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Teachers' Ethic Responsibilities in the Practice of Education and Training

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Abstract

The training of the professional in education implies, beside a very good specialization and psycho-pedagogical training, another extremely important aspect, with direct and powerful impact on the whole educational process - the outline of the ethical profile of the future teacher's personality. The work focuses on the following approaches: the role of studying *the ethics of education* in training for the teaching career, critical aspects regarding the practice of teaching and evaluation, the teacher's ethic responsibilities in approaching different types of curricula: *hidden curriculum*, *null curriculum*, *phantom curriculum*, *curriculum –in- use*, *rhetorical curriculum* and strategies of reflection on the ethical behaviours in education.

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1. Ethics of education and training - field of study required for training teachers

Nowadays, there is a certain indifference towards the ethical dimension of training professionals in education. Many programs of study that focus on teacher's training ignore the disciplines specific to the ethics of education/professional ethics, leaving uncovered one crucial side of the professionalization of the teaching career. In school, with its highly complex issues and lack of exercise of analysis, deciphering, solving situations and ethical dilemmas, teachers fail to understand the ethical dimensions of their actions.

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Based on these findings, we aimed at identifying educational issues that may have a negative impact on students and at outlining the ethical responsibilities of teachers in order to anticipate, manage, improve and eliminate the harmful effects of these influences.

We chose for this study an analysis of certain types of curriculum specified in the classification proposed by Leslie Owen Wilson (1990): *rhetorical curriculum, hidden curriculum, phantom curriculum, null curriculum and curriculum-in-use, in order to identify certain unethical aspects - that can influence school and its core activities*. This analysis led to the identification of some ethical responsibilities of teachers as a support for a good practice of education and training.

2. Types of curriculum - types of ethical responsibilities of the teacher

2.1 Rhetorical curriculum and its ethical implications

It is represented by opinions, ideas of officials, decision makers, personalities, administrators or politicians who impose it to masses. It can be expressed by professionals hinting to modifications, changes in the educational environment based on statistics and national reports which suggest good paths followed by the "average guy" (who thus loses his individuality, as "he melts in statistics ". (I. Negreț Dobridor, 2008, p.356)

It is known as a curriculum expressed in school that passes off as certainties, fragmented, truncated truths, presented in the textbooks, for example, and requiring beliefs that are difficult to change, a curriculum that requires teaching, lack of critical thinking and reflexivity. (Leslie Owen Wilson, 1990)

- Frequently, teachers themselves make the error of taking the information without criticism, without reflection and analysis, servile adhesion, leaving themselves prey to manipulation and demagoguery. Textbooks are very frequently sources of errors, confusions, even indoctrination, of prejudices which are difficult to remove over time.

- What is worse is that such an attitude of obedience towards the so-called "undeniable truths" (I.Negreț Dobridor, 2008, p.356) and the lack of critical spirit is also transmitted to students, who take, as it is well known, the attitudinal patterns of adults/teachers, seen as an authority. This retrieval of messages without analysis or reflection involves ethical suspicion. „Prejudices and stereotypes (...) just refer to the idea according to which, the education's intelligibility (in any form) depends on the quality of training of the participants involved in this activity. (Eși C. M, 2010, 13)

How can we respond to such a challenge?

- On the one hand, in the initial and ongoing training activities for teachers, there should be a special concern for the information on these possible influences and then the emphasis should be on the training and development of thinking for the student's benefit and support, a free thinking and a reflexive attitude on the educational messages, a pluralistic approach of prospects and a greater flexibility in thought and action to support originality, independence and individuality.

2.2 School and implications of the Hidden / Covert curriculum

It is represented by the aspects of the school environment that cannot be easily measured and quantified: values, rituals, traditions, rules, conveniences, school's ethos, psychosocial ambience, interpersonal relations, system of rewards and sanctions, messages transmitted to students in a veiled way and so on - which are reflected in the personality of the students, especially on the affective dimension and self-image. *"Hidden curriculum means unintended social experiences of the student, who do not meet either the explicit objectives of education and training or the curriculum content and methods of the official program, but which influence students' academic socialization. (Dictionary of Pedagogy, 2001)*

The subliminal curriculum triggers both positive and negative influences - from the second category we take as an example: *the symbolic violence* that can take various forms in school-discriminatory attitudes and gestures, threatening looks, ignoring the messages, lack of attention, etc. – and can foster a climate of inadequate study, influence students' self-esteem, transforming school into an environment without security.

The negative influences of the hidden curriculum must stand out to trainers, who can anticipate, avoid, reduce or cancel them as much as it depends on them;

Here are some suggestions for training the ethical skills in this regard:

- Exercises of observation and analysis of the influences of the hidden/subliminal curriculum in: the classroom climate, manuals and other official documents, extracurricular activities, family, etc.
- Identify those students who failed to adapt to the hidden curriculum of the school;
- Analysis of the hidden curriculum in the literary works describing school with all its influences (Mark Twain - „*I didn't allow school to affect my education*”, George Bacovia - „*High school ... cemetery of my youth*”, Constantin Noica - *school is the place where „nobody knows who gives and who receives*”, Mihai Eminescu - „*But the character of a good school is for the student to learn in it more than what is taught, more than the teacher himself knows*”, Amos Bronson Alcott - „*A true teacher defends his pupils by his personal influence*”).

2.3 Phantom curriculum and applying the principle of refusal

It is a curriculum that displays false noble objectives in order to conceal or to cover/veil the real objectives, pursued and implemented by using manipulation techniques; it affects subtly, subliminally the youth's mentality by promoting persistently certain types of values; it hides mysterious, secret, often petty interests, thus replacing traditional values. It is a curriculum that is based on duplicity or hypocrisy, intentionally presenting an appearance, a false reality, mimicking a certain moral behaviour in order to influence. (Leslie Owen Wilson, 1990)

Unfortunately school itself encourages or even forms a series of duplicitous behaviours - and those who suffer are, unfortunately, the students and, as we know, not just them.

For training teachers' ethical skills we suggest practicing the ability to see and understand beyond appearances, to capture the hidden intentions, to engage in exposing them, assuming the related risks; giving up the passive, defensive attitude, giving up dirigisme, "to expect proposals and changes from others", from upper bodies and encouraging initiative and courage to implement change; encouraging the principle of doubt and denial in specific situations as result of verticality and moral creed.

2.4 Null curriculum versus the respect for the learner

It indicates what is not taught in school by launching the idea that what is not taught is not important for their training and therefore for the society in which they live. Also called "*curriculum of ignorance*", it is accompanied by the prejudice that what is not taught does not deserve to be taught (Negreț Dobridor, 2008, 356), leading to the risky situation for young people to be incapable of making their own choices, options, decisions, etc.

Ignorance in education is serious, it has harmful effects on education and can become aggressive if accompanied by arrogance and contempt for what is ignored (ibid.).

Ethical responsibilities:

- The respect for the student also involves respect for what we teach, for what we offer them.
- The contents and the values must not be sacrificed at the expense of the so-called decongestion of the curricula
- A deep analysis of the real needs of the students, but also of those that are neglected
- The continuous enrichment of the learning experiences, as the motivation for knowledge and discovery.

2.5. From the official curriculum to the curriculum-in-use

School practices do not overlap completely over the formal curriculum – there are involved personal elements of the teaching actors who have their own systems of values, beliefs and ways of perceiving and understanding the reality.

The curriculum-in-use is what the teacher teaches, having as benchmark the written/official curriculum and is characterized by the fact that each teacher perceives personally and subjectively this type of curriculum, building it depending on the teacher's own philosophy about the world and his/her own system of values. As a result, the teacher selects as important or fundamental specific sequences of curriculum, sometimes at the expense of others. It is a curriculum influenced by the teacher's experience, by his/her educational ethos, culture and vision of the school and subjects. (Leslie Owen Wilson, 1990)

2.6. Ethical responsibilities?

Teacher's training must start from this reality - each person perceives the curriculum personally, but, as for errors in evaluation, acknowledging this reality and the negative effects of the subjectivity, it can intervene effectively to eliminate any gaps, syncope, confusion, errors, etc. Training in this respect requires strategies of meta-knowledge and self-knowledge of their own system of values, principle, their own faith. The teacher understands their impact on the entire formative approach that he builds and implements, the value on the targets, strategies, evaluation organization.

It can lead to a balance: the curriculum perceived by the teacher supersedes consistently the formal curriculum; in other words, the teacher's personal image towards the curriculum to be taught must match, where possible, with the taught curriculum.

3. Reflection and self-reflection of ethical behaviours in the practice of education and training

Practice of education and training provides numerous examples of ethical risk, which, in most cases, have as victim children/students. Teacher's training, both initial and continuous, should therefore need to set as priority training the ethical, moral dimension of the personalities of those who carry out education - the teachers. We invoke here the strategies of reflection on the ethical behaviours of all those involved in school activities, knowing that each influences, shapes, forms: *„As students learn continuously through disclosure and behaviour modelling, this means that they learn important social and emotional lessons from anyone who is in school - from the nurse, the secretary and the staff from the canteen to their peers, as well as the posture, the behaviour and the attitudes shaped by their teachers. Many educators do not have the awareness of the lessons' force that young people get through these contacts”*. (Leslie Owen Wilson, 1990)

Self-reflective strategies filter through consciousness the behaviours, attitudes, intentions, personal feelings that define us as individuals more or less responsible for the importance of the actions. These strategies are designed to realize and empower about the impact of the teachers' own actions over the destinies of the trained ones.

4. Conclusions

We believe that such an analysis, which facilitates the understanding of the ethical implications on different educational levels, is a first step in forming an ethical demeanour appropriate to the professional in education. Simon Mehedinți's statement is representative in this regard: *"... the teacher is the most valuable social power. He is the superlative ethical talent, as the scholar and the artist reach the peaks in Science and Art."* (S. Mehedinți, 1940, 342)

The teacher's ethical responsibilities, beyond reporting to a general set of rules and codes, mean the ability to find suitable solutions for particular situations, to display behaviours that are consistent with the beliefs of the achiever and to live the moral values, not just to declare them.

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