CRITICAL THINKING IN THE PROGRAM OF MORAL EDUCATION IN SLOVAKIA

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Abstract

The author aims at the description of Ethical Education teaching introduction realized at primary and secondary schools in the Slovak Republic. This subject creates a main supporting area for pupil and student’s moral development. Besides these education aspects, the author points at the importance of critical and analytical thinking processes development within this class as a mean of helping and enabling to deepen the understanding and internalization of moral values and norms. The author presents fundamental baselines for pupil and student’s moral development program in Slovakia, exploring its dominant goal orientation, content structure and methods of realization. The author pays attention also to an Ethical Education teacher implementing different educational approaches in comparison to teachers of other subjects emphasizing also different didactic approach based on the experiential learning and its reflection. This reflection ends up in the analysis of moral values, moral norms and principles.

Keywords: moral development, Ethics as an academic subject, value education, critical and analytical thinking.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the context of the Slovak National Educational Program, moral development of a pupil is addressed mainly through Ethical Education as an academic subject belonging to one of six educational fields called Man and Values. Ethical Education is a component of the National Educational Program for primary education level (the four initial years of education, ISCED 1), for lower secondary education level (five years, ISCED 2), and for higher secondary education (the first two years out of four within ISCED 3). Ethical Education is based on questioning the moral value reflection or own value orientation establishment. Then there is a place for its answering and argumentation, and it is not possible without critical thinking. It can be thought nowadays there is an increase in philosophical exploring methods being realized at schools within philosophical classes. There are two main reasons for it, i.e. firstly, Philosophy asks for doubts (as a method), and an effort/courage to think more as is usual, accept no arguments before they are being doubted, and again verified; and secondly, asks for/develops critical thinking. Critical thinking is resistant to manipulation and indoctrination, is independent and logical. Critical thinking (as a base for every science) should be realized in every class within all educational levels in our educational system. Present uncertain times require it.

2 THE CONCEPT OF PUPIL’S MORAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE EDUCATIONAL CURRICULUM

The original concept of a pupil’s moral development in Slovakia was designed before 1990 by the team of Lencz [2]. It was originally developed by a Spanish psychologist, Olivar who, in turn, elaborated on the preceding of Child Development Program of Solomon, Watson, Battistich. Olivar’s program of education oriented at prosociality involves specific methods and topics addressing the development of prosocial (socially positive) behaviour of a man. Olivar [4], [1] based his theory on his awareness, that prosociality is a decisive factor of personality development. “Prosocial behaviour is a behaviour which provides benefits for another person or a group of people. It is not based on any obligation or expectation of a reward” [5]. It is a behaviour encouraging integrity and cohesion in the society and is based on help, gift, sharing, cooperation, and friendship of its members.

The most recent version of Ethical Education curriculum was published in 2015 stating that Ethical Education primary task is based on “the formation of pupils’ personalities in the context of their identity and value orientation, in which the respect towards man and nature, cooperation, prosociality, and also universal human values are key components.” [6]. As we can see, the goal of Ethical Education is to support the personal and social development of a pupil towards prosociality in his/her identity and value
orientation. To achieve these educational goals, mainly experience based learning is used, because it helps them to understand and integrate moral standards into their thinking, and encourages desirable behaviour in compliance with these standards. Within primary education (ISCED 1), Ethical Education focuses on the regulation of behaviour, the development of moral thinking and the cultivation of interpersonal relationships emerging from the family and spreading towards the class, school, and region. Pupils are taught to think critically, discuss, express their opinions; harmonic and stable relationships in the family, class, and other social groups are encouraged. Within lower secondary education (ISCED 2), used didactic methods are enriched by controlled conversation, discussion and simulation games which teach pupils to distinguish good from bad and help them to get oriented in contemporary moral dilemmas. Prosociality does not represent Ethics as a whole, however, it is the core of ethics of interpersonal relationships. Its value dimension lies within mutual human understanding and sharing a space to live, which includes compassion and humanity as a moral category of a man, related to the human struggle to live a harmonious and happy life in accordance with the ideal, we have created [6].

These goals are achieved through sixteen topic units of the curriculum. The first 10 units constitute the basic topics; the following six are the applied topics: 1 - open communication, 2 - human dignity, self-respect, positive self-evaluation, 3 - positive evaluation of other people, 4 - creativity and initiative, 5 - expression of emotions, 6 - empathy, 7 - assertiveness, 8 - real and imagined ideals, 9 - prosocial behaviour -- help, gift, sharing, cooperation, friendship, 10 - complex prosociality, 11 - ethics – searching for the roots of prosocial behaviour, 12 - ethics and economic values, 13 - ethics and religions -- tolerance and respect, 14 - the family I live in, 15 - education about marriage and parenthood, 16 - nature and environmental protection.

To be able to reach the educational goals of the Ethical Education, the authors suggested an optimal methodical procedure to practice the activities, or educational phases. R. Olivar [4] suggested three following phases: cognitive sensibilization – practice/training – real experience. This three phase model was broaden by a Slovak pedagogue, L. Lencz [8] in several aspects. He pointed at the need of emotional sensibilization (interconnected to cognitive and affective stimuli), and also he added the fourth phase into this model – value reflection being placed it (not only) at the second position after the cognitive-emotional sensibilization (but also he enables it also after the phase of practicing). The value reflection phase is understood by Lencz as “an inevitable part of the education…needed for the second degree of interiorization process of values and norms and their further generalization” [8, p. 60].

The value reflection opens up the space for thinking about the moral values from the individual or social perspective. The essence of this educational phase is the awareness, characterization and also evaluation of the moral values being applied in any human activity or pupils’ activity. Pupils are supposed to describe a moral problem, identify various ethical arguments, as well their own ethical judgement. It is unacceptable if this educational phase is neglected, for then the whole process of value identification and interiorization is in danger or as stated by I. Podmanický [9, p. 65] “the experiential learning without value reflection is dysfunctional”. However, we do agree it is the most complex phase of it. Though it has happened, and it is still happening as is mentioned by L. Lencz. The teachers did “acquire the experiential learning, the activating teaching methods very easily, even the training phase in the classroom is realized”, though the value – ethical – reflection makes them to be worried, and also making the interconnections to real, everyday life[8].

The experience covered in the first phase (or in a training phase) helps to create moral attitudes only when it is combined with reflection enabling the understanding and awareness of the value hidden in it; leading to the generalization and to moral rule formation. In general, the reflection is a phase of thinking about facts arising from own lives, own knowledge, and own experiences. This phase goal is to develop a new cognitive-emotional experience into the reflection and understanding the projected (or experienced) value. The values understood in this manner help to create new value system related to behavioural norms. In the phase of value reflection, there is a place for own experience reflection and analysis of own ethical attitudes. Lencz suggests to proceed from experiential learning to value, generalizing and norm-based reflection, i.e. the education should be a reflection generalizing the experiences [8]). However, he adds the teacher should not be satisfied with the heteronomous principles based on the consensus, but to try to understand the theoretical or empirical foundations and motives. The value reflection then enables as a part of experiential learning to create moral attitudes and autonomous moral reasoning. It leads to identification and understanding of the included experience, to
the experience of a pupil acquired in the educational setting and to generalization, so that is into creating a moral principle.

The value reflection is precluded by *emotional* reflection based on the emotional experiences quality reflection in various educational situations, especially while using the experiential methods. Especially the moral feelings are being addressed as the basic fundamental part of the moral consciousness. The first (cognitive) form of the value reflection is *discovering* reflection where pupils try to identify moral problems in various educational situations. The more demanding form is *reasoning* reflection where pupils not only identify, but also name the causality of the moral problem solution with an accent at its consequences for himself/herself or for others. The last form is *generalizing* reflection where a pupil looks for and identifies moral principles applicable into analogical moral problems solution in his/her moral behaviour in everyday life. Looking at the developmental issues, we talk about the process from self-feeling, self-understanding to self-evaluation and self-regulation, self-projection, self-reflection of own life meaning. This is a process of very simple feeling reactions through progressive value awareness and their implementation in moral attitudes and in a pupil’s behaviour on the basis of own emotion reactions, ability to analyse them, reflect them, and ability to solve more complex moral problems in the context of own various life situation. The limitation is if a teacher (especially because of the lack of time) stays only with the emotional reflection keeping at the simplest form of this phase. If s/he does not continue into cognitive and analytical reflection form, then the moral/ethical education stays as a psychological activity.

The form of reflection realization can be different: individual (e.g written), reflection in small groups of the same “blood”, or as a part of a whole group activity when all of the respondents sit in a circle at the same distance/level. Reflection can be split also into the next, individual educational activity.

The activities done in the phase of value reflection can be also evaluated. D. Schmidt and P. Ruthendorf [11, p. 20-25] suggest to look at following pupils’ competences.

**Tab. 1. Competence of moral analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competence</th>
<th>Being evaluated</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ethical problem analysis</strong></td>
<td>Identification of moral problem/conflict;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Identification who was affected non/directly (aims, interests, worries, hopes,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>description of the value system, expectations arising from the role);</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Identification of situational criteria (e.g. technical possibilities, legal and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>economical framework);</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Identification of the present good;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Identification of the alternatives of activity (goals, activity steps, analysis</td>
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<td></td>
<td>of the used tools);</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Consideration of the activity consequences (including the risks, evaluation of</td>
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<td></td>
<td>the non/knowledge/uncertainty, ability evaluation to reach a goal, and ability</td>
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<td></td>
<td>to control the means);</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Naming of the situational important ethical values and norms (generalization of</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ethical principles, special rules);</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Value and norm consideration.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Various ethical positions usage</strong></td>
<td>Description of value system referring to ethical position,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Situation judgement from various ethical positions (e.g. religious, utilitistic,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>biocentric, pathocentric, deontologic, …);</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Clearness of the decision making in relation to the actual position;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Reasoning of the decision from a concrete perspective (explanation of why and</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>how concrete norms are important for this decision in this concrete situation).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Own ethical opinion</strong></td>
<td>Own opinion formulation clarity;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suitable situation analysis formation;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suitable norm analysis formation;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comprehensibility of preferred norms and values usage for the concrete situation;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Logic and understanding of situation analysis and norm analysis combination in</td>
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<td></td>
<td>the ethical argumentation.</td>
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</table>
We presuppose the most suitable methods for reflection are discursive and presentation methods [8]. The discursive ones cover various forms of dialogue leading, text production and perception, notion confrontation and analysis. The presentation ones are global ones, it is e.g. picture production and perception, theatrical philosophy, and thinking excursions. However, all of them need to be at the end expressed by the means of language that is why the dialogue has a central importance where critical thinking development has its inevitable position.

3 CRITICAL THINKING

The critical thinking basis can be explained in six steps. Critical thinking:

1. is independent and indifferent (i.e. undogmatic) – it produces own ideas reflecting own values and beliefs. It is not influenced by propaganda as was explained in a notion “Sapere Aude” by Kant (i.e. “Do not worry to use your own brain!”);

2. is based on information – though, it is just the beginning of critical thinking, it is not its result. For example, if I want to answer if it is correct to share the results from a project about the human genome research, I must know something about this project and about its results;

3. starts with questions or stated problems needed to be solved – curiosity, wonder, doubts, and personal engagement are the beginning of it enabling a personal struggle to “get out” of it while trying to improve himself/herself. The question is being asked because of doubts, because of not knowing something or of not being convinced;

4. looks for the logical arguments – proofs supporting and verifying the arguments; is reasoned, rational, and consistent. It creates logical conclusions. Arguments consist of three basic elements: a) argument (main idea), b) reasons (justifying the arguments), c) proofs to support every reason (they either confirm or disconfirm the anti-arguments) [7];

5. is analytical – looking for (unspoken) assumptions, analysing, discovering contradictions, judging (arguments) and applying criteria to judge the quality, stating and verifying the hypothesis, synthetizing and implementing. It is judicious, exploring, differentiating (differentiates facts, opinions and valid judgments). It controls the consistency (discovering relations or differences), identifies cliché, stereotypes, bias, and emotions, it presupposes probable consequences;

6. is a social thinking – is being tested and improved by others, their knowledge and experiences verify the correctness and reasonability and logic of our arguments.

When M. Lipman [12] talks about the thinking skills, he is not talking only about the pure critical thinking, but rather about so-called multidimensional thinking covering except criticism also creativity and activity; that is why he talks about 3Cs thinking. His concept of Philosophy for Children offers an important aim for critical thinking: think about the way I think, speak about the way I speak and trying to improve it. There is also logic involved (as a scientific field) with its rules. The group leader needs to be aware of them to be able to identify them during the discussion, to point at them and to help the group to use their potential – that means to think logically correct. Lipman emphasizes these basic structural (logical) principles.

1. Unclear (everyday) words to differentiate from terms, think in terms, clarify the meaning of words. A group leader verifies it/supports it by following questions:
   - Can you make your question clearer?
   - Can you specify what you are talking about and can you repeat what you are talking about?
   - Can anyone help Peter to clarify what he is saying?
   - What do you mean when you say....?
   - Is it the same as you meant it?
   - Are there any synonymous words that would help us to understand better what we are talking about?
   - Can we split this problem we are talking about into several parts?
   - Can this idea be expressed by other words?
   - You both are using various words, are you saying the same or different things?
   - Can these two problems relate in any way?
Do all these things mentioned by Peter, Paul, Frank something in common?
Can we define this term? This idea?
What is the most important? What is the most relevant for this issue?
What is the difference between the idea of Peter and of Julia?

2 To realize the judgements have their own quality (positive and negative), quantity (general, partial, unique), relation (categorical, hypothetical, disjunctive), and also its modality (assertoric, problematic, apodictic). There is a need to realize the definition rules. What is a satisfactory argument for truth verification of our argument?

A group leader verifies it/supports it by following questions:
- When we turn your sentence you have mentioned now, will it still be true?
- Do both of these sentences have the same subject?
- What does your sentence presuppose?
- Is it true what you have mentioned now always and in all cases? Can we find any cases when it is not true?
- Why did you say it? Why do you think it?
- What arguments can be used to support this statement?
- Is it the right argument?
- Is this argument satisfactory?
- Is this argument true?
- Is this argument important?
- How did you end up with this statement?
- How can we support the corrected argument so it persuades us?
- Have we mentioned all the important arguments?
- Which one of these mentioned arguments is the most persuasive for you?
- If we do accept Peter’s view point, what consequences will it have?
- How would the world look alike if all the people acted according to your suggestion?
- What conclusion can be drawn from what Julia says?
- Do these two ideas differ or exclude each other?

3 Judgements (our statements) cannot be mentioned freely. Some of them are introductory (premises) and some of them just follow (conclusion). Their logical relations do influence their truthfulness value.

A group leader verifies it/supports it by following questions:
- Can someone tell us how we came with this conclusion?
- Can someone tell an example to support John’s hypothesis?
- Can someone help to explain Julia’s example?
- Is it possible to verify this hypothesis?
- Can we find an example to verify this hypothesis?
- Is there any case that falsifies our hypothesis?
- If we accept this opinion as one possibility what would it presuppose?
- If one of you is true, does it mean the other is wrong?
- Is there any other solution we have not bear in our mind?

4 Criteria are differentiating instruments on a way to the truthfulness finding expressing the justness of our thinking.

A group leader verifies it/supports it by following questions:
- How can we identify this opinion is correct?
- What criteria are going to be used to compare these statements?
How can we verify the validity (justness) of these criteria?
What criterion do you suggest to choose from criteria?

5 Critical thinking leads to auto-correction.

Critical thinking expresses the context and circumstances where there are our conclusions (or our words meanings) still (always) (not) true.

In contract to correct (truthful) thinking is false thinking (mistake) and also a lie. We can come to the mistake by a chance unconsciously while a lie is conscious untruth with an aim to make someone wrong, to manipulate him/her. Though we can avoid the mistakes (and also manipulations). When Lipman explains creativity as a second dimension of multidimensional thinking, he mentions several criteria to be a measure of it, and being present in the thinking in various intensity [12]:

- Originality;
- Productivity;
- Imagination;
- Independence;
- Experimentation;
- Holism (global thinking);
- Expression;
- Self-transcendence;
- Surprise;
- Generativity (stimulation of others);
- maieuticity (encouraging the ideas and potentials),
- inventiveness.

Referring to the third thinking dimension, Lipman [12] understands the caring thinking. This notion covers in itself the human feelings, emotions, often creating the structure and sense of the proportion and perspectives. Without them our thinking would be flat and incurious. This thinking enables us to concentrate at what is being respected, value the importance of what is needed, evaluate its values, for the presence we pay attention to relates to our actual interests (and also an interest is a type of emotion). That means it is also rewarding. Though differently. We think about the things that we are attracted to by our interests. Or again differently. Moral feelings provoke some thinking and then also the activity (e.g. protection or caring).

Caring thinking is for Lipman (besides affective, rewarding and active) also a normative and empathic thinking. Normative one for our activity is developed in respect to the question “how should the things be” and empathic one for we often imagine ourselves with feelings, perspectives and intentions of the others. Due to this ability we can think effectively in the field of morality. The empathic act does not require to accept the other’s evaluation; we still can use our own judgements. However due to this change, our judgements can be more complex and more strong.

4 CONCLUSION

Ethical Education as an academic subject is an important part of the Slovak school curriculum. In our study, we have explained the basis of the Ethical Education in the context of critical thinking development. By the means of its most important educational phase – value reflection – Ethical Education provides opportunities to develop moral feelings, their actualization, and cognitive reflection.

To be able to fulfil its goals, the critical thinking needs to be used and developed. Before the aimed prosocial pupil’s identity is being developed based on principles of understanding, help and friendship, it needs to be critically analysed and argumented later on to be internalized. The aim is the pupils using their own critical thinking are able to answer the question of Why to be moral, why to act pro-socially? Otherwise, the Ethical Education classes stay as a certain educational theatrical event reaching no deeper changes in the pupil’s moral behaviour.
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