., that we have the mechanisms that delineate the shape our actions should have, that our institution informs us and promotes an ethical culture, and that we perceive that culture as positive and have a feeling of responsibility towards that culture), then we can turn to a few other things our leaders can still do to ensure that the workplace and the employees have all they need to perform the best they can.

According to Sims and Sims (2005) there are certain actions that school principals and university leaders, in general, could take to enhance a professor's satisfaction. They suggested that leaders should find a way to involve professors in decision making that affects them, they should motivate professors to

advance professionally, they should offer effective orientation and information processes, they should provide professors with "well-defined personnel policies and procedures available to teachers", they should provide professors with comfortable working spaces (classrooms, lounge and equipment) and finally, professors should be given administrative support so that they can fully carry out their academic tasks.

Once again, are UNA leaders providing these things to the professors working there? Some may be more easily identifiable than others on our campus. And yet, can leaders demand and hold others accountable when the above conditions are not necessarily being met? To what extent can leaders be, or are leaders being, held accountable for this failure in meeting their responsibilities?

What happens once we fail to follow mechanisms and an ethical culture in the workplace? (whether this happens to the person in the highest position of the hierarchy or to any other leaders in lower hierarchical roles). For Ronald R. Sims, "Restoring ethical consciousness to organizations and the workplace begins by establishing a culture based on always "doing the ethical right things, whether the actor is an individual employee, a team or a whole organization". (2005: 394)

The benefits are clear when ethics are present in the workplace. But again, what if someone in the institution does not respect or recognize ethical guidelines? Several sources point to accountability as a possible answer. There are many ideas related to accountability that can support the information presented above in this discussion.

I am sure many others would agree with me and also believe that, in general, a person that assumes a specific job should be held responsible for completing the tasks that are related to that job. Kenneth A. Strike (2007) discusses the idea of accountability and explains that there are different ways of determining who should be accountable for what. For him, people “tend to think of accountability largely as a matter of meeting benchmarks for achievements that are defined by test scores.” (p. 107).

At the university level this may be true when we are talking about students’ performance and what they should be held accountable for in one specific major. And given that students should be the center and soul of any and every university system, this is something worth paying attention to and it will be discussed further in subsequent sections. However, not only students should be held accountable; almost everyone in the system should be held to a certain degree of accountability. In a public institution, particularly

in a university setting, a leader must appear accountable in reference to the set of rules that govern that particular university (the mechanisms mentioned above) and the educational system of the country in general, but that person is also accountable against professional and ethical standards, coworkers, students, parents, community and any other group that may be impacted by the decisions he makes. A leader is not simply an administrator of items and norms in a school or university, although that is what many may assume their task to be; instead, he is responsible for leading a group of people and following the highest standards of ethical decisions, morals and values that impact many people in our society, and he should do so as positively as possible.

According to Ronald R. Sims (2005: 390-393) there are multiple benefits associated with a strong ethical environment. It can have a direct, positive effect in the society of the country in which it occurs; it provides a context with a right moral path in times when things can become difficult; it strengthens co-workers’ ties and makes them work more, and more productively; it helps strengthen academic growth and gives more sense of orientation to the professors working in it. An ethical environment assures that policies and other rules to follow are legal; it helps avoid misconduct both from workers and

students in the institution; it makes it easier to identify the values that are sought and helps form behaviours to match those values; it projects a positive public image of the institution; and most important of all “it is the right thing to do.” Having so many positive benefits it is hard to believe that leaders may not be searching to create the conditions that would provide a true ethical culture and climate. After all, leaders have the power to make things possible and to lead people towards a path that ensures this ethical environment. They are the ones that can exert control so that unethical practices are identified and eradicated from our institutions. Having the “mechanisms” required for people, we need clear instruction on how to follow these and even clearer policies that ensure that we would be held accountable if we choose not to follow them. There can only be benefits as a result of a strong ethical institution. Being aware of ethical practices and being active in terms of ethical matters eventually pays off for each of the organizations where these can be identified.

Professors

In general, professors are to be given all the same responsibilities as those outlined for leaders. They could be narrowed down for them at the classroom and school levels and most importantly to the personal extent of

their actions regarding the following of mechanisms and their application in reference to intellectual production. If they have chosen to work in one particular institution we can assume that professors would set themselves to know about this institution, its “mechanisms” and ideal practices but more importantly they have found a place where they would put their moral and ethical values into practice. They have chosen to “impact” this institution and all of its participants with their actions.

What actions on the part of professors should reflect ethical practices? Various sources mentioned above point to the idea of coworkers aiming at one common goal. In an academic environment, different institutions and programs set specific goals and work together to achieve them. For Kenneth A. Strike; “[i]ntellectual communities aim at research, the pursuit of truth, and educating new members.” (2007:17). All of these goals sound pretty familiar to anybody working in an academic institution, but do we all really pursue them? Strike believes that for goals to be met competition should take a second place in interactions among professors; he thinks cooperation should supersede any other kind of interaction. He claims also that “the excellence of each community member contributes to the excellence of the whole... [i]f the goal is to advance knowledge through teaching or inquiry,

the success of each contributes to the success of all...In good academic departments, able scholars make one another better.” (p.154). Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Again, not everybody is willing to share his knowledge with others and competition to obtain a permanent position or a better evaluation than one’s coworkers can be fierce.

Strike suggests what he calls “The Anatomy of Ethical Decision Making” to describe the characteristics of a good decision. He enumerates them as follows: 1) A decision should be supported by evidence; 2) the ends at which it is aimed are right; 3) such a decision can “be implemented morally”; and 4) it “has been legitimately achieved.” (2007:113) If we analyze the decisions we make as professors in the different spheres we are part of, whether in our academic production, in the way we evaluate students, in how and to what extent we abide by the rules that are part of the ethical culture and climate of the school, to mention a few, and we can proudly declare that the Strike’s four features are present and we are open for discussion about our own decisions, then, we know we have made an ethical decision.

Much later in his book Strike states that conflicts of interest should be avoided and that they refer to the situation whereby “a decision you are involved in has actual or potential

consequences that may benefit you or your family...” (p. 128). He suggests that in this case, the right thing to do would be to inform others that you do not wish to be involved in the decision or particular situation. You may explain why the situation represents a conflict of interest and then you may avoid the situation all together.

The unethical use of information in academia has been subject of much study. What happens when plagiarism is present in professors’ papers, or when the sources used during the treatment of ideas, whole paragraphs or papers is not clear? Plagiarism constitutes a serious case of ethical misconduct and a simple, flat lie. Any person lying has a very strong, negative effect on others, but when it comes to public workers the ramifications of lying are even greater because this action has an impact on a larger number of people. If we work with someone who we know has lied, the dynamics in the workplace may shift, relationships are damaged, and it is much harder to work together and to come to consensual decisions, especially important ones. “Truth-telling is essential to the educational process. Learning cannot occur where there is not confidence in the integrity of those who teach.” (Strike, 2007:16).

People who are not always honest or transparent about the sources of their work, are setting themselves apart from the original ends and aims

that were set for the community, in that case that particular academic community, for the classroom or for the department in the institution. Instead they are seeking to benefit themselves and are forgetting about the group benefits, which should have been the original goal. "Lying signifies a failure of personal integrity. But it also signals and loss of commitment to the purpose of the community." (Strike, 2007:18).

According to Susan O.Blum:

[faculty plagiarism can take many forms. The most common are self-plagiarism (that is, copying from one's own work or repackaging articles in a second or third journal); copying from other's published work; and unrightfully copying graduate students' research. (2009: 19)

Although this seems to be an extremely common phenomenon in the context of higher education, there are not always clear guidelines as to how to deal with it. Blum explains that there are far fewer consequences in cases of plagiarism involving faculty than there are in cases involving students. In the case of our university in particular, although there have been clearly recognized cases of plagiarism, there have been no direct consequences. Here, we would need action on the part of those in positions of leadership, either to establish the mechanisms to

follow and apply in cases of this sort or, if they already exist, to inform about these mechanisms if they are already in effect.

For me, it is fundamentally important to determine the reasons why someone would plagiarize. Is it that one wants to advance in his professional category at all and any costs? Or, might a person be unaware of the concept of plagiarism (and then we wonder what he is transmitting to his students...)? Is it that competition in the workplace is very tough and we need to produce more than others in order to compete successfully? These are also important questions our leaders should be asking; their answers may help them determine how to deal with such instances of misconduct in the workplace. If they fail to identify the reasons, they would be failing at some of the tasks required of good leaders, as described above. Simply ignoring the fact that this situation occurs and that it is more and more common in recent years results in a continuous destruction of the ideals with which public, high-level institutions are associated. We may refer to Aristotle's ideas presented above. If the professors are "the cause" of that action, they must be held accountable for all consequences related to that action. If their actions make a positive difference, then they should receive praise; but, if they are misusing information they are to blame and should face the consequences.

Hersh and Geary Schneider (2005) claim that certain characteristics have been traditionally associated with the roles of professors and that have recently become less apparent in their roles as higher education participants as much as individuals as professionals. It is necessary for both leaders and professor to make sure these features are more evident in professors again.

“Personal responsibility and social responsibility involve the moral obligation to both self and community, and both forms of responsibility rely upon such virtues as honesty, self discipline, respect, loyalty, and compassion. The formation of these personal and social dispositions is powerfully influenced by the character of the community culture and the community’s own integrity and vitality depends in turn, on the values, actions, and contributions of its members” (2005: p. 13).

Again, we return to the importance of the culture in which we are immersed, it becomes a circle where what our culture demands shines light over the individuals that are part of it and at the same time what individuals do is a reflection of what is expected in that culture. It is clear again, that if we want ethical outcomes our culture must be utterly clear as to what it is, for that culture, the right thing to do. The values that were discussed at the beginning of this paper come together

one more time to signal our approach to a decision that is going to be filtered through what is ethically expected in our academic community and culture and which is going to finally result in the ethical decisions we make in all our different fields of action.

As professors, we cannot separate our roles as researchers, when we are dealing with academic production, from our roles as professors within the classroom dealing with students. Our values and ethical decisions permeate the different contexts in which we interact with others. Being part of this profession, we may think that our goal should be providing students with a good education and this should include setting a good example. Mangubhai) says that “[t]o better understand teacher behaviours in the classroom one therefore needs to take into account their moral dimension also, not only the cognitive.” (2007: 179).

Following the idea of teaching and educating students, professors should study, carefully select, and present information that will initiate knowledge in students who then become invited to pursue their own interests in this knowledge themselves. Professors set the example, “leading and managing ethically also means managing with integrity (succeeding and being ethical at the same time). Integrity cascades throughout an organization. It shapes, influences,

and maintains the values, tone climate and culture of the organization...” (Sims and Quatro, 2005: 389). So, if we expect our students to make ethical decisions we must start off by having a consistent behavior (in every scope of action) that exhibits ethical decision-making. We cannot forget the fact that each and every one of our actions will have an impact on others.

Having clear ethical conduct in professional spheres, professors may benefit from different practices to raise students’ awareness about the importance of ethics within the ESL classroom. Leilei, Ehrich and Ehrich (2012) propose a way for ESL professors to project ethical leadership in the classroom, thus developing ethical awareness in students. They propose implementing Confucius’ teachings as a way of “transformational leadership” with the idea of having a strong ethical impact on students who are part of the experience. They ensure that following Bass’s (1985) leadership theory, based on Confucius’ teachings, professors can achieve that goal. The proposal is based on the following four tenets, briefly explained here:

a. *Idealized influence*: That refers to the idea of being a model inside the classroom, who students wish to follow, i.e., someone who students would look up to. If a professor can have that effect on students, they are going to follow his lead and they may transform former

behaviours into the new model they are observing. This experience can be motivating for both professor and students and may enable both to reach higher goals.

- b. *Inspirational motivation*: The leader’s approach and positive interpretation of the future may be encouraging to students while the leader transmits his feelings to them. This may help all identify objectives in common and they also may find ways to get to these ends all together.
- c. *Intellectual stimulation*: Through a promotion of creativity in the classroom a leader points to the importance of rational and academic activity; students are motivated to think and to develop their own ideas.
- d. *Individualized consideration*: A leader would relate to each student as an individual with individual capacities and instructional needs. Individual differences are recognized and dealt with. Students would then find their way to succeed which would mean the professor has also succeeded. The authors acknowledge Confucius’ interest in establishing personal relations with followers as an important element of moral leadership.

If we consider that we as leaders in the classroom set the tone, we may be

willing to incorporate this approach or to look for other ways to bring ethical practices into our ESL classrooms. Personally, it will bring a lot of benefits to my classroom.

Students in the BEI

Considering what has been mentioned above, professors have to assume a serious role when it comes to students. Ideally, we are helping our students become righteous individuals. We should try to impact their lives in such a way that will eventually benefit our society with the greatest possible impact. Strike (2007) says that education has to have clear, and at the same time, broad goals in reference to students. He lists and discusses a few of these features and suggests the following: “students should become economically competent, become good citizens and moral people, be capable of an examined life, and discover ideas, activities, and relationships that enrich their lives.” (p. 19) This means that in our classrooms we are not only forming people who would be part of the active workforce (although that is one of the things we do); we are also forming citizens who are to become active members of society and that through the search of their own ends, ideals and motivations will have a positive impact on society. What is the students’ standing in terms of ethics? We have to be sure students are also aware of their social responsibility.

In times when there is so much access to information, we are thrilled to find information, facts and figures about almost any topic we want to discuss in our classrooms, quickly and without any costs; or so we may think. The truth is that, as easy as it is to find the information we need, it is also easy to run into unethical behaviour and misconduct on the part of our students (as well as in professors as mentioned above) when it comes to dealing with this information. Under the assumption that classes should be student-centered, there has been a tendency to provide students with a lot more freedom than they had been given at other times. Although this can be an advantage for many, it also opens a window (sometimes a big one) that allows the possibility to abuse that freedom. Sadly, this freedom turns, sometimes, into cases of misuse of information, lack of knowledge of how to deal with, use or report certain information and, in serious cases, plagiarism. Such cases are becoming more and more common in our classrooms. Ethics and the results it brings about are many times ignored and undervalued in many modern contexts. The main problem is that we see ethical issues as a set of rules that *should* be followed and many times we do whatever it is possible to avoid them or run past them without being caught. We do not see them as something we wish to have as part of our *modus operandi*, ethical issues

have become something about which some people talk.

Conversely, our true aim as educators should be to form students who are able to develop higher order thinking abilities and who can prove to us and to themselves that they can perform in highly intellectual areas of knowledge. Nevertheless, we do not always find this, and unfortunately many times we run into misconduct that makes us rethink our position and wonder if there is something we could really do.

Where does plagiarism come from? Why do students take refuge in this practice? According to Susan D. Blum (2009), over 75 percent of students agree to having cheated or used some type of information wrongly. She set herself to find the reasons why this happens and found several interesting answers, some of which are mentioned below. For her, Internet use has had a direct effect on the lives of students because it has shifted the way the newer generations perceive texts, both oral and written. Sharing information socially does not necessarily require mentioning its source, so why do it when writing? Students have accepted the social idea of a fast paced society, i.e., if they work fast they can be more productive and even use their time on other activities, so why spend time doing what someone else already did?

Sometimes students who plagiarize do not know how to avoid it or even

that they should avoid it. They do not fully understand the rules and thus do not know how to follow them. I believe that all these findings can be applied to students in many different countries, who share quite different backgrounds. But, I also believe all of them could be redirected to achieve better ends. Here again, a real ethical culture and climate must take effect so that students can clearly identify the right thing to do. If they choose not to follow these right things to do, they have to be held morally responsible for their actions.

Along with the appropriate culture ambiance, there has to be a clear explanation about the different types of practices students should avoid, what these entail and what their consequences can be. For Blum (2009), the word plagiarism entails different things for different people and also different kinds of practices can be traced back to the term. She groups the different types of practices as follows: “*deceptive*: buying a paper, using someone’s freely given paper, importing a paper; *nonce*: using components from elsewhere, patchwriting; *uninformed*: imperfect mastery of citation conventions.” If these are, as she explains, the most common cases; what should we do, as professors of these new generations, to help students do the “right” thing? (p. 27).

If we are aware of our mission as contributors in the shaping of these

students' thought and character, we should instill in them a sense of social and moral responsibility. We must act. Through the activities we develop in class and the way we deal with the different situations that may arise out of these activities, we should transmit our own values and at the same time create in them a real sense of what the right thing to do is; and they, in turn, will develop that sense of social responsibility that will eventually come to be part of them and their own character. If this character already has strong values and an ethical sense in terms of decision making, we are just teaching them what they already know they should do; only now they are applying this knowledge to the university environment and to their particular major. If they lack these values and ethics, we can provide fertile ground where these may grow, big and strong. They have to know that in our classroom, a strong sense of ethics will prevail. They have to be aware of the mechanisms and the ethical culture and climate that are part of the classroom setting. Not so much because they signed a paper that says that or because they talk about that the first day of class; (as this has become a common practice) more important than that; they have to be able to perceive and embrace the idea that that sense of ethics and the sense of social and moral responsibility are the heart of what they (and we) do.

We may want to also raise awareness of the fact that choosing ethical practices may not always be the easiest way to progress. Currently, this practice may have more detractors than followers. Thus we must develop this sense of ethics and social responsibility, so that it is strong enough not to decay and fail when it faces opposition. Furthermore, ethics has to represent a means in itself, rather than just the unusual practice of a few people. For Hersh and Schneider (2005) "educating for personal and social responsibility will take nothing less than a pervasive cultural shift within the academy. Faculty are the key to real change, and we must help them integrate responsibility into all courses." Adding a single course on ethics to the university setting or specific curriculum or taking a serious stand in just one class is not the answer, or at least it is not enough. Students have to really be able to see ethics reflected across the different courses of the major and the daily practices of all professors for it to become real. Language learning offers a space to form personality and it provides room for improvement in all aspects of life, thus it is the ideal setting to implement a change.

As mentioned above for leaders and professors, once the mechanisms have been established and the code of culture is clear for students, they have to assume responsibility for their actions, as would anyone else in society.

They have to learn to be accountable for their actions and the university is a good place for that.

Language classrooms are good places to infuse ethical sense in students who are in the process of defining their personalities. Barbara Bycent Hennig (2010) in her study to determine the students' motivation to learn a third language, identified a number of things that students took into consideration when they decided to learn that language; among these things are: "the learners' feelings and emotions towards their language learning; their longing for self stylization and distinction; the aesthetic and ethical values they attached to their language learning and their considerations on how to prepare themselves for their future lives." (p. 307).

So students are really looking to fulfill a number of personal characteristics and needs via language learning. This opens a great opportunity for professors to use this space for the fulfillment of students' needs in the area of ethics formation and ethical decision-making. From what I understand, classrooms are spaces where students find that formative part that Hennig explains as follows: "ethical self-formation stands for the attempt to discover spaces in pre-given power structures where one can give one's life a certain kind of individuality and special shape" (308).

We cannot lose sight of the fact that the university is, for most people, the starting point of social engagement; once students graduate, they will become an active part of the workforce where they are going to put into practice what they have learned in the university context. Following the quote above, it would be ideal if we as professors could shape students so that they become ethical individuals.

There are several possibilities of how to deal with ethics in the EFL classroom so that students become well acquainted with its concept and reality. Again, for many, this may represent a problem because it takes time away from the core contents of the established curriculum. However, there are ways in which the teaching of ethics can become an active part of our classes without really taking time away from the contents of the class. One approach was already suggested above, through the use of "transformational leadership."

Daniel K. Sokol (2004) claims that it is possible to teach English through ethics using ethics cases. He lists several advantages of this approach; for example, it provides something interesting for students to discuss. Students are not always interested in fully academic topics and may enjoy topics that inspire them more and seem more real to them, and which at the same time offer a space for reflection and interaction with others.

Discussing ethics cases may also offer an opportunity to lessen the distance between student and professor by showing a professor who offers opinions just as students do and does not impose his power as leader of the class. Ethic cases can also be carefully selected to serve one particular linguistic purpose. Depending on the case the professor chooses, instructions may lead students to give emphasis to specific language structures. Professors may create these cases in different ways depending on their purposes; however, a very useful way of doing it is through the use of existing resources offered in many different web pages. Many universities across the United States have web pages where they have open forums about different ethical issues that are categorized according to topic or area of study. This would offer students a real way of learning about ethical issues in the target culture and at the same time practicing language in real contexts.

Conclusions

Throughout this paper there has been a consistent idea that begs for revision of the existing mechanisms present in our university and which deal with how to hold people accountable for their actions, given the impact that each action may have in society. Leaders, professors and students have to take responsibility for their actions and accept the praise or blame for their actions. Most importantly, this is a plea for the promotion of an

ethical climate in the academic culture. The creation or re-implementation of an ethical culture would render many positive outcomes at all levels of the institution. Leaders are also in need of revising the reasons behind unethical practices to determine how to solve problems related to integrity and competition while promoting the use of more cooperative practices. Furthermore, professors are invited to include ethical practices and activities in all courses within the different majors so that they can fulfill their missions of forming morally responsible individuals who will have a positive impact in our society. Students need to be constantly exposed to ethical practices so that they have the opportunity to assuming these as their own.

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