The Role of Teacher as a Moral Agent

A Conceptual Framework for Teachers’ Professional Ethics Development

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Abstract: This paper aims to analyze the moral agency theory holistically and discuss implication the development of teachers’ professional conduct education. The research method used is the concept analyzation with generic analyzation design or the integrative review. Research data sources are the result of research articles on moral agency and the development of ethics of teaching profession gathered by documentation studies and reviewed systematically. The results of this research conclude that the concept of teachers as moral agency can be understood as the double condition which covers the teacher as: 1) exemplary figures who perform professional acts ethically; and 2) as moral educators who teach the virtues of prosperity to the students so that they become human being with character. The structure of the moral agency building within the scope of the teaching profession consists of four components, namely: moral sensitivity, moral consideration, moral motivation, and moral action. This paper is expected to provide significant benefits for the development of literature on the theory of teachers’ competency development in the areas of personality, ethics, and morality competency.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In the middle of 2017, the profile of teachers in Indonesia cannot be fully ideal. Public expectation of teacher service in education is still not fully fulfilled. It is characterized by some of the contradictory phenomena carried out by some of teachers in Indonesia and raises the public's disappointment on the profile of teachers in Indonesia. Referring to the findings of Kesuma (2016) stated that "a lot of negative news about the primary school teachers, among other things, a running text on national TV: 400 works of the promotion of elementary school teachers in X Province is 'piracy'; around 2,000 elementary school teachers of PLPG (Education and Training of Teaching Profession) participants from the total number of tens thousands participants in an area of the organizers did not pass the UK test (competency test)". Kesuma (2016) findings represent an unsatisfactory profile of teachers in Indonesia. The case of 'piracy' works reflects the unethical behavior of the teacher who did it for getting promotion, while the magnitude of teacher failure rates in the PLPG Examination reflects the weakness of the teacher's independence and persistence to become a learner.

Other findings reported, retrieved from http://www.bbc.com/indonesia "in the year of 2017 occurred a case of suicide of a vocational school student in North Sumatra by poisoning himself after allegedly intimidated by unscrupulous teachers after uploading alleged leaks exam answers on social media accounts. This case reopens the debate over the graduation system that is applied on student and school" (Artharini, 2017). The case proves that some teachers in Indonesia have not fully upheld their ethical values in carrying out their profession, the key leakage action and intimidation action against students is a reflection of non-ethical or immoral actions.

Unethical actions done by some teachers become phenomenon of concern and disappoint the expectations of society on public services in the field of education. Unscrupulous cases which are involving teacher raise the concerns about the future profile of future generations who are predicted to experience more moral decadence. Associated with unethical acts by teachers, Jahan and Islam (2014) explained that:
Almost all scholars emphasize teachers’ ethical responsibilities but many university teachers are engaging in unethical behaviour in the form of breaking their commitments to their profession and to students. In curriculum development, classroom teaching, conducting examinations and student evaluation, publishing results, student-teacher interaction, research and publications, teachers have traditionally adopted unfair means whether intentionally or unintentionally.

Refer to the findings of Jahan & Islam, it can be concluded that unethical behavior was still likely to arise in the life of teaching profession. It is caused by the lack of attention on construction of ethics of teaching profession. So far the development program of teacher's competence is still pragmatic, focusing only on the development of competence and teaching skills.

Basically the described situation has represented the crisis of teacher's identity. A study of teacher's professional ethics is likes alienated in their lives. In Strike and Ternasky (1995), education is still lacks of "ethical language" or moral language that can help teachers recognize, articulate, and communicate with other fellow teachers about their moral complexity and teaching ethics. Furthermore, Sockett and LePage (2002) highlighted the current state of the teaching profession which is concern because of the lack of moral vocabulary. In this case, they propose that teachers need a kind of "moral law" to provide a basis for confidence in making ethical judgments that can defeat intuition.

Referring to these problems, the authors recommend a fundamental study about the competence or the role of teachers as moral agency. The study of moral agency is expected to strengthen the identity of the teacher as an autonomous subject, having the will and purpose in conducting his profession ethically. Not only that, teacher also have to install virtue values through moral education and character, so that later the student can be a good personality, tough, intelligent, and noble. This article offers a conceptual framework on the moral agency theory and its implications for the development of teachers' professional conduct.

1.2 Research Question

Referring to the background of the problems that have been described previously, the researchers found that there are gap on the ethics and competence development of teachers as moral agency on the research professional development teachers. Then it is hoped that this paper will be able to answer the following questions:

- What is the meaning of a moral agency?
- What are the dimensions of moral agency in the life of the teaching profession?
- What is the role of teacher as a moral agency?

The three questions will be answered by describing it systematically on the part of the theoretical framework and discussion.

2 THE FOUNDATION OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICAL THEORY

2.1 Study of Ethics for Teaching Profession

Ethic is a fundamental discipline or study for developing human resources. Bertens (2013) describes that ethic has three definitions namely: first, the word ‘ethic’ can be defined as moral values or norms for the guidelines of individual or group in managing their behavior. In a brief, this first definition can be formulated as a “value system” which is validated for both private and society. Secondly, ethic is a collection of principles and moral values in the scope of formal organization; it refers to “ethic code”. In example, the teacher code of ethics is a series of principles or moral values which is adhered to the teacher. The third, ethic is a course about good deed and bad deed. It is a discipline about ethical beliefs which is applied on particular society and become a material critical reflection for methodical and systematically research. Ethic in this third definition can be referred as moral philosophy. In this study, ethic means rights and obligation of education stakeholder, which is teacher; the applied moral policy for taking decision of their profession; and the relationship nature of between the teacher and educational environment such as student, partner, headmaster, the parents and the society itself. Therefore, this study can be regarded as a study of teachers’ professional conduct education that refers to the code of ethics of the teaching profession in Indonesia.

Furthermore, in order to improve the functionality of those 4 components of profession morality, somehow it needs to plan a concept of ethic education in teaching profession-critical consciousness based to improve the competency of moral agency of teacher. Since basically in a profession scope, a study on
profession ethic is very fundamental. According to Bebeau and Monson (2014) “the first purpose of ethic teaching and learning in profession school is to develop the professional skill, afterwards the second purpose is to produce a professional who is able to work collective well for advancing the common good”. In other words, basically being a professional does not only depend on skill and intellectuality, yet how a professional conducts his assignment fully dedicated and always spreading prosperity.

2.2 Teaching Profession Code of Ethics

Regarding to the code of ethics of teacher as a professional position, because on the implementation it demands certain specific skills through an exclusive formal education which called Pendidikan Profesi Guru (Teaching Profession Education), it cannot be separated from the prevailing values. The legal values and procedures that govern a teacher in behaving towards students, peer teachers, society, and government is called the teacher code of ethics. This teaching profession code of ethics is the foundation of moral ethics in order for teachers to carry out their duties.

There are several reasons stated by Surya (2014) on why a code of ethics in a profession is needed, they are:

- To protect the profession in accordance with the provisions and policies established by the government based on applicable legislations. This code of ethics will allow the profession to self-regulate and perform its functions automatically within the applicable legislations;
- To control the possibility of disagreements in the dispute of the executors. Thus the code of ethics can maintain and enhance internal and external stability of the profession;
- Protecting practitioners in the community especially in regard to malpractice cases (false practices). If the practice of a certain profession is in line with the ethical lines, then the practice can be considered to meet the standards;
- Protecting clients professionally from unlawful practices.

Before the code of ethics of teachers formulated, the history recorded PGRI (Indonesian Teacher's Union), XVI Congress held on 3-8 July 1989 in Jakarta has been established the Indonesian Teachers Pledge with the following formula:

- We the Teachers of Indonesia, are the peoples' educators who believe and serve the Almighty God;
- We the Teachers of Indonesia, are the bearers and implementers of the ideals and Proclamation of Independence of the Republic of Indonesia, defenders of the Pancasila and loyal practitioners of the 1945 Constitution;
- We the Teachers of Indonesia, determined to realize the national goals in the intellectual life of the nation;
- We the Teachers of Indonesia, are united in one organization: The Teachers Association of the Republic of Indonesia, fostering the unity of the nation;
- We the Teachers of Indonesia, upholding the Code of Ethics of Indonesian Teachers as a guideline of professional conduct in the devotion to the Nation, the State and humanity.

Based on the Indonesian teacher's pledge above, it can be concluded that teaching is a really noble job because teachers carry a world and hereafter oriented humanitarian mission. The teaching profession requires one's strong will in fulfilling their duties to always hold fast to the divine pillars, and belief in God's rewards on the services of teachers that carry the mission of humanity which is humanization. If we take a closer look to the last Teachers Pledge, Indonesian teachers promised to uphold the code of ethics of Indonesian Teachers as a guide of their professional conduct. In performing its profession, teachers are guided by the norms applicable in the teaching profession code of ethics.

According to Mars (2008), it is required an ethical standard in instilling knowledge and skills to students in schools. Teachers are required to be proficient in making daily ethical decisions in order to plan, implement, and evaluate learning. The rights and obligations of teachers and students are guided through the teaching profession code of ethics, therefore Mars (2008) provides his views on the teaching profession code of ethics into some points namely teaching ethics, moral ethics, relationship ethics between teachers and education councils, relationship ethics between teachers and principals, relationship ethics between teacher and student, relationship ethics between school and private industry.

The code of ethics of a profession is formulated and mutually agreed upon by members of a profession. Especially regarding to the Indonesian teachers’ code of ethics, PGRI (Teachers' Association of the Republic of Indonesia) has established the
teachers code of ethics as one of organization complementary as stipulated in the articles of Association and bylaws of PGRI. The following is the Indonesian Teachers Code of Ethics, abbreviated as KEGI (Kode Etik Guru Indonesia) by the decision of the 8th PGRI Congress which took place on 21-25 November 1973.

INDONESIAN TEACHERS CODE OF ETHICS

Indonesian teachers realize that education is a field of devotion to God Almighty, the Nation, the state, and humanity. Indonesian teachers who are Pancasilaist and loyal to the 1945 Constitution are also responsible for the realization of the ideals of the Proclamation of 17 August 1945. Therefore, the Indonesian Teacher is called to fulfill their work by obeying the following principles.

1. Teachers vow to guide the learners to form a true Pancasilaist Indonesian
2. Teachers possess and conduct professional verity.
3. Teachers should make efforts to obtain information about learners as materials to teach and guide.
4. Teachers should be able to create a teaching-learning atmosphere as well as possible to support the success of the process.
5. Teachers should maintain good relationships with parents and surrounding communities to foster their participation and shared responsibility for education
6. Teachers should personally and collectively develop and improve the quality and dignity of their profession.
7. Teachers should maintain professional relationships, the spirit of brotherhood, and social solidarity.
8. Teachers should collectively maintain and improve the quality of PGRI as a means of struggle and devotion.
9. Teachers should implement all government policies in education.

Source: (Surya, 2014)

In its journey, PGRI continues to conduct assessment along with the various demands that developed in the field but still refers to the essence of the Indonesian Teachers Code of Ethics that was formulated for the first time. The essence of the Indonesian Teachers Code of Ethics can be illustrated as follows:

![Figure 1: The essence of the Indonesian Teachers Code of Ethics.](image)

Referring to figure 1, it is understandable that the teachers code of ethics provides a professional guidance for teachers to be able to interact ethically in various social relationships ranging from students, parents or guardians, communities, schools, peers, professional organizations and the government. Teachers have a moral responsibility to always maintain good relationships with all social environments that are related to the life of the teacher. Studies on the role of teachers as a moral agent will clarify the role of teachers in applying the professional code of ethics in everyday life.

3 RESEARCH METHODS

This research method is a concept of analysis method along with generic analysis to identify the essential meaning of a concept. The analysis isolates elements which distinguish a concept from other words. The result of the generic analysis is the clarity of a concept. The indicator is the availability of definitions and arguments which support the meanings. Generic analysis design could be called as integrative review. The method is conducted in some steps starting from problem identification, literature searching, evaluation and data analysis, and the last is reporting (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005; Brady & Asselin 2016).

- The problem is the need of conceptual framework relates to a theory of moral agency and Teachers’ Professional Ethics;
- Literature review applies article references which are posted in a website that provides the variety of trusted international publications such as sciencedirect.com, SAGE publications, ERIC journals. The literature searching uses some keywords: moral agency, self-concept,
self-regulation, critical consciousness, teacher’s development, and ethical study;
- The evaluation data is being done through article selection which supports literature review of moral agency and Teachers’ Professional Ethics;
- Data analysis, the researchers adopt line method by line coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Researchers identify phrases, sentences and themes relate to research review;
- Reporting, the last product from integrative review, is the steady-state concept concerning the role of teachers as a moral agent.

4 DISCUSSION AND LABORATION

4.1 Describing Concept of Moral Agency Theory as A Background Study of Teacher Profession Ethic

To completely understand the concept of moral agency, we may begin with understanding the nature of human being as an autonomous creature, free, and has consciousness to manage himself whether it is in aspect of cognitive, affective, and intuitive in the various life context. Ultimately, “agency” characteristic is simply possessed by human. It is in line with Taylor arguments in (Sugarman, 2005) that: a person is a being who not only possesses self-awareness and ‘who has understanding of self as an agent’ (p.263), but, moreover, is ‘a special kind of agent’ (p. 261) in that persons are agents for whom things have characteristically human significance. Furthermore, Freire (2001) adds that human is ‘a historical being’, the author interpreted this term as a human ability to arrange marks of his existence in socio-cultural reality autonomously, human has decision towards himself to reflect his experience as well as setting up ethical goal of his life.

Human autonomy reflects its freedom of will. Berlin (2014) analyzes two concepts of freedom. In negative view, freedom or independence is equal to the absent of intervention from another party, the adult persons are free as long as they are not interfered by others, so that this freedom becomes relative, ambiguous and non-ethical. In positive view, human has his freedom when he is able to be what he should be (normative), an ideal self. Tilaar (2012) states this condition as ‘free but responsible’. The point of Tilaar’s statement about freedom in frame of responsibility shows that each of human behavior should be based on moral consciousness, or can be defined as conscience (Bertens, 2013) that guides human spiritually to always do a good deed.

Based on the above elaboration, it can be perceived that moral agency is a special spiritual component of human. Moral agency is autonomy or will of human to make a cause, control authority, and the creator of moral behavior to consciously do a good deed and prevent a bad deed. The moral agency even becomes a life goal and pattern of behavior which is willingly exerted with full integrity. The definition is interpreted by the author from several meanings of moral agency which are described by the experts. Bandura (2002) stated in his article titled “Selective moral disengagement in the exercise of moral agency” that:

*Moral agency has dual aspects manifested in both the power to refrain from behaving inhumanely and the proactive power to behave humanely. Moral agency is embedded in a broader socio-cognitive self-theory encompassing affective self-regulatory mechanisms rooted in personal standards linked to self-sanctions (Bandura, 2002).*

According to Bandura, it can be understood that mechanism process of self-regulation is inseparable part of moral agency. Relating to the self-regulation, Bandura developed his theory to discuss the methods of people control towards the events in their lives through self-regulation on their thoughts and acts (Schunk, 2008). One of the main assumption from social cognitive theory by Bandura is that persons want to “control the events that influence their life” and see themselves as an agent (Schunk 2008).

Based on Bandura statement in the context of ethic study, it can be concluded that human is a creature who serves as the creator of act (agency), human always interact and gives influence to his environment in ethical way; it involves cognitive (moral reasoning), affective (feeling or emotion), and conative (intention or motivation) processes. The harmonization of those three processes will help human to manifest their ethical behavior in daily life.

Moreover, Pasupathi and Wainryb (2010) said that: Actually, one element of individual moral agency may be proved in their tendency to consider the scale of moral relevance from their behavior. The consideration of greater moral relevance to the behavior can produce a motivation to do good deeds, whilst the consideration of lesser moral relevance will produce hesitancy and pettiness to do bad things that may hurt others.
Assessing a behavior for having moral relevance needs a negotiation among the individual, their social world and culture, and the nature of their behavior (Smetana, 1982; Turiel et al., 1991). In its core, moral value always makes dialectical with self, social environment and the developed culture. Besides increasing the relevance of moral through behavior, moral agency also assists human to control situational or external barrier that can create moral disengagement (Pasupathi and Wainryb 2010; Bandura 2002).

In case of situational and external barrier, Bandura et al. (1996) reminded to avoid social environment which is non-ethical and create obstacles, it can trigger moral disengagement, weakening self-regulation process, as well as degrading the role of moral agency in life. The deactivation of self-regulation can take place through (1) moral justification, (2) the use of euphemistic language to hide the actual purpose of one’s action, (3) advantageous comparison, (4) the displacement of responsibility, (5) the diffusion of responsibility, (6) minimizing or ignoring the consequences of one’s conduct, (7) dehumanizing the victim and (8) the attribution of blame (Hiekkataipale and Lamsa, 2017).

In another reference, Taylor (1989), an expert in identity theory, stated in his work titled “Sources of the self: The making of the modern identity” cited in Sugarman (2005) described that, “We are self-interpreting, and in our attempts to understand, we participate in the shaping of our own being and becoming. Taylor proposes that in order for our self-interpretaions to get off the ground, however, it is necessary to see ourselves against a horizon of qualitative distinctions and standards of worth”. Sugarman (2005) explained that the specialty of Taylor’s contribution towards discussion of personal self-identity is acquired from explicit moral perspective that he brought to hermeneutics thesis. It argues that: “human interprets himself.”

According to Taylor (1989), human as moral agency because he is in the space of moral question about the thing that gives meaning and value in human life, and the meaning of being a human and good person. During the discovery of meaning and value of life, human needs to do a strong practical evaluation towards the values which is developed in society, interpreting the values in qualitative way, articulating ‘constitutive wealth’ explicitly inside the self. A constitutive wealth is moral purposes that order us to critically evaluate values, framing moral commitment, and affirming the ethical principles in life completely.

In conclusion, moral agency is human capability to interpret self, begin from the meaning discovery and fundamental values for human life, evaluate it qualitatively, articulate it in a form of high moral purposes, and implement it in life consistently and comprehensively. Based on the experts and scholars arguments about moral agency, it can be synthesized that: in multiple dimension of life, human faces social environment which has potentiality to give good or bad influences, the good influences will strengthen moral character in human self. In the opposite, the bad influences have potentiality of moral disengagement in self. It is the point where self-regulation process that can strengthen moral agency is needed. It is not a light issue, so that we need strong effort to make all human become capable to interpret their selves as a creature with morality to live this life in ethical and normative way.

4.2 Teacher as Moral Agent

Essentially, teacher is a noble profession which has a high ethical value. It holds a mission to produce better humane generation for the nation. In this case, reality of education faced by the teacher in wider context is to create humanization, a conscious and well-planned effort in developing various human potentialities in multidimensional way, in which it becomes an ideal and complete human; it is not about education in the narrow context (teaching or training). In this humanity mission, teacher is obliged to understand deeply moral of self-identity, based on Hart (2005), “Moral identity is a vital conception in human life at least for two reasons. First, it helps us to understand not only moral example but also the cases of moral destruction. Second, it is a bridging conception between philosophical conception about moral life and certain empirical evidences from the ethic and psychological researches.

Referring to Hart (2005) argument, moral identity is a strong basis to build awareness of moral agency for the teacher. Moral identity also serves as a compass in interpreting moral values critically. However, “moral values in human life can influence and force human to establish a pure life and create goodness. It also gives benefit among people which is based on the condition when human adhered and obey to the moral policies, he will then have moral responsibility of his identity as a human” (Blasi, 1999).

Moral identity and the comprehension of moral values will support moral consciousness. Campbell (2008) argues that “as a moral agency, teacher needs to have a high moral consciousness.” In this case, the
level of awareness is inserted when teachers develop their capacity to identify how moral values and its sources become and how the ethic can be done through the action, utterance, decision, and their own intention. This relationship is created intellectually, emotionally, intuitively, philosophically, practically, and experientially. It happens when the teacher makes a self-reflection and collective discussion with his colleagues about the job they have been pursued every day”. Furthermore, Campbell (2003) suggests that Moral Agency is the result of professional role and responsibility of the teacher, it is expressed and confirmed in daily practice by giving role model, self-management, moral teaching, connecting and advising and self-involvement. Moral agency is counselling about goodness and moral principles and ethic which are intertwined from the difficulties both in life and in the classroom.

Regarding to Campbell (2003), (1) it is important to build trust toward the teacher that has obligation as moral agency which is classified into two activities area: ethically doing a professional action such as wisdom, discipline, altruistic, cooperative, visionary, responsible, and full integrity to the job; and (2) teaching moral values using character education approach such as honesty, just, bravery, patriotism, patience, empathy, etc. The purpose of character education is to shape students’ identity to have a quality of moral character as well as good characteristic performance. Moral character can be defined as the power to do a good thing anytime and anywhere, while the characteristic of performance can be defined as capacity or power to do best with full integrity to achieve a life goal properly (Davidson et al., 2010).

In conducting the obligation, teacher must become a good role model for everyone, both for the students, students’ family, work partner, headmaster and the grand society. Vargas (2001) in a particular research about teacher moral development and professional ethic, noted that behavior, nature, value and priority of the teacher is the most prominent factor in making role model for the student, and also transfer value of goodness to the student. In line with Vargas (2001), Ki Hajar Dewantara, an education scholar in Indonesia, expressed a concept of “Leadership Trilogy” in educational context. This trilogy is a portrayal of a teacher as the leader in educational world which should have three characteristics. First, the teacher should be capable to be a role model for the student; second, the teacher needs to escalate the spirit and affection among the student. Third, the teacher should be capable to lead the student: (a) (guiding students’ behavior) to have a high ethic. (b) Giving trust to a student to find the potentiality or nature (Ibrahim and Hendriani, 2017).

4.3 Development Structure of Moral Agency

The Development Structure of Moral Agency in the context of the development of professional ethics has been formulated by the followers of Kohlberg which is often called Neo-Kohlbergisme incorporated in 'The Minnesota Group’ (Rest, Narvaez, Thomas and Bebeau) initiated the FCM theory (four-component model of moral functioning) implicated in the development of professional ethics. Neo-Kohlbergisme research is summarized by Howard J. Curzer in his article entitled "Tweaking the Four-Component Model", Curzer (2014) explains:

“four-component model of moral functioning (FCM). The components of the FCM are: moral sensitivity (the ability to recognize the morally salient aspects of a situation and to interpret morally challenging situations), moral judgment (the deliberative ability to determine which options in a situations are morally required, acceptable or prohibited), moral motivation (the prioritizing of morality, i.e. the lack of inclinations contrary to morality or the ability to force oneself to do the right thing despite contrary inclinations), and moral character (the package of abilities that one needs in order to implement one’s moral choices effectively)”

Referring to the Curzer's opinion, researchers could make the four components as the structure of moral agents development in the context of teaching profession ethics. Strengthened by Rest et al. (1999) who also developed FCM into the development of professional ethics in general. The first component is moral sensitivity, in the opinion Rest et al. (1999) moral sensitivity is a skill that includes knowledge and emotions about the issue or problems that hit the profession, also, the abilities of regulation, code of ethics, and the norms of one's profession, and knowing when they should be applied. The second component is moral consideration, Rest et al. (1999) poses moral judgment as the ability to think carefully about professional dilemmas, such as when to give appropriate moral judgments in the professional life. The third component is moral motivation, Rest et al. (1999) calls it the ability to find the identity of the profession, build commitment and integrity in the profession, and design strategies for self-improvement. The fourth component is the moral character; the author is more suitable to use the word
"moral action". The fourth component is the teacher's efforts in implementing conscious and autonomous moral behaviors in various dimensions of life, the fourth component representing an adequate moral agent. Moral action includes competence, desire, and habits.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This research offers a conceptual idea of moral agent theory holistically and its implications for the development of teaching profession ethics education. By far, researches on improving teacher competence in Indonesia only focused on professional and pedagogic competence. PLPG (Teaching Profession Education and Training Program) and the Teacher Learning Competency Improvement Program are the examples that focused only on developing teachers' skills in classroom management and developing learning tools. There is a void in teachers' professional ethics education based competence improvement. This study recommends the importance of teachers to act as moral agents focused on two areas: the development of ethical professionalism actions and the enhancement of the ability to develop moral education in the classroom. The structure of moral agent development uses four components of the moral functionality of Neo-Kohlbergism: moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation and moral action. Hopefully this study will provide significance for the study of teaching profession ethics education. The weakness of this research is the fact that it is not yet entered the practical level, so that the benefit cannot be practically perceived by the society. This new research is discourse in the form of conceptual framework obtained from integrative study and concept analysis from previous research. The recommendation for further research is to try to develop the didactic-methodical design of moral agent education for the development of teaching professional ethics.

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