PEDAGOGICAL ETHICS FOR THE FORMATION OF HAPPY STUDENTS

T. Koshmanova¹, T. Ravchyna²

¹College of Education and Human Development, Western Michigan University (UNITED STATES)
²Ivan Franko National University of Lviv (UKRAINE)

Abstract

The paper centers on the premise that education is conceived in relation to visions of human happiness and flourishing: we educate students to make their lives better. We believe that happiness, as the highest human value, is the emotional activity of a person, in accordance with virtues. Based on the idea that any professional activity is grounded in the ethical norms and principles that direct its organization and outcomes, this qualitative study aims to find out the most significant ethical values which would promote student happiness and well-being in education. The study also seeks to identify the conditions, directions, and strategies that would help teachers in the process of formation of their students’ emotional well-being.

Keywords: Pedagogical ethics, teacher education, virtues, human flourishing.

1 INTRODUCTION

Our time of rapid, technologically-driven change, high-stake testing, and consumerist culture led to the reductionist role of pedagogy and teaching profession. Struggling from the pressure from school authorities to deliver test results, teachers often have to ignore the values of pedagogy, teaching their students to the test. The paper argues that the focus of teaching by delivering a subject matter is too limited, it should include other scopes too.

Teaching is just one aspect of an educator’s practice. Another big aspect of teacher professional activity is ethical, or pedagogical. Studying does not aim only at the content conveyed in the subjects; the moral dimension is every decision made by any teacher, but it is often overlooked. There is also shared content that is instantaneously studied by all the students. This content is mostly emotional and social in nature; it reflects the moral background of the pedagogical interaction.

We think that the science of pedagogy must have a renewed look and be studied within the practice and reflection of teachers who care for and about learners, and who connect learning with life and its happiness. By examining four approaches—phenomenological, cultural-historical, dialogical, and the activity theory approach—the authors identified the main ethical norms of teaching and professional pedagogical values which promote students’ emotional well-being and feelings of happiness in learning, and will offer practical recommendations for their attainment by educators. The study is based on pedagogical analysis of teacher practices, the generalizations of the authors’ practical experiences as secondary school teachers and teacher educators who lived and worked on the basis of these theories as teachers and teacher educators. The study will also employ the findings from a multicultural empirical study on the essence of pedagogical ethic and the concept of good teaching which promotes students’ happiness from the points of view of teachers and their students.

The paper centers on the premise that education is conceived in relation to visions of human happiness and flourishing: we educate students to make their lives better. We believe that happiness, as the highest human value, is the emotional activity of a person, in accordance with virtues. We agree with Haybron ([1]) who looks at happiness as “emotional well-being,” and as something “opposite to anxiety.” Based on the idea that any professional activity is grounded in the ethical norms and principles that direct its organization and outcomes ([3],[4]), this qualitative research aims to find out the most significant ethical values which would promote student happiness and well-being in education. The study also seeks to identify the conditions, directions, and strategies that would help teachers in the process of formation of their students’ happiness.
2 METHODOLOGY

We collected data from a variety of sources to construct the analytical framework for this study. The study is based on pedagogical analysis of teacher practices, the generalizations of the authors' practical experiences as a secondary school teachers and later teacher educators. The paper also employs the findings from the cross-cultural empirical study on the values of learning and teaching which promote students' happiness and flourishing. We used narrative analysis that promotes the formation and preserving of social-cognition processes ([2]). The researchers examined narratives of American \([N=21]\) and Ukrainian \([N=27]\) in-service teachers who were Master's students in their teacher education graduate programs. The participants were reflecting in their university classes on the ethical values of teaching which promote students' well-being and happiness in learning.

To determine the conditions that promote students’ well-being, positive feelings and happiness during the process of their learning, we conducted a cross-cultural study, the participants of which were practicing teachers in their relevant Master’s programs \([\text{total } N=48]\), each of them had approximately three years of teaching experience in public schools. The study was conducted by the researchers in the United States and Ukraine. The researchers asked them to write short narratives addressing the following question: “What are the most important factors for you that make your learning joyful, pleasant, happy? Please describe not more than three factors.”

3 RESULTS

Analyzing the obtained results, we systematized the respondents’ opinions and identified three main conditions for students to feel happy. The study showed that students will feel happy when they gain interest and feel engaged in the process of mastering professional knowledge and skills; when they achieve learning success, psychological comfort, and develop self-confidence; when teachers create a supportive learning environment, in which every student becomes a value for the teacher.

3.1 Interest

Speaking about interest, the participants wrote that they were very happy to go to classes, where they learned something new, meaningful for their professional life. Many of them indicated that when it was interesting in the classroom, they felt inspired, joyful, happy, and did not even notice how quickly time passed.

We also asked our participants to indicate which factors influence the development of interest in learning. On the basis of their answers, we identified the most important conditions for the development of students' interest in learning, such as: practical significance of educational material for teaching students; use of modern scientific information that promotes the development of students; the use of methods, tools that make the learning fun; teacher’s personality, his/her professional competence, moral qualities, pedagogical ethics (attitude towards students, colleagues, other people, his pedagogical activity, the country, etc.) also plays a big role in keeping students engaged, happy, and interested in learning.

3.2 Success

Highlighting success as an important condition for obtaining positive emotions, respondents noted that its achievement depends on teachers, namely their ability to help students in learning. Respondents identified such important teacher qualities: willingness to support students; high expectations for students, teacher’s belief in each student’s success.

During the study, the participants noted that learning environment in which every student feels psychologically comfortable, protected and self-confident, is of great importance for the feeling of joy and happiness in learning. During the dialogue with the researchers, the participants, answering their question “What makes a student feel easy, free, happy in the learning process?” we found out that it is very important for students to have their psychological needs met, such as: safety, security, acceptance, development, etc. The study shows that it is the realization of these needs that makes each student confident in their own strengths and capabilities.

The study found out that the main conditions specified by the respondents for students' feeling of pleasure, joy and happiness in learning (such as learning interest, success, comfort, positive well-being and self-confidence) fully depend on the teacher’s personality, his/her professional competence, pedagogical ethics. We believe that moral qualities of the teacher, which is the expression of his/her
ethical values, are an integral element, the core of his pedagogical competence and have a great influence on his/her professional knowledge and skills. Adhering to moral values, the teacher will treat all students without prejudice, believe in the ability of everyone, and respect the dignity of all. In accordance with the pedagogical ethics, the teacher does not put pressure on students and does not force them to learn, but rather involves them in the process of thinking, searching for new knowledge, and constructing personal judgments. It is ethical values that do not allow teachers to impose their opinions on students, to make them think like their teachers.

3.3 Teachers’ Ethical Values

The participants were also asked to highlight the basic ethical values that teachers need for successful organization of teaching, behavior, productive educational environment, and trusting relationships with students. Both American and Ukrainian participants gave identical answers. They considered pedagogical competence, kindness, trust, justice, respect, responsiveness, benevolence, as main ethical values for promoting students’ creativity, independent thinking, joy and happiness in learning. There were no particular differences in the opinions of the American and Ukrainian respondents regarding teachers’ ethical values. However, American participants have identified pedagogical competence as the most important ethical value of the teacher - the ability to organize learning in the context with modern approaches, concepts, and also use scientific information that corresponds to modern research and scientific achievements. Ukrainian respondents highlighted justice and objectivity as the most important ethical values of a teacher for the organization of trusting interaction with students, for providing psychological and comfortable learning conditions.

We believe that pedagogical ethics not only regulates teachers’ behavior and their positive relationships with students, but also directs them to create conditions for each persons' happiness ([5], [6], [7]). The study also allowed to identify the directions and strategies of formation of teachers’ ethical values, which include

1. mastering theoretical knowledge about the essence of each value, discussing its objective and subjective significance for students as future teachers;
2. the analysis of teachers’ behavior according to the content of each value in various pedagogical situations and own personal experiences; consideration of the consequences of teacher behavior in connection with the violation of certain moral norms; (3) modeling pedagogical situations in which students can predict teacher's behavior in the context of moral values; students’ analysis of personal attitudes to the moral norm as a value.

4 CONCLUSIONS

For the formation of ethical values of future teachers that promote students’ happiness in learning, it is very important to organize a discussion with them on the essence and content of each ethical value. Our practical teaching experiences prove that students often cannot explain how they understand the concept of “respect” of a teacher or “pedagogical kindness,” “justice.” It is important for future teachers to pose trigger questions for reflection, like “Can a teacher respect students who do not respect him, do not fulfill his/her requirements and may allow rude remarks about him?”; “How can a teacher be kind to students who do not study, deliberately violate discipline and disrupt classes?”

Discussing the content of pedagogical values that promote students’ enjoyable learning, it is important to discuss with them the objective value of each norm (how important it is for teaching, what actions the teacher should do in accordance with this value). No less important is the analysis of the significance of this value for the future professional activity of each student as a teacher. Students need to analyze the objective significance of a specific ethical value for personal pedagogical activity — what it means for me to be a kind, fair or trusting teacher, etc.

Of great importance is the preparation by the teacher of specific real pedagogical situations in which different forms of teacher behavior are presented, depending on certain situations. It is important for teacher teachers to direct students toward analyzing, assessing own actions in accordance with the content of a specific value, and consider the consequences of teachers’ behavior in educational process as a result of a violation of a specific ethical norm.

Students also develop their personal attitudes to ethical values which promote students’ happiness, if they analyze their personal experiences of teaching, the sense of the importance of a particular ethical norm or the consequences of its violating in certain situations. It is very important to organize a
dialogue, during which students view the essence of ethical norms and evaluate their personal significance as values for their own educational activities. It is also necessary to focus students on the prediction of personal actions as a teacher in future educational activities that promote students’ enjoyable learning and feelings of happiness.

REFERENCES