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EDITORIAL

INTERCULTURAL MANAGEMENT AND ETHICS MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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There are many publications about intercultural management and ethics in various fields: business, healthcare, law, social activities. There are also many publications about teaching intercultural management and ethics including higher educations. However, there are few scholars or practitioners who did research and published significant results regarding managing ethics and intercultural issues in higher education.

This is the reason why the role of professional ethics in the academic world should be analysed. While other professional areas such as business, law, and healthcare, have been subject to the analysis and supervision of academic ethicists, the academy itself has been immune to such responsibility, in defiance of substantial academic scandals. In order for the university community to develop harmoniously in an upward direction, professional ethics must play a constitutive role in the academy. Even at first sight, there is a lack of ethical training of teachers and academics leaders.

Many articles in the press draw attention to the various academic, administrative and social issues that raise ethical dilemmas for the university at all levels, such as objectivity and transparency of academic staff engagement, academic confidentiality, students' rating criteria, the use of university investment budgets and the responsibility of university professors in student relationships. Making the general public aware of these ethical issues in the academic environment can help maintain ethical responsibility for teachers, academic leaders and students by promoting transparency, roles and responsibilities clearly defined, building the academic community on ethical foundation, and developing modern and flexible organizational structures.

In order to capture unethical and unprofessional activity in the university, Keenan (2011) focuses on reports from universities in the United States. He highlights the extent of the lack of professional ethics referring to very different communities within the university: administration, faculty, staff, and students. The author argues that while readers might think that the scandals are “typically American”, most readers will see that the problem at U.S. universities are fairly pervasive in the academy, wherever it exists.

In light of his article, the same author suggests that we need first to articulate a professional code of conduct for each community within the university. Rather, we need to develop a culture of awareness among faculty, staff, administrators and student, that the university ought to recognize that for us to flourish as such, we need to be aware of the integral, constitutive roll of ethics in that formation of a flourishing community. He concludes with an interesting question: “Why and how should a university seek to develop a role for academic ethics, inasmuch as the role is largely non-existent?”

In the same vein, Puiu and Ogarca (2015) revealed that managers in higher education system from Romania believe in their role as ethical models, but they are not really aware of

the possibilities offered by a solid implementation of ethics management. They do not know very well the instruments they can use for raising the ethical level of their institutions. The most used are ethical codes and ethical committees, even if the dissemination of the rules stated is not so efficient. Ethical trainings, ethical experts, ethical hot lines or the procedures protecting whistle-blowers are not even known by most of the managers. The authors argue that the situation of corruption in Romania may be a consequence of a poor understanding and implementation of ethics management.

Another opinion on this hot topic of professional ethics in universities belongs to a scholar in Mexico. Lopez Zavala (2015) considers that university teachers' duty not only emanate from the field of knowledge and from what society expects from higher education institutions, they also emerge from what is established in the purposes of the university discourse and each professional career. In education, what is prescribed does not harmoniously turn into actions, the ethical formation included in the institutional proposal has a weak presence in students' culture; this is, a wide fringe of the faculty tends to reject and to keep in definitions before ethical principles during their teaching practice. He argues that such assertion is not absolute, among the universe of teachers and students where the cultural exploration was carried out there are signs which allow to relativize this fact given that there is an important segment maintaining convictions and attitudes oriented by professional ethics.

As I have shown above in the examples in the US and in Romania, in Mexico as well, the technical dimension of formation is placed as the only referent to value the quality of university education. Such a subject cannot be minimized; the invasion of non-ethical practices leads to the weakening of students' moral values, implicitly the ethical principles of future graduates. Facing this sad reality, the professional ethics of the university is an essential cultural device, especially to make university space a place to achieve solid ethical principles.

There is a strong link between ethics management and intercultural management. Thus, the promotion of intercultural education serves as a starting point for promoting equity and unity in diversity on solid ethical grounds. Consequently, higher education institutions, sensitive to the principles of university ethics, must continuously seek ways to update and achieve the ideals of intercultural education. This search can take the form of symposia, conferences, forums, open dialogues and the like, aimed at promoting intercultural education and equity. Universities must consider including intercultural education in higher education policy, then establish the key features of a intercultural curriculum, and devise strategies for developing intercultural thinking skills.

This avoids situations in which teachers and students may sometimes not be aware of cultural differences that may affect the relationship of power or communication between teachers and students. Other aspects of intercultural communication that may lead to misunderstanding include linguistic traits, such as different rules of decision making, communication and acceptance, feelings and emotions or ways of conflict management.

Thus, higher education can provide staff and students with a great opportunity to put into practice the development of intercultural competences. However, as we have shown before, this does not happen in too many cases, and when it does, it is not happening without a structured awareness and preparation. Higher education staff are in a privileged position in many ways (power relations, high professional competencies, etc.) to acquire and develop these skills and to encourage the development of these skills primarily through modelling and use of specific techniques and strategies within universities.

Everything I have presented above is an invitation to think more deeply and get to the core of the issues that are, or should be controversial. The universities have to revisit their ethical codes and practices and train students to make ethically-oriented behaviour a way of life in their future careers. Comprehensive ethics education can improve ethical standards.

Lack of commitment to teaching, lack of interest in student outcomes, plagiarism, imposture, and false advertising about job opportunities open to graduates are examples of institutional practices that corrode ethics in universities. All these sad examples of practices in universities raise us two essential questions for the future of the academic world: Do universities have to learn modern ethical standards by imposing them from outside? Or is it possible to adopt them from the inside?

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3. López Zavala, R. (2015). Professional Ethics of University Professors A Weakness of Higher Education in Mexico. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 5(9(1)), 215-222.