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ETHICAL BASIS OF EDUCATION FOR TOLERANCE AND MULTI-CULTURAL VALUES IN PRE-SCHOOL AND PRIMARY EDUCATION

Abstract:

Every quality curriculum planning demands a clear conceptual basis, i.e. a philosophy of curriculum. Education for post-modern values (autonomous and responsible morality, tolerance, human rights, multiculturality) can be founded on different ethical theories: on ethics of values (MacIntyre), ethics of justice (Rawls, Kohlberg) or ethics of care (Gilligan, Noddings). In pre-school and primary education, ethics of values is an excessively demanding basis of moral education. On the basis of contemporary research evidence regarding social development (Trevarthen, Tomasello, Hartup itn.) we can build a hypothesis that the child's first moral relationships with important persons are formed on the basis of the child's care for the primary objects' love, and that the cognitive capacities for understanding justice develop after that. We are already familiar with some theoretical attempts to reconcile ethics of care and ethics of justice (Callan), which enables us to develop a second hypothesis: that a combination of ethics of care and ethics of justice is the best basis for developing a curriculum of moral development in nursery or primary school. Such combination presupposes activation of indirect and direct educational factors in the didactical sense, which include a proper climate of peer relationships, the child's attitude to the authority of the teacher as an object of identification, the organization of peer cooperation and mutual help, the stimulation of the processes of negotiation of common rules and regulations, the interpretation of different opinions and desires in potential conflict situations, special curriculum units about ethics of interpersonal relationships, etc. Such model of moral development also presupposes a new interpretation of some basic educational concepts (particularly the link between the concepts of self-limited authority (Kroflič) and of pedagogical eros).

An ethnographical note: A change of a playing corner

“Since children no longer play with dolls, we decided that we will change the babies corner it into a beauty parlour. When I told them that ('motivation to act'), Saša reacted: 'Leave the babies corner as it is, Marija plays there every day. She loves babies, she loves them so much she'll have nine of her own when she grows up.' (Marija is a handicapped child!) We left the nook as it was, and arranged a beauty parlour elsewhere.”

(Kroflič 2000, p. 117)

This story was written by a teacher of a group of six-year-olds and describes a spontaneous event during a one-year project to develop a process model of moral education for public nurseries in 1996/97 in Nova Gorica, Slovenia. I figuratively described the model as *Between obedience and responsibility*; in today's terminology it could be described as an attempt to encourage a just and caring environment which enables children a quality moral development.

From the standpoint of existing ethical paradigms (ethics of justice, ethics of virtues and ethics of care), we can ask ourselves, what thinking and what views were the basis for Saša's reflection on the moral responsibility to protect the particular interests of a handicapped girl? Rawls would probably emphasise the concepts of the “veil of ignorance” and the “original position” and add that in spite of the principle of equality of all members of the just society, morality presupposes the primacy of the benefits of the weakest individual (Second principle: Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both: (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principle...; Rawls 1999, p. 266) Kohlberg would further ask if and to what extent the girl was capable of explaining her situation-sensitive and highly moral act in relation to the general moral principle presupposing the verification of a moral choice beyond negotiation or beyond the established rules of living

in the group. The advocates of ethic of virtue would recognise in the act a strong character feature of the girl which not only enabled her to empathise with the special needs of her colleague, but also led her to the decision that the special need is more important than the majority interest of her social group, and add that in this case »...turning to a principle when natural (spontaneous) caring is already operating (or could be operating) is indeed having one thought too many.« (Noddings and Slote 2003, p. 345) Gilligan and Noddings would attribute the act to a situation-related care relationship enabled by exceptional engrossment into the position of the handicapped girl, and add that they cannot agree with Kohlberg when he says that »direct caring concern for other people is morally less advanced than conscientious concern for principles of justice and human rights.« (Ibid., p. 344)

Before we return to the judgement of how these explanations are convincing or unconvincing, I would like to note how much I agree with K. A. Strike when he says that »moral pluralism says that moral goods are irreducibly many and often conflicting... Moreover, there is no grand theory in which all moral goods are synthesized, weighted, and ordered.« (Strike 1999, p. 21) The following hypotheses arise from this statement:

- that despite the essential differences, the prevailing concepts of ethics of care, ethics of justice and ethic of virtues can be combined, and on the basis of such combination a consistent concept of moral education can be developed;
- that every moral development, as well as any concrete moral dilemma is a conflicting one, and one of the main tasks of encouraging moral development is to enable an individual to act in conflicting situations as a moral subject;
- that it is sensible, regardless of the complementary nature of the above ethical orientations in the choice of methods of moral education in early childhood (family education, nursery and primary school education), to favour those ethical models which are better suited to the nature of the child's first entry into social interaction (ethics of care), and gradually strengthen the child's ability to reflect on ethical dilemmas and his or her awareness of the complexity of universe of personal and societal values;
- that, particularly when the issues of tolerance and multiculturalism are at stake, engrossment in the other as different and a life in a situation of caring and just heterogeneity are the only ways to ensure and early entry into ethically appropriate models of multicultural coexistence.

I.

While institutional moral education before the twentieth century was dominated by the concept of character education based on ethics of virtues, the criticism of its ineffectiveness (e.g. Hartshorne and May) and indoctrination (e.g. Kohlberg) gave rise to a number of new approaches with more or less developed ethical paradigms (Noddings and Slote 2003, pp. 350-352). After a period of conflict between advocates of different ethical orientations (between the advocates of ethics of justice, ethics of care and ethics of virtues, between the advocates of liberalism and the communitarians), the appeal to find a "common voice" came to the fore. Such voice should retain the moral pluralism and the right of individuals, particularly the members of different cultural, ethnic racial and other minorities, to keep their different voice heard in the world of majority culture (Callan 1998, p. 51; Noddings 1999, pp. 14-15; Strike 1999, pp. 28-29; Katz 1999, p. 73, etc.). But to unite different ethical approaches into a whole, certain common views must prevail in the interpretation of

individual ethical theories. We can only arrive at such views by reading mutual criticisms by the advocates of different theories.

The key points of ethics of justice are therefore:

- to maintain a difference between justice as a common value on one hand and particular political, economic and social rights of the other;
- to renounce the efforts to reach universal ethics and to emphasise Rawls's principle of difference, and to understand the reasoning under the veil of ignorance in the original position;
- to encourage moral judgement which strives to recognise and tolerate differences, and to respect the other regarding moral distress (Callan 1997, pp. 198-202);
- in addition to rational judgement, the sense of justice and the conception of good should be recognised as motivation forces.

Young democracies such as Slovenia are typically fascinated with the consistent discourse of human rights and the rights of the child; many believe that this discourse actually replaces the need to develop an moral education concept in schools. In this, they neglect certain theoretical predictions which caution against equating the general concept/value of justice and particular legal approaches. In practice, the care approach provides for a larger contextual flexibility and respect for differences, as well as the respect of existing rules (Strike 1999, p. 26); but nobody in his or her right mind conceptualise family education using the courtroom as a model (Ibid., p. 28). Noddings and Slote further emphasise that the discourse of rights sees people as separate individuals, since rights protect us from interference by others, while women think more in the context of community of people (Noddings and Slote 2003, p. 344). And finally, Noddings provides an important political warning that particular models of equality, including ethics of justice, are popular because of the political and economic tradition of liberalism, adding: »I include myself among those belonging to the liberal tradition. It may well be that we will have to move beyond liberalism. However, until we develop a way to do this without losing some of liberalism's great strengths, we should at least be aware of its weaknesses.« (Noddings 1999, p. 18)

That the principles of ethics of justice can be understood beyond the ideal of universalism, and thus reconcile it with other ethical orientation, is convincingly argued by Strike: "Universalizability is a formal rule of reasoning, and it is not specifically about moral reasons... What is important for the difference between justice and care is therefore not the issue of universality" (Strike 1999, p. 24) According to Strike, the dilemma of Heinz described by Kohlberg (the theft of the drug to help the loved person) does not presuppose any universal prohibition of theft or universal prescription of theft to save life. All it demands is consistent argumentation. Even more: "What universalizability requires is that anyone who says, 'Since my loved will die if I do not steal the drug, I may do so?' also be willing to say, 'If your loved one were dying, you would be similarly justified in stealing the drug.' Here the universality recognizes the connection between two people as a reason. It does not reject the caring justification. It universalizes it... It insists only on consistency – that any reason for me to steal or not to steal the drug is also a reason for you if you are similarly situated." (Ibid.) A similar interpretation of Rawls's ethics of justice is advocated by Callan, who says that the essence of ethics of justice is the concept of justice as reasonableness, and this "devolves into a cluster of mutually supportive habits, desires, emotional propensities, and intellectual capacities whose coordinated activity requires

contextually sensitive judgement; ...the idea captures no simple master-rule rule for moral choice.” (Callan 1997, p.8).

Since this is an answer to the most frequent criticism, that ethics of justice is restricted to rational judgement and therefore requires an emotionally detached individual (desituated self (Gilligan); disinterested self (Noddings)), who could have problems with reaching beyond ones own individuality and with motivation to act ethically, we should now examine the request for a moral reasoning oriented towards recognising and tolerating differences. This arises from the need that ethics of justice should provide a justification for ethical behaviour and at the same time remain open for different ethical views and the context of particular ethical situations. Since we live in a world of differences, “we can learn the most from the most adverse situations, situations we would never create for ourselves. When the life is most complicated, overflowing with pain and difficulty, we can grow the most.... crisis may be one of the climates where education flourishes – a climate that forces honesty out, breaks down the walls of what ought to be, and reveals what *is*, instead.” (Katz 1999, p. 72) Moral conflicts can be ideal educational situations (Kroflič 2002), of course if we are capable of developing communicative tools for their solving. As the fundamental dimension of justice, E. Callan provides the concept of moral distress: “By 'moral distress' I refer to a cluster of emotions that may attend our response to words or actions of others or our own that we see as morally repellent. Moral distress comes in two basic varieties: the other-regarding kind triggered by the perceived failings of others, and the self-regarding kind that entails some negative evaluation of what we have done or who we are... Yet a discriminating susceptibility to moral distress is a fundamental aspect of virtue, and therefore, that troubling cluster of emotions must be evoked, and suitably shaped, in the process of moral education.” (Callan 1997, str. 200) Callan notes that moral distress can lead to pathology, which means that “there can be no risk-free morality, and no risk-free moral education” (Ibid, p. 201). But he adds that the concept of offence-free school “would oblige us to eschew dialogue. But to avoid offence is to suppress all that might arouse other-regarding moral distress.” (Ibid, p. 202) A conflict dialog is, in addition to mutual trust and attachment, a precondition for pluralist school (Ibid.).

That a combination of the postulates of ethics of justice, ethics of care and ethics of virtues could lead us to a consistent basis for an education concept of a public educational institution, we must also critically correct ethics of care and ethics of virtues:

- ethics of care must accept both interpersonal relationship and the fellow-human's position as fundamental values;
- regardless of ethical appropriateness, care must be rationally founded; it is also clear that long-term success can only result from care which is supported by the feeling of justice in all involved;
- we must also consider caring attitude in a conflict environment, when it is not easy to recognise the object of care as a friendly person;
- care is not a necessary quality of strong character, nor is it revealed only as care for fellow-person, but also for oneself, for foreigners and distant others, for the environment and the tradition of ideas (comp. Noddings 1992).

Criticisms of crucial role of caring attitude in N. Noddings' ethics of care is voiced by Strike (1999, p. 176) and Callan, who claims: »Persons have a worth that is not reducible to the relationships in which they are embedded, even when the relationships are constituted by

bonds of unselfish caring; and their worth creates peremptory claims upon the aid or forbearance of others – moral rights in other words – which are not contingent upon the affections that may or may not bind particular members of the moral community.« (Callan 1998, p. 55) Or, in similar statement by P. Tillich: »Justice can be reached only if both the demand of the universal law and the demand of the particular situation are accepted and made effective for the concrete situation. But it is love which creates participation in the concrete situation.« (Tillich 1954, p. 15).

To accept the fellow-person as a value regardless of the intensity of personal bonds, we must find a rational base for the principles of ethics of care and adjust them to the principles of justice. Noddings admits that understanding is an essential element in ethics of care, but contends that motivation for ethical action does not arise from rationalised moral principles and the deontological obligation ‘I must’, but from empathy with and for the other (Noddings 2002, p. 14). At the same time, Strike shows that attitudes can remain permanently caring only if the object of care sees them as just, not as capricious (Strike 1999, p. 28)

And finally, ethics of care and ethics of virtue must relate to the issues of a possible gap between the strength of personality/character and morality, and the issues of ethics outside personal relations with close others. It is a great paradox, hard to reconcile only with ethics of virtues and education of character, that »...some people of otherwise upstanding character have done horrible things to their fellow human beings. People, who are truthful, loyal to their country, obedient to authority, dutiful, and in some ways responsible can nevertheless commit crimes against humanity.« (Noddings 2002, p. 152) Even if education involves influencing personality or character, education of morality also entails the development of certain special skills and the development of moral attitudes outside close personal contacts. In this way, the concept of ‘caring about’, as opposed to the concept of personal ‘caring for’, can be understood of the formation of a general sense of justice (Ibid., pp. 85-86). In addition, Noddings in her early work established a whole spectrum of caring attitudes. I would particularly like to emphasise the attitude to one’s own spiritual development (Noddings 1992, pp. 81-85) and the caring for ideas and cultural tradition (Ibid., pp. 150-172). The former deserves special mention because the concepts of ‘attitudes ethics’ and ‘human as a person’ only obtain a sound metaphysical foundation in the spiritual dimension: “We study spirituality because it matters to us individually and collectively; it is a center of existential care.” (Ibid., p. 85) This is particularly emphasise in European personalist tradition (Buber, Levinas etc.). The latter is mentioned because the ultimate requirement for any sensible and significant learning as well as for personal development is the ability to engross in the message of the spiritual/cultural tradition and to allow it to reshape our current thinking and values horizons with new experience (Gadamer 1979; comp. Kroflič 2003).

II.

To confirm the hypothesis that, when deciding on the methods of moral education in early childhood (family education, education in nursery and primary school), it is good to favour those models which are better suited to the nature of the child’s first entry into social interaction (ethics of care), and then gradually strengthen the child’s ability to reflect upon ethical dilemmas and his or her awareness of the complexity of the universe of personal and societal values, let us consider a few psychological and philosophical approaches to the understanding of the moral development of the child in early childhood.

Let us begin with the statement by R. S. Peters, that the fundamental paradox of moral education is the fact that, while we aim at “the intelligent adaptability of a rational code” with »spontaneous delight in practising it” (Peters 1998, p. 38), “the brute facts of child development reveal that at the most formative years of a child’s development he is incapable of this form of life and impervious to the proper manner of passing it on.” (Ibid, p. 32) Therefore the first moral education must include the strengthening of moral habits – and the consistent concept of moral development must provide for such moral habits which will not be in conflict with future moral reflection (Ibid., p. 39). Apparently Rawls is aware of Peters’s paradox of moral education. In his chapter of the *sense of justice* he states that the stability of a just community largely depends on a “strong and normally effective desire to act as the principles of justice require” (Rawls 1999, p. 398). This desire is over and over again in conflict with the individual’s particular motives (Ibid., p. 399); therefore “a moral view is an extremely complex structure of principles, ideals, and perceptions, and involves all the elements of thought, conduct, and feeling.” (Ibid., p. 404) Although he does not establish his own theory of moral development, he explains his view of it in the context of three more or less sequential stages. Two stages are particularly interesting: *morality of authority*, which belongs to the stage of (predominantly) family education, when the child does not yet have developed concept of justice, and the fundamental medium of moral development is love and care for the child, through which the child develops reciprocal moral feelings, and the demands of authority, which must be just without exception – particularly because the child is not yet capable of moral reasoning (Ibid., p. 405-408); and *morality of community* (which is Rawls covers Kohlberg’s third to fifth stages; ibid., p. 404), in which “a person works out of a conception of the whole system of cooperation that defines the association and the ends which it serves.” (Ibid., p. 410) One of the most important communities the child enters at this stage is school; and its principles are based on the recognition of different views, the acknowledgement of these differences and the adjustment of these views and expectations in accordance with a minimum level of negotiation (ibid.).

Another evidence that Rawls’s ethics of justice is not in conflict with the ideas of ethics of care and ethics of virtues comes from many research in the field of development psychology. Between children and adults (subjects of care), an emotional exchange develops as early as the first few months, as a form of “protoconversion” (Trevarthen 1993; quoted from Marjanovič Umek L. and Zupančič M., 2001); this is followed by the understanding of other people by analogy with oneself (Tomasello 1995; ibid.) and by friendly (peer) cooperation, also when conflicts arise (Hartup 1993; ibid.). The same findings are confirmed by Hoffman’s research on empathy (1987, 2000; ibid.). The latter is shown as a concept which, arising from emotional exchange, gradually includes the development of cognitive capacities. Noddings finds a great similarity between ‘empathy’ in Hoffman’s research and ‘engrossment’, and regrets that there had been no cooperation in the field of morality research (Noddings 2002, p. 151).

The closest link undoubtedly exists between the proponents of the theory of object relations (Kernberg, Kohut, Winnicott, etc.) and the advocates of the ontogenetic primacy of caring attitude in moral development in childhood (Noddings, Rawls). Through the concepts of symbiosis, mirror stage, primary emotional (imaginary) identification and symbolic identification, the proponents of the theory of object relations enable the understanding of the importance of an emotionally stable and caring environment, which is gradually upgraded with the adoption of moral rules as symbolic objects of identification. If the emotional blending of object and subject of care (symbiosis) is crucial for the child’s development in the first months of life, the later identification with rationalised moral rules helps the child

through the time of reduced emotional attachment to the authority of important adults, encouraging the processes of separation and individuation and the growth of social-cognitive competences (Kroflič 2000, pp. 44-84).

Accepting these theoretical bases in the curriculum requires that the educational concepts of nurseries and primary schools include process oriented planning, which emphasises a combination of crucial direct and indirect educational factors: the development of appropriate peer relations, the child's attitude to the authority of the teacher as the object of identification, the organisation of cooperation and mutual assistance, the encouragement of processes of negotiation of common rules, the interpretation of different opinions and wishes in conflict situations, and discussing topics in the field of ethics of interpersonal relations (particularly through children's literature) (Kroflič 2000, pp. 85-144). At the same time, the model presupposes a new interpretation of certain fundamental concepts of theory of education (particularly the linking of the concept of self-limited authority (*ibid.*, p. 65-84) with the concept of pedagogical eros (Kroflič 2003a)).

III.

What is the connection between the presented model of encouraging moral development and the formation of a tolerant and multicultural environment? Tolerance, including the acceptance of the other – either as a subject or as an object of care – on the principles of justice, is an exceptionally demanding concept (in both emotional and cognitive sense); it requires the overcoming of the feeling of emotional threat from the different, and thus strange, other, as well as the recognition of the other as valuable, and the readiness for communication and coexistence. This can only be achieved in inclusive environments which provide not only for just integration of different children, but also for engrossment (empathy) in the different other and for gradual understanding of the new quality of existence.

Only such environment enables a pre-school child like Saša from our introductory story to place the particular need of a weaker child above the consensual interests of the majority. This is therefore an example of spontaneous acceptance of a particular difference, in which any quotation of corresponding ethical principles would be *one thought too many...*

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