

The Connotation of University Teacher's Dignity and Strategies to Safeguard It

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Abstract

The “dignity” of university teachers refers to the established and strengthened sense of self-respect. University teachers would have a sense of belonging and a sense of control when they are self-respected, self-dignified and constantly strive to be stronger. As the multi-cultural era makes the way knowledge is imparted and information is received unprecedentedly convenient, teachers are no longer the only source for students to obtain knowledge from. It is true that the loss and deterioration of dignity among university teachers is a fact facing us. In response to these problems, it is urgent to reshape and safeguard the dignity of university teachers. However, teachers, universities and government must work together before the dignity is reshaped and safeguarded as it is a systematic project.

Keywords: university teacher, dignity, safeguard.

1. Introduction

“How to study and respect teachers are among the most challenging things in the world; Knowledge is valued when teachers are revered; People realize how to esteem study when knowledge is valued.” The quote that can be found in *On Learning* in the *Book of Rites* means only when a teacher is respected can the knowledge, principles and skills imparted by him or her be cherished. Later it is believed to indicate what makes a teacher is honorable and dignified. As a Chinese proverb goes, a scholar would prefer death to humiliation. It can be found that dignity is regarded more important than life by ancient Chinese intellectuals. Today university teachers as the typical intellectuals need to safeguard the dignity of teachers as is what stands for the spirit of the community.

2. What does university teacher's dignity mean?

Dignity in recent years has already become a hot topic. Former premier Wen Jiabao stated in the Report on the Work of the Government that everything the Chinese government did is for the purpose of creating a happier and more dignified life for people. So what is “dignity”? It is defined in Modern Chinese Dictionary as honorable, solemn and respectable identity or status. Nevertheless, “dignity” as one of the concerns in the academic circle is universally believed to be arduous to be defined as a concept because it is a combination of multiple relations rather than an object of any forms. “Dignity” is something enjoyed only by mankind. It is beyond any value and cannot be replaced. Xiao Dan, a professor in Ji Lin University interprets dignity from two perspectives. Internally, “dignity” is a personal feeling about his own value and importance or precisely a “sense of self-respect”. Externally, “dignity” is the acknowledgment that can be found in judgment or comment made by others who deem the subject is

respectable. Even though the conceptual interpretation of “dignity” tends to be descriptive, it covers the major contents of the university teacher’s dignity. Accordingly, it makes it possible to define the contents of the dignity of university teachers in two perspectives. Internally or psychologically, the “dignity” of university teachers refers to the established and strengthened sense of self-respect. University teachers would have a sense of belonging and a sense of control when they are self-respected, self-dignified and constantly strive to be stronger. In this sense, teachers would become fully aware of their principal status and even more confident and passionate at work. Finally, they would appear to be more qualified and even find self-efficacy in themselves. Externally or sociologically, the “dignity” of university teachers refers to the respect and acknowledgement for university teacher’s values that are obtained from the students or other people, and hence the honorable or respectable status or identity shaped in people’s mind.

3. How to safeguard the dignity of university teachers?

As the multi-cultural era makes the way knowledge is imparted and information is received unprecedentedly convenient, teachers are no longer the only source for students to obtain knowledge from, and classroom is no longer the only place to learn in. Traditional teacher-centered teaching pattern is thus suffering severe shocks. Moreover, tempted or influenced by the prevailing commodity economy, some university teachers are unclear about their career goals, pendulous in their occupational belief, under-motivated for their work, less conscious about imparting knowledge and educating people, careless with academic research and undisciplined. What’s worse, some teachers become no model of students by losing teacher ethics and committing academic misconduct. That is ruining the image and human dignity of university teachers. It is true that the loss and deterioration of dignity among university teachers is a fact facing us. In response to these problems, it is urgent to reshape and safeguard the dignity of university teachers. However, teachers, universities and government must work together before the dignity is reshaped and safeguarded as it is a systematic project.

3.1 What should university teachers do?

To safeguard happiness for university teachers is to safeguard dignity for them. It is a necessity for university teachers to show their legitimate existence or irreplaceable status with their own values given that they want to remain dignified, professionally prestigious, universally acknowledged and contented. According to Conde, it is called equivalence when something can be replaced by others, however, it is called dignity when something valuable is beyond any value and cannot be replaced. However, what makes university teachers irreplaceable is not anything inbred or endowed by God. This irreplaceability cannot be achieved unless they are constantly improving and actively working for it. Independent profession development is the source that drives university teachers to embrace self-dignity, self-efficacy and sense of belonging. Independent profession development generally includes teacher’s ethics construction, upgrade of knowledge structure and improvement of teacher’s professional ability. Great efforts can be made by university teachers from the following aspects. Individually, they can be initiatively spirited, innovative, self-disciplined and conscious to improve, making themselves knowledgeably admirable, morally adorable and attractive.

3.1.1 To strengthen teacher’s ethics construction.

Teachers are the foundation of education while teacher’s ethics are the soul of being teachers. Sukhomlinskii once pointed out that a teacher is not only a teacher but also an educator, a mentor and a guide. Importance must be attached to the fostering and improving of teacher’s ethics, which is a

necessary requirement for independent profession development and a prerequisite for teachers to get social acknowledgement and values to be respected. Confucius, master of Confucianism once said teachers are able to teach others only if they have noble characters and exemplary conduct, which tells us that the primary task of a teacher is to establish fine virtues and cultivate a moral character. Only with such a character can he become a model of others and become respectable. Also, president Xi Jinping made it clear in a faculty seminar held in Peking University that morality is of great significance to individuals and the society at large. He emphasized that university teachers should never forget the mission of imparting knowledge and educating people, that university teachers should be ready to be a staircase and paving stone, guiding students with great personality charm, opening with academic achievements the door to wisdom for students and that university teachers should be the ones who impart knowledge and guide behavior. Since the foundation of People's Republic of China in 1949, higher education in China has scored unprecedented achievements featuring many excellent teachers and advanced model teachers who represent the noble ethics of modern university teachers. It gives expression to the nobility and greatness of university teachers and they have thus gained wide praise and respect. However, in an open market economy, it is an emergency to resolve some prominent problems related to moral construction. In order to solve these problems, Ministry of Education and China Education Science Culture and Health Union have formulated and issued Norms of Occupational Ethics for University Teachers, which prescribes that university teachers, in accordance with the norms should be patriotic, dedicated and students-caring. They are expected to be careful with academic studies, serve the society and be a model of students. Teachers should assume the glorious responsibility and holy mission of rearing people, imparting knowledge and teaching students, meanwhile moving students with lofty sentiments and ultimately winning over acknowledgement as well as respect with remarkable character and higher working efficiency.

3.1.2 To update knowledge structure.

Knowledge for university teachers should be composed of professional knowledge for the subjects they teach, basic knowledge in relevant subject, pedagogical and psychological knowledge and so on so forth. It is a precondition and guarantee for university teachers who are in a special profession to construct a scientific and reasonable knowledge structure. University teachers are a tree of life. Knowledge they own is the root which makes for exuberant leaves when it is deeper in soil. In other words, with a broader and more profound knowledge base, a university teacher is better able to make their professional life dynamic and their ability sustainable and then show self-esteem and the courage in unceasingly striving to be strong and enterprising. In the era with explosive information, university students are able to use the methods in collecting, selecting and processing information, so teachers are no longer almighty giants. Their merits in imparting knowledge are thereof weakened. In this sense, they are supposed to advance with the times, focus more on study and increase themselves with more knowledge to update their knowledge structure. That is how they become a model of students in terms of knowledge and behavior and that is "what more knowledge and high moral integrity makes a teacher" means. To expand knowledge quantity of teachers has almost become the most important condition for students to expand their knowledge input and establish a prestige for teachers. Chan Korsakov suggests that teachers who have an insatiable desire to learn would be tireless in teaching. If he or she wants to supply students with a bowl of water, a teacher has to prepare a pail of water and even endless tap water to offer. Only in this way can teachers become permanently prestigious and embrace the dignity among students.

3.1.3. To enhance professional competence.

Professional ability is the ability people are equipped with in a special profession. Professional ability of university teachers includes teaching ability, the ability for scientific research and service ability. Teaching ability is in the first place of the abilities as university is an institution where people are educated and it is responsible for personnel training. The ability for scientific research is an important part of professional ability for university teachers. As a worker in modern universities, the seat of learning or knowledge workshop, a university teacher is an important knowledge producer whose ability for scientific research is determining both quantity and quality of the produced knowledge. Service ability refers to the ability university teachers have in meeting the needs for social developments by way of mastering and creating knowledge. Professional ability of a university teacher is closely related to his or her social status and dignity. Teachers with better professional ability are better able to serve students and the society and show their self-value in personnel training and social services and can be accepted and respected by students and the public. As a result, efforts should be exerted to improve professional ability. It is a must for university teachers to be earnest in preparing each lesson and adaptive to changing times by actively adjusting teaching contents and methods so as to promote effective learning with profound knowledge and admirable exquisite teaching art. When it comes to scientific research, it is suggested that university teachers contribute to a more thriving country, a more prosperous society and a more decent well-being for people by burying their head in academic studies, endeavoring to enhance the ability for scientific research and producing more favorable fruits. In the meantime, university teachers are also expected to work for the people and meet people's needs by walking out of the ivory tower and getting closer to the people's life. To be precise, they are supposed to serve for social and economic needs with knowledge innovation and technology inventions and to forge ahead the spirit which can serve as a beacon for the public by playing a role of think-tank in order to improve their ability in social services. It can be said that to improve the teaching ability, ability for scientific research and service ability is the most important way for university teachers to be dignified.

4. What should university, government and the society do?

Apart from the efforts made by the teachers in constructing ethics, upgrading knowledge structure and improving professional ability, universities, the society and government should play a part as well in safeguarding the dignity of university teachers. Abraham Maslow, an American psychologist proposed in the five hierarchies of needs that people experience a sense of dignity when a hierarchy of need is met. The dignity is safeguarded through material and positive autognosis and self-evaluation. Hierarchy of Needs Theory implies that government as the subject of social public rights is supposed to advocate a favorable environment in which teachers and their teaching are respected, to attach importance to the living conditions of university teachers, the livelihood, work of university teachers, to the improvement of learning environment, the enhancement of social status and treatment of university teachers so as to make university teachers respectable and the profession appealing. In addition, university as an education institution is expected to be a defender of dignity of university teachers by establishing admittance norms for university teachers and improving management system. University management should work to show humanistic care, to create a democratic, liberal and harmonious campus, to take seriously campus culture and to carry forward the teacher's dignity by respecting individuality, caring about teachers' health, and ensuring their safety.

5. Conclusion

The studying of the meaning of the university teacher's dignity and the safeguard strategies, which will have a significant meaning in understanding the connotation of education. The university teachers should have the positive faith in survival value.

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