Teacher’s responsibility in moral and affective education of children

Simona Velea\textsuperscript{a}, Speran\c{t}a Farca\textsuperscript{b} \textsuperscript{*}

\textsuperscript{a,b}Institute for Education Sciences, 37 Stirbei Voda, Bucharest, 010102, Romania

Abstract

This article investigates the role of teachers for moral and affective education of children in secondary education, based on a survey carried out in 2011 within the Institute for Education Sciences in Romania. It aims to identify current challenges and difficulties encountered by teachers and students in relation to moral and affective education in school, to explore how teachers understand their role, to identify critical areas of teacher training and solutions for improvement. It underlines the need to update educational practices, while the fast changes of the education system in the last decades caused an increased resistance of school.

Keywords: teacher training; moral education; affective education; research; teachers’ role

1. Introduction

School is an institution that influences in a decisive manner the education of young generations of a country, the transmission of cultural and moral values, as well as the premises for new social changes. The impact of school in shaping the young generation is very important and therefore requires an analysis of its real contribution and its values. Even if the intellectual education and the transmission of knowledge seem to be the major role of the school, we cannot neglect its impact for moral and affective development of children.

Children and young people need a comprehensive development of their personality; if they do not receive consistent and coherent influences for moral and emotional growth, they search for these elements in the

\textsuperscript{*} Corresponding author. Tel.: +4-021-3136491; fax: +4-021-3121447.

\textit{E-mail address:} simona@ise.ro
examples provided by adults in their environment. Sometimes, adult educators meet the need for guiding the emotional life of children without a clear purpose or even without being aware of, no matter if they were trained or not in this area. Thus, whether it wants it or not, every teacher, regardless of the subject taught, is a guide for moral and affective development of children and young people. If formal education really implies such a demand, a teacher should be properly prepared for. It is expected for the teacher to have good knowledge of the taught subject(s), to have good knowledge of pedagogy and psychology of learning, but above all, a teacher ought to be mature emotionally, so consistent with him/herself, a socially desirable person and capable of educative interaction with children. But these cannot be learnt from books, cannot be theoretically assimilated or practiced in a stereotypical manner according to pre-defined regulations. Following a research conducted at the Institute for Education Sciences in 2011 [1], the real impact of teachers in moral and affective education of children was revealed and several solutions for improvement have emerged.

2. Aim and methodology of the study

The research aimed to identify the current challenges and difficulties faced by teachers and students in relation to moral and affective education in school, to explore how teachers understand their role, to identify critical areas of initial and in-service training and needs for improvement. It was built upon several key-questions: Does the school provide an environment mainly (or solely) focused on intellectual education? Does school prepare children for the social life and is this possible unless providing strong moral guidelines and an appropriate climate? Teachers, as specialists of a particular subject, are aware of the consequences of their behavior towards the moral and affective development of children? How can we explain the frequent predisposition of passing the responsibility for moral and affective education from parents to teachers and vice versa?

The methodology of research included: analysis of relevant documents, interviews with secondary school teachers (altogether 115 secondary school teachers from 17 counties in Romania answered the interview) and focus-groups (14 interviews involving approx. 130 secondary school teachers in 4 counties in Romania).

According to John Dewey, the role of the educator – parent or teacher – is to ensure that children and youth acquire knowledge and ideas in such a manner that they become moving ideas and guide pupils’ behavior. Thus, the moral purpose of the education becomes the leading one, no matter the school subject taught by a teacher [2].

Through moral and affective education we refer to the dimension of educational process which is concerned with the development of attitudes, beliefs, emotions, feelings and social skills. [3,4]

The teachers involved in the data collection process were teaching different school subjects in secondary education (grades V-XII). We have chosen to investigate the opinions and behaviors of different teachers, not necessarily of those teaching school subjects directly related to moral education, because we believe that every teacher plays – directly or indirectly – an important role for pupils’ moral and affective development. It was stated many times that the indirect moral education is even more powerful than the direct teaching of or about morals.

3. Teachers’ current challenges in moral and affective education of children

Our research has shown the link between the moral behavior of the teacher, the learning content with moral dimension and the moral and affective development of pupils. There were pursued three main dimensions of the school behavior: the moral-emotional dimension, the pro-social and the normative ones. These dimensions were pursued at different levels of depth: the moral judgment (cognitive), the moral conscience (structuring the character) and the moral conduct (moral behavior) [5]. The research highlighted some key issues useful for planning and providing the initial training of young people for the teaching profession.

There is a gap between intention and educational intervention. Any teacher has and declares his/her good educational intentions, but often use the same practices encountered by him/herself as pupil or student. This
creates a difference between what he says and what he does, feeding negative tensions that leave the growing child without support. The teachers participating in the survey claim to be very concerned about moral development of pupils. The moral traits most frequently pursued are the honesty, fairness, respect and responsibility while the most common violations of the moral conduct are verbal and physical violence – vulgar language, indiscipline –, absenteeism, lack of respect for school / teacher, exaggerated focus on material values – individualism, selfishness and inability to relate to peers. How do teachers react and act? Many educational activities and strategies mentioned as having a significant contribution to moral education are formal activities, remaining usually at a superficial level: for example, school competitions, projects on the code of conduct, debates, information activities, out-of-school/ extracurricular activities, filling in questionnaires etc.). The power of personal example appears to be not sufficiently exploited.

The school is assuming the merit of good education, without recognizing the weaknesses. The school wants to be the “princeps educator”, but when it comes to specific situations that do not go “by the book” assigns an important part of the responsibility and guilt to other instances of socialization: family, community, media etc. But those that may do major mistakes in education are those having the greatest influence towards children.

The double measure used in education. Adults – teachers and parents – expect desirable behaviors from children, while they are not always practicing them. This happens because adults propose a theoretical model of “how the children should behave” and “what they should become”, but is less connected with how they really are, with the contemporary society and with what fits the child. It happens that some behaviors nonchalantly practiced by parents and teachers to be blamed only when the child is practicing them. Thus, we impose to children rules that ourselves, as educators, do not respect.

The distance between the schools values and family and society values. What is the relationship between the moral of the school and the moral of other out-of-school environments? At social and institutional level, the school struggles to preserve consecrated values, but faces significant difficulties due to the noxious influence of media, extensive corruption and lack of respect for education. For example, the success obtained through work – a value that is promoted by the school – is contradicted by mass-media. In relation with the family, we may notice a kind of "resignation" of parents from their parenting roles, devalued attitudes toward school and teachers and frequent situations of parents offering a negative example. But school and teachers themselves are also experiencing serious challenges: inconsistent values, insufficient training of teachers especially from the perspective of moral and affective education, unclear role in moral and affective education of children. The research highlighted the need for coherence and consistence of all educational environments. All teachers must participate in the moral and emotional education of students, regardless of the subject they teach. They all should respect the children’s rights and create a secure socio-emotional environment based on trust, balance and mutual respect.

The lack of coherence between educational environments causes schizoid effects for the child development. Too often the child finds that what is considered to be "good" by the school is seen as "wrong" in society and "impractical" in the family. For example, teachers tell the children not to hit back a colleague that hit them, while the parents often give them the opposite advice. At least parents and teachers could be harmonized through better communication, through direct collaboration with the child to discover what would be better for him in every situation. Also, perhaps education should not obstinately focus on an arbitrary selection of values for the child, but on the development of his authentic ability to choose what is appropriate.

The means and methods of education used in the school are not fit for purpose. Most of the teachers participating in the research appreciated that "responsibility" is the main value they aim to develop with their pupils. However, the means they have mentioned (reward, punishment, conditioning, positive labeling, stimulation of competition) promote the child’s dependency towards the adult educator, and less the capacity to anticipate the consequences of his own acts and to take responsibility. A child that is not encouraged to self-ownership is devoid of support to become responsible.

Teachers do not always deeply understand children’s attitudes and behaviors. The data collected through individual interviews showed frequent situations when teachers are alerted by normal behaviors of children and overly tolerant of significant deviations from the norms of conduct. Sometimes, confusions between what is
normal to a certain age and what not can appear. On the other hand, behaviors that show the lack of respect, the lack of involvement and collegiality are tolerated or ignored, thus being the risk of exacerbation. The respondents noted the need for deeper knowledge of child psychology, a subject included as part of core curriculum for initial training of teachers but often taught at a theoretical and formal level.

Social changes are reflected in the school, which is searching for its own landmarks. Changing of social customs of networking, communication and treatment of child are to be transferred at school level. The school today no longer matches the benchmarks of the “old” magistro-centric school, focused on memorization and reproduction of knowledge, on reward and punishment, but it does not find how to adjust to the social change [6]. It is a turning point for a path that is not as new as we would dream, not as old as we are afraid of.

Teachers are not prepared to communicate with parents. The initial training of teachers includes an optional course on Educational communication, but (according to the curriculum guidelines) it refers only to the communication with children and young people. Data collected in the discussions with teachers revealed that they often ignore the communication with parents and the importance of this ordinary element for the education of a child. Schools in our country rarely provide appropriate space and time for the communication between teachers and parents. This communication is often spontaneous or takes place when a problem/conflict occurred. Teachers need to be prepared to deal with new types of communication and interaction [7].

Teachers lost their confidence in education reforms. Immediately after ’89, the school received with great joy the idea of education reform. Since then, there were numerous and permanent changes/reforms and numerous mandatory in-service training for teachers, without leading to the welfare of the education system, of teachers, pupils and parents. Therefore, the school has come to bureaucratically defend of all the changes it cannot avoid and to reject everything that is not mandatory. This shows that in order to become operational, the intended changes should be well prepared and staggered, transparently explained and not imposed from outside.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

According to the research findings, several conclusions and recommendations emerge. To conduct thorough changes in education, we should begin with teacher training. For a “different” school, training should be done “differently”, with a focus on developing practical pedagogical skills and on human maturation for becoming a teacher. Only with emotionally mature, balanced, creative and dedicated teachers we can change the school into a better one. Authentic transformation of school and teachers cannot be imposed by a law; it appears and strengthen in a natural and necessary manner as a consequence of the teachers’ way of being.

Therefore, teacher education and training cannot be reduced to concepts and theories no matter how advanced they are, as it should be complemented by the development of their personality as a whole [8]. If teachers are confident in themselves, they will be able to trust children and parents. If they are balanced and creative, they will be able to create a secure climate, constant and proper for the development of children [9].

The training of teachers and their need of support do not end together with the initial training but should not be extended through formal and occasional courses. A proper solution for continuous support for teachers’ professional development is represented by professional discussion groups (like Balint groups) that may provide a constant and secure environment [10].

The relationship between school and family cannot be functional and successful if a dispute of primacy, hierarchy or authority over education takes place [11]. A real partnership and mutual support are needed.

References


