

THE MORAL NATURE OF TEACHER'S PROFESSION

MORÁLNA PODSTATA UČITEĽSKEJ PROFESIE

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Abstrakt

Vyučovanie, ako je zdôraznené v tomto príspevku, je morálne úsilie. Jeho morálnu podstatu možno postrehnúť v niekoľkých rozmeroch, spomedzi ktorých je v príspevku analyzovaný aspekt asistencie pri morálnom rozvoji študentov. Všeobecne môžeme hovoriť o dvoch možných spôsoboch dosiahnutia tohto cieľa: v prvom študentom predstavíme rozličné morálne teórie, v druhom ich vystavíme osobnosti učiteľa, ktorý bude prezentovať model morálneho správania. Keďže rozvoj morálneho charakteru jednotlivca je nepretržitý proces, zdôrazňuje tento príspevok skutočnosť, že študenti učiteľstva by mali prejsť systematickou prípravou na morálnu podstatu učiteľskej profesie. Súčasne by mali byť formovaní pedagógmi predstavujúcimi vzor, na základe ktorého bude formované i ich morálne povedomie.

Kľúčové slová: *morálna podstata učiteľskej profesie, etika, vzdelávanie učiteľov, študenti učiteľstva, vysokoškolskí pedagógovia*

Abstract

Teaching, as emphasized in this paper, is a moral endeavour. Its moral nature can be derived from several qualities among which the aspect of assistance in the moral development of students is analyzed in this paper. By and large, there are two possible ways of achieving this goal: either that of exposing students to various theories about morality or exposing the personality of a teacher who, in fact, functions as a model of moral behaviour. As the development of one's moral character is a constant process, this paper highlights the fact that teacher candidates - in the same way as the future students they will serve - should be exposed to systematic ethical preparation for the moral nature of their work. Moreover, they should be formed by teacher educators on models of whose their own moral awareness could be moulded.

Key words: *moral nature of teaching, ethics, teacher education, teacher candidates and educators*

1. THE MORAL NATURE OF TEACHING

Contemporary authors (Buzzelli - Johnston, 2001; Sherman, 2006; Sanger, 2007) dealing with the topic of ethics and teaching argue that teaching itself, in its nature, is a moral endeavour. Even though a strong consensus prevails within these matters, no specific conclusions are drawn for the matter of practice. What is more, all perspectives on the teaching process as a moral endeavour are being constantly overshadowed by the requirements of extensive general knowledge.

With hindsight, the role of a teacher used to be tightly connected with moral issues. His/her appreciation was based on the assumption that theoretical knowledge he/she possessed was intertwined with moral maturity. In this way a teacher was - almost solely on the basis of formal education - considered to be morally developed individuality with a good character, showing all kinds of virtues. As Lumpkin (2008, p. 45) claims: "While maybe not as visibly emphasized today, these expectations remain essentially unchanged. Because of teachers' influential role in the lives of young people, the public still expects teachers to display behaviours reflective of moral virtues, such as fairness and honesty, and to adhere to Professional codes of conduct."

These expectations go hand in hand with one of the reasons why teaching is morally salient – namely because it contributes to the moral development of students. As Hansen (1998, p. 649) states: "Teaching is a moral endeavour because the practice involves assisting students to broaden their horizons." "Teaching means promoting enabling attitudes, orientations, and beliefs, the kind that allow students to progress rather than regress as human beings, to grow in both intellectual and moral terms. In short, teaching is steeped in presuppositions about moral goodness and about what it means to live a flourishing life" (Hansen, 1998, p. 648).

Beside the intellectual development, reinforced by the universal standardization, the challenge stemming from the last quotation is that of a call for a moral progress which would help students to become human beings capable of virtuous acts, who would remain firm in various streams of modern pressures.

However, it is quite difficult for moral appeal of this kind to find its way of realization in practice. Over here, there are two possible approaches to be taken into account – we could consider either the "direct" formation of moral character of students, or a more "indirect" one, based on the idea of the teacher being a model of behaviour. In the following part, we are briefly going to introduce both of them.

The most basic assumption connected to teaching is that if we want students to have some knowledge, they need to acquire it in certain way, usually by teaching-learning process. Traditionally, the teacher teaches *about* the particular subject or teaches the subject *itself* (of course, these are intertwined, but not necessarily the same). Applying these principles into the field of morality, the teaching would probably incline to the teaching "*about*" an approach, because the second approach demands putting the knowledge into practice – which is quite an idealistic goal. More specifically, we can suppose that by exposing students to the theory about what is good or wrong, virtuous or worthy of dispraise, this knowledge will completely change their life so that they would act in accord with the acquired knowledge. Even if we leave aside philosophical disputes about what should be perceived as good or evil (based on various philosophical perspectives), one can easily consider these expectations to be naive. The question therefore stands whether this approach could be effective enough to bring students to their highest possible moral development. Churchill (1982, p. 300) commenting on this problem states: "It is frequently said that ethics cannot be taught. Upon examination this assertion usually means that moral values cannot be forced down a student's throat, that no coercive tactics seem to work. The assertion usually masks an explicit effort to "teach" some specific moral value to a student - an effort that invariably fails."

This statement might seem to be striking the right of ethics to be included among academic disciplines in the curriculum, however, it is surely not meant to. The fact that values, virtues and moral behaviour as such could not be taught in the same way as mathematical rules does not entail that ethics in teaching fails in its primary goal. In fact, if our only aim was to change one's personal values to "more moral" values, we would not leave any space for the freedom of choice. By the same token Johnstone and Treuthart (1991, p. 75) claim that "...the aim is not to change values but simply to promote awareness." Once having

this stated as a primary goal of ethics within the curriculum, the place for freedom is to be guaranteed, and in the same time the moral sensitivity may be reinforced. "Even though all people do not accept the same basic values, students should nevertheless be introduced to the full range of philosophical possibilities and to the merits of reflection and disputation." (Johnstone -Treuthart 1991, p. 83)

In other words, if the nature of teaching involves the obligation to broaden students' horizons – intellectual, but also (if not mostly) moral - we have to move further in our search for means of doing so. Analyzing all of them would go over the scope of this paper; however, one of them, quite significant, should be mentioned. As we have seen (and academic authorities have agreed on - Sanger-Fenstermacher, 2000, p. 4; Churchill, 1982, p. 300) virtues cannot be taught. "In a deeper sense, however, values are taught constantly insofar as value dimensions are present in any significant human relationship- of which teaching and learning are examples." (Churchill, 1982, p. 300) In this kind of relationship the teacher takes the role of a moral agent (Buzzelli - Johnston, 2001, p. 876) every action of whose is infused with a moral significance, which, thereafter, actively contributes to student's moral progress or regress. His/her (im)moral conduct being observed carefully by students places him/her into the role of a model of behaviour and his/her moral character might have powerful impact on lives of his/her students. Students make moral progress or regress (of course not solely) on the basis of teacher's model of behaviour – which is why Sanger and Fenstermacher (2000, p. 4) may claim that: "[...] students become virtuous by having a teacher with a virtuous character as an exemplar and a guide for engaging in their own virtuous actions, shaping their character. This involves the development of virtuous habits and skills, emotional sensitivities and dispositions, as well as the motivational characteristics that lead one to do what is virtuous, with the appropriate attitude and emotions. The virtuous teacher, as a moral educator, provides a model for all of these things, as well as instruction and guidance in their development." The moral character of teachers then plays a central role in the transmission of virtues to his/her students – which Campbell (2008, p. 370) considers to be an inescapable potential of being moral models and exemplars.

To sum up, both (yet not sole) ways of influence of moral character of students should be present in the teaching-learning process: theoretical introduction of basic moral values should serve to promote moral awareness and moral sensitivity while the model of teacher's moral character might be seen as a test of accuracy – whether theoretically presented moral values could be practiced in real life.

2. PREPARATION OF TEACHERS FOR THE MORAL NATURE OF THEIR WORK

The brief hindsight at the role of a teacher in the past at the beginning of this paper brought us to the conclusion that likewise in the past, present expectations of the moral qualities of the teacher have not changed. What *has* changed, however, was the understanding that the formal and theoretical education does not necessarily cause and guarantee a moral maturity. Moreover, there is no such label as "Morally developed" for the whole life is infused with obligations for personal growth. What we argue here therefore is that teacher candidates should be treated as the same "raw material" for formation as students, howsoever enriched by the life experiences.

In fact, the ultimate challenge of this paper is based on the claim that teacher candidates should be - at the time of preparation for their profession - exposed to systematic theoretical moral stimuli – aiming not to change their system of values but to sensitize them to the moral nature of their work. Simultaneously, they should be formed, lead, developed and

inspired by their own teacher educators in the same way it would be expected from them – which is an obligation for teacher educators.

The goal of forming intellectually developed society faces a rebuke that it omits moral side of personality which plays a key role in cases where consensus based on intellectual basis cannot be reached. Campbell (2008, p. 358) comments: “Ethics and teaching seem inherently compatible and unavoidably intertwined”. Alarmingly enough, this idea is not reflected in programmes of teacher education. Even though these include the basis of pedagogy, psychology, didactics and methodology of certain subjects, no special attention is paid to the moral nature of the teaching profession. Moral problems teachers face in the classrooms are marginally included in every one of these, yet we can concur with Sanger’s claim (2007, p. 169) that the study of the moral nature of teachers’ work is not substantively and explicitly considered.

As Lasley and Seidentop (2006, p. 14) assert, the goal of education is or should be a highly qualified and highly effective teacher in every classroom. The effectiveness is often seen as a priority. However, as Naravaez and Lapsley (2007, p. 2) claim, effective teaching promotes both – moral and academic excellence. To assign the first, two obligations show up. Firstly, teachers would need to know what is good, right, caring, and virtuous and be able to enact those things in their practice (roughly: to know the good and to practice it). Secondly, they would need to know what contributes most effectively to their students’ moral development, and be able to incorporate those things into their teaching practice (to know what contributes to the development of good people, and to provide it). (Sanger, 2007, p. 175)

“Yet, the moral dimensions of teaching and the ethical nature of the teacher’s professional responsibilities often seem to be [...] overshadowed by cognitive theories connected to teaching and learning, effective approaches to measurement and assessment, classroom management strategies, and other aspects that, while naturally important, are rarely viewed from a moral or ethical perspective.” (Campbell, 2008, p. 358) The overestimation of cognitive side of personality might be considered as a first and the main reason for disapproval with establishing any kind of systematic moral training for teacher’s work. Sherman (2006, p. 55), however, states strictly: “Teacher educators should be creating opportunities to situate moral dispositions as central aspects of teacher preparation and assessment. Moreover, they cannot point to the standards movement as a reason for not doing so.” Moral issues which penetrate our whole life are of further more importance than seemingly irreplaceable intellectual development.

Sanger (2007, p. 180) is aware of another obstacle: “[...] many educators would likely sigh and worry over where it [ethical instruction for teacher candidates] might go in an already overcrowded curriculum, and then leave the issue aside to proceed with all the other pressing tasks that face them.” Resigning from doing certain task, however, is justifiable just in case we have tried to accomplish something, but quite unacceptable when due to fear of failure we refused even to try to move the bounds of possible.

The other reason of ethics being omitted in teacher education is connected to what we have illustrated earlier – any attempt to influence someone’s behaviour might fail. Once again must we emphasize that rather than doing that, ethical instruction of teacher candidates should aim to sensitize students to the ethical dimensions, to provide insight into the nature of their profession, and cultivate their willingness to engage in reflective judgement. (Johnstone - Treuthart 1991, p. 102)

Finally, complexity, ambiguity, vagueness and tensions of morality, as Sanger (2007, p. 182) admits, make this task so difficult. However, in his own words, “it is one of the key reasons why this domain of teaching needs more systematic attention, so that we can find productive ways to work successfully within the messiness, complexity, and conflict that the morality presents us with.”

When considering the goal of teacher education, Lasley and Siedentop (2006, p. 14) state, that it is “[...] the preparation of teachers who make a difference in the classroom.” Sherman (2006, p. 51) develops this idea by saying that it is the vision to nurture in candidates a *commitment* to make difference in the lives of students. This challenge for teacher educators reaches the level of motivation and responsibility speaking of which we might say that these two should become one – for as Hansen (1998, p. 649) claims “[...] teaching compels teachers to serve students’ growth and development, not because some external authority has declared this to be so, but because of the very nature of the work.” The feeling of responsibility for students’ moral, intellectual and social development should be the essential motivational force pushing teacher educators towards the deeper awareness of their potential for shaping the character of a person.

Perceiving long-term consequences of teaching profession, teachers with this type of motivation might recognise the importance of providing programmes of ethical instruction which could prepare teacher candidates in an explicit and systematic way for the moral nature of their work.

3. LITERATURE

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