

Knowledge, Emotion and Action Connected to Ethics Learning.

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KNOWLEDGE, EMOTION AND ACTION CONNECTED TO ETHICS LEARNING

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Introduction

In other papers we have developed programs that we found to the development of moral education in childrens². In this opportunity we would like to make some considerations related to the learning process in adults. Since 1995 we have been developing a set of investigations aimed at thinking the learning and teaching of ethics in the field of higher education. In this paper we would like to develop the features presented in adults during the learning process of ethics and deontology notions.

Regarding the relationship between ethics and education it is necessary to make an explanation. Ethics has two ways of presentation in the university classroom, such as disciplinary content and as cross content. In the first meaning, it refers to teaching specific content that should be taught by the teachers of ethics during the lessons. In the second meaning, it refers to all the teachers of all the courses in which ethics is taught, in the way that ethics goes through the attitudinal contents of all subjects. This paper was conceived following the guidelines of the first meaning. However, the results can be used by other courses to the extent that they are also involved in the teaching of ethical content.

Some of the issues in which this paper was organized are: What is specific in teaching ethics? What is specific in the learning process of adults? Finally, what is

¹ This paper is a result of a group discussion and debate produced in terms of two research projects which address the relationship between ethics and higher education, as director: Ubacyt P 404 and as co-director UNLaM 55 B- 125. The members of these projects are: UBACyT Juan Brunetti, Silvia Fernández, Giselle Sajanovich, Patricia Gorocito, Andrea Hellemeyer, Fernando Perez Ferreti, Gabriela Levy Daniel and Pablo Esteva. UNLAM: Director Elisa Basanta, Co directors Elizabeth Ormart and Maria Victoria Santorsola; members: Mariela Bavau, Carina Antón, Juan Brunetti, Osvaldo Galardo, Graciela Cruzado, Elba Robustelli, Mirta Santonocito.

² Ormart. Moral sensitivity in children. In Actas del Tercer Congreso Marplatense de Psicología (2007). Organized by Secretaría de Extensión - Facultad de Psicología – UNMDP ISBN: 978-987-544-239-9 / Mar del Plata - 2007

specific in the teaching and learning process of ethics in adults? We will try to answer these questions and left open others for further research.

What is specific in teaching ethics?

General didactics gives us guidance on the most beneficial strategies for teaching. The teaching proposals referred by Davini (1988) are really useful, as contributions of special didactics to the conceptual framework of general didactics. From all of them we have made a selection of which are relevant to the field of ethics:

- Carry out a work relating to intuitive ideas of students considering that individuals have an own prior meaning (Aisenberg, 1994) This is essential in the area of ethical content. And the older the students are, the more is also the moral experience they bring to the field of systematic education. Can students change their previous intuitive ideas? This is the main goal of any ethics teaching plan. Moving from the intuition to critical analysis and based on their previous beliefs.
- Start a conceptual change in students from a cognitive conflict (Weissmann, 1993; Carretero, Pozo, Asensio 1989) Ethical dilemmas are useful tools for teaching ethics. As we have observed, it is more productive to present dilemmas for debate and group interaction than presenting dilemmas to isolated persons. Since the debate allows a confrontation of points of views which is more fruitful when destabilizing the previous ideas that students carry. To investigate previous beliefs, it can be useful the presentation of dilemmatic situations individually but if what we want is to provoke a cognitive-affective conflict, it requires the presence of other points of view. I modified the term cognitive conflict, present in the piagetian tradition, to include intentionally the affective. Ethics education is an education not only racional but also emotional. It is also essential to stress that this conflict is not of the isolated person but of the intersubjective. And with it, we include Vygotskian and Freirean tradition, since the person builds meanings with others, that modify and transform the socio-cultural reality in which the person is embedded. Hence, as we will explain later teaching ethics is about educate to think, educate to feel and educate to do.

- It is necessary to build a network of meanings that stem from everyday life. (Prats, 1989; Carretero, Pozo, Asensio, 1989; Merchán Iglesias-García Pérez, 1994) Intuitive knowledge reconstruction allows its questioning and analysis. This allows the distortion of everyday moral practices. Once again we find the support of Freirean theory to think the field of ethics as an area that raises awareness of everyday practices in order to problematize and transform them.
- In the construction of knowledge it is suggested to problematize hypothesis and ideas (Domínguez, 1989; Segal y Laies, 1992) and build conceptual frameworks (Ramírez, 1989; Carretero, Pozo, Asensio, 1989) This principle is extremely valuable if there is an affective commitment and not only a cognitive one.
- To include as critical content, thoughtful and problematical the own practices relating to the fair, unfair, standards, values, rewards, lifestyle, etc. Reflect on the own practice, in terms of Maliandi (1991) problematizing the own *ethos* means a bigger commitment than thinking over the outside practices. Bringing the field of ethics here and now, place the student in front of the situation analysis and the decision allows him to get involved and generate a stronger commitment than the analysis of a foreign practice.

What is specific in the learning process of adults?

The grownup has different features from those of other persons presented in the educational system. We are going to review some of the pertinent aspects without considering this description conclude.

One of the elements which adult teachers find more relevant for the learning process is working with situations. Ethics assignment or professional deontology is commonly a subject included in the curriculum that presents the opportunity of working with dilemmatic situations. The situation allows to the student to be set in a context and to consider different variables that come to play. This consideration is part of what we call deliberation and is in itself a central issue for ethics.

Therefore, while we consider the special feature of the grownup we introduce a main topic for ethics: the deliberative methodology.

Another key issue to consider is the importance that previous experience has in adults learning. Due to the fact that adults are more experienced than young people it seems to be enlightening the overview that they provide to the analysis of the topics proposed. Morality means a series of principles, rules and shared values. We can not expect to impose the teacher's morality to the student. In this stage of life, adults have autonomously build their moral consciousness. In contrast to children in which ethics education may aim to teach values, in the case of adults, it is essential to start with the values that are already present in their life. At this point it is important to establish a distinction between ethics and professional deontology. Ethics is a reflection that aims morality and as such starts from there but implies a modification of it. If the adult realizes a constructive process starting from its morality, then analyzes it, makes inferences, etc, and then returns to its initial moral intuitions, this path implies a greater state of knowledge than the one given in the initial situation. Therefore, going through this path reflects already a learning process. On the other hand, deontology implies a knowledge corpus which is available to the student so that he can display the different cognitive operations aboved mention, and think over the professional practice from those knowledges.

But the teaching of ethics and professional deontoloty to adults does not end in the development of cognitive skills. Can I set as a target in ethics university classroom to cause an attitudinal change in students? Previously we said, we should start from the values that he has in his life, to analyze them, etc. Definitely, the progress in the knowledge level does not guarantee the progress in the attitudinal level. The piagetian question which is the base on its epistemology: how to go from a state of less knowledge to a state of higher knowledge? This sounds in this forum with other significance. What is a higher ethics or deontology knowledge? To deal with information, a technical vocabulary, legal tools, codes of ethics, etc. All of this and something more. A change in behavior caused by a new way of feeling and thinking. At this point it becomes relevant the inclusion of the emotions and the action in the ethics agenda. From the educational assumption that we start, ethics can not be learned without the possibility of living an experience which leads us to

reflection. Hence we postulate the need for education of moral sensitivity not only in children but also in adults.

How we teach moral sensitivity?

To teach and learn from emotions implies the integration of the body in the process of learning. It turns to be vital to stop being a thinking substance and to redefine the learning person. While for Descartes I am a thinking thing, to Marcel “I am my body”. This dichotomy, body-mind, turns to be not only useless but also it becomes in an epistemological obstacle to build a knowledge over what is done, a reflection over the action.

In opposition to this dualism, Anzieu³ argues that “The mind is the idea of the body affections and not only the simple idea of the body, to think is to reflect on what affects the body (feelings, emotions, actions) The body is at the beginning of the ideas, the reflection over the ideas, perform the human mind... And the mind is nothing more than the reflection over these ideas, beginning with the idea of the existence of the body.” (1998: 33)

The trained student by the educative institutions arrives at college in a state of passivity and apathy. Our university classrooms repeats a fixed layout that immobilize the students bodies, who have to “open their minds” to what from the “front” says the teacher. The beholder student model has been subject of reflection and has been modified in other levels of education, except from university.

The teacher is who can assist in enabling the passage from the *beholder student* to *dweller* of the learning community. Only a change in the student’s subjective position, a real involvement, will cause a real learning. To create this process should be the teacher’s challenge.

³ We can compare the Anzieu thoughts with Espinoza who argued that the psyche has it origins in the body and with Freud who finds the libido (psychic energy) as a limit concept between the somatic and the psychic. Anzieu, D. Los continentes del pensamiento. De la Flor. 1998. Buenos Aires.

As we emphasized⁴, “The conditions in which learning takes place, the bonds that are generated in the institutional coexistence, the cutting down on contents and the possibility to interact or not from the community in which the university lives in, leaves marks in those who went through this institution”. Marks which will leave a stamp on people who lives in educative institutions like in other social institutions. Educative institutions begin to be part of our lives from the early years to adulthood. From these traces, discipline people, learn to organize experiences, emotions and thoughts. To think from bodily traces, from sensitivity leads us to act.

A very useful methodological resource to educate moral sensitivity in classrooms is to reproduce dilemmatic experiences in which students question themselves and get involved in decision making. To generate group discussion situations⁵ or use audiovisual resources⁶ which create a vital experience are excellent occasions for comprehensive learning.

How do we educate the action?

The possibility to take action over the world involves the exercise of the will which is lead by desire. A movement which stimulates the body and drives it to do. Only when we are involved within our body and soul we act accordingly.

In *States of Denial* Stanley Cohen (2005) consider the difficulties observed for people to be truly involved in situations of human rights violation. What he calls “states of denial” causes people obfuscation, stopping the action. This essay help us to reflect, by the denial, the mechanisms at play to do or not do something in certain situations. According to Cohen, the lack of intervention is likely when responsibility is vague, when people are unable to identify themselves with the victim, when they can not imagine an effective intervention, etc. This lack of action

⁴ Fernández, S. Ormart, E. (2009) Ethical premises to think a change in college education. In Actas del II Congreso Argentino - Latinoamericano de Derechos Humanos. 23 and 24 of april 2009. Universidad Nacional de Rosario, Argentina

⁵ Cfr. Paper which widely develops the benefits of group discussion of controversial situations in the university classroom. Ormart, E. (2005) “Learning ethics in Higher Education Institutions” In Revista Iberoamericana de Educación. (RIE número 35/3)

⁶ Cfr. Paper of Fariña and Ormart (2009) Audiovisual resources in the teaching of ethics. In el Primer Congreso de Audiovisuales organizado por la Fundación Incluir.

is not only observed at the individual level but also at cultural community, ethnic or national level to which it belongs. In this way the author remarks “the denial includes *cognition*, (not acknowledging the facts) *emotion* (not to feel, not be disturbed) *morality* (not recognizing what is wrong or its responsibility) and *action* (not taking active measures in response to suffering).” (2001:29)

In contrast to the states of denial, we conclude that a real ethics learning occurs when there is cognition, emotion, morality and action, it means, when people recognize the facts, they can feel them, they feel responsible for them, and act accordingly. Thinking, sensitivity and action are connected in such a way, that unlike what Socrates thought, to know what is good is not enough to do good. Therefore it becomes essential to include students in community outreach services.

Working in community-based projects is essential to bridge the gap between traditional academic education and the crosscutting proposal to all university training in order to shift the goals into the common welfare.

An university ethics training will always aim at renewing, on an ongoing basis, its social integration through the investigation of the interests and needs of the communities.

Teaching levels – ethics learning in adults

We propose this diagram according to the systematization of the ideas above developed. Clarifying that knowledge, sensitivity and action are tied in ethics learning based on the distinctive features of the study object.

When we address the problem of teaching ethics at university level, it arises the following question: what teaching strategies promotes ethics education? This question which runs parallel to the following issue: which cognitive skills should the student display to learn ethical notions? We hold this parallelism to the extent that teaching and learning are two processes that can be think in parallel, as products of the teaching-learning situation. In this situation a third element is combined, around which the previous ones are organized, this is, the object of study. In this

case, the complexity of the ethical study object requires a methodological effort to repeat in the classrooms not only a conceptual content but also a vital experience. Ethics, held Ricardo Maliandi (1991) is the questioning of the ethos. This knowledge is not only theoretical but essentially practical. It is a knowledge that emerges from reflection on action. Thus, learning ethics involves the thinking, the body and the action.

Summarizing:

	Teacher	Student
Knowledge	Critical handling of information	Critical handling of information
	To deal with communication strategies	To deal with cognitive strategies
Sensitivity	Didactic transposition management	
	To design, implement and evaluate life experiences wich involve students sensitivity.	To live experiences which allow student to put themselves in someone else position.
Action	To be driven to act on what you are and what you feel.	To perform experiences.
	To develop protection activities and care for the other.	To carry out transformation experiences of reality in an ethical sense.

Conclusions

The starting premise is that the student build its knowledge based on lived experiences. The teacher is the one who enables the change from the beholder

student to citizen of the world. Then it begins with breaking the passive role, (established for the student) which stops and paralyze him, to set the action as a tool, which can affect reality and change it.

The key element that the teacher has to acknowledge, it's own and the student's involvement, is the willingness to teach that starts during the lessons and the methodology, the process⁷ that the students are invited to do, without being able to predict whether this will cause the desired effects. Even though bets are made within this uncertainty margin.

It is quite common that in the field of science, practitioners and researchers are faced to difficult situations in which there isn't, strictly speaking, a "good" choice. The dramatization of these situations (films, debate, dramatizations, etc) faces participants with the anxiety of a vital experience, promoting the access to a knowledge of the problem which is not only conceptual but also experiential. This methodological exercise, far from being a learning experience disconnected from everyday life, aims to strengthen the connection between the scientific knowledge (fields of knowledge), the professional practice (know-how) and decision making (how to deal with a situation). Contributing to an integral education of sensitivity and intellect, reestablishing the path, broken many times, of alliance between academic training and the working world.

We would like to end with the question that Prof. Cullen formulated (2004: 54) in relation to the need of teaching ethics "How could it not be difficult to teach ethics at school, if the rationality of the field is so complicated, and if the empirical reality of its object, the moral standards, or the social discourse which expresses it, turns to be so complicated?" That the complexity of the subject matter do not frighten us in the task of teaching how to conceptualize, explain and feel a real commitment of concern and care for others, thus the only way out for a globalize and multicultural world, of the near future, is the transmission of a democratic participation ethics and the respect for symbolic and cultural differences of the human groups. Nevertheless, this is not an assignment of one discipline but affects all teachers trained in all disciplines. This concern is related to ethics as cross content.

⁷ Method from the Greek *metha* (beyond) and *odos* (way). The follow-up that students will do, will depend on the method develop by teacher and student, which will allow them to improve knowledge.

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