

ETHICAL EDUCATION AT SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This paper informs about the educational content of the subject Ethical Education that has been in the Czech Republic newly included as a Complementary Educational Field into the Framework Education Programme for Elementary Education in addition to Second Foreign Language and Drama. Part of this paper concentrates on introduction of the new subject Ethical Education in the form as it is taught at the University of Hradec Králové and also on the presentation of some parts of selected teaching units.

Key Words

Ethical education, ethics, morality, moral values, prosocial behavior, communication, self-assessment, positive assessment of others, empathy, creativity, assertiveness

Introduction

At the present time discussion of different levels takes place on introduction of the educational field Ethical Education in Elementary School System as a Complementary Educational Field besides Second Foreign Language and Drama.

Ethical education is being taught as a compulsory optional subject in the national education system, for example, in Slovakia. Another country, which integrated the subject Ethics as an alternative to Religion as a compulsory subject in the elementary education, is Finland. In the long term this country ranks among the best as far as education research of all kinds is concerned. Today the discussion about obligatory inclusion of the Ethical Education into the curricula of Germany is in progress as well. Some federal republics have already introduced it as an obligatory subject in their education system. The country, in which teachers take a keen interest in the issue of Ethics and Ethical Education, is also Austria. On the basis of OECD results in this country there are 89 per cent of educators who pay attention to Ethical Education (see Ticha).

The experience gained from the above mentioned countries demonstrates that Ethical Education became a popular subject because of both its content and its form of experience learning. Ethical Education strengthens child's dignity, leads to kind and helpful interpersonal relations, cultivates positive human qualities, trains for tolerance and the ability to sympathize.

Ethical education forms an inseparable part of education. It is closely connected with the moral element of education, which deals with shaping opinions and beliefs influencing human behaviour in such a way so that one acts not only according to legislative norms and social rules but also according to moral norms. In our school system the subject which would

systematically develop the moral element of pupils' character has been missing up to now.

Characteristics of the subject Ethical Education in Elementary and Secondary Education

The main aims of Ethical Education include training school children to be prepared to act as independent, free and responsible persons, who are able to claim their rights and to perform their duties; forming pupils' need to express positive emotions in their behaviour, acting and experience of real-life situations; cultivation of perceptivity and sensitive relations to people, environment and nature; guidance towards pupils' tolerance and consideration of other people, their culture and spiritual values; teaching principles of human coexistence.

During an Ethics lesson one uses mainly methods of experience pedagogy, which are completed with other activities including, for example, reading or listening to stories and fairy-tales, making-up stories on particular topics, drawing and other art activities, work with pictures, practice of separate skills, solving model situations, situational games etc. (see Novakova). Using the project method is also very beneficial since in ideal case it integrates themes chosen from the educational content of other school subjects.

Teaching Methods and Forms of Chosen Ethics Topics - Teachers' Training

In terms of the subject Ethical Education the training of future teachers aims not only at the topics related to prosocial behavior, for example, ethical values and norms, self-awareness, positive assessment of others, empathy, family and ethical aspects of a family life, real life and displayed examples, multicultural

aspects of education, prevention of some negative phenomena, but topics universally developing future educators' personal qualities are also implemented in teaching, for example, social interaction and communication, assertiveness, solving conflicts, creativity and essentials of cooperation, healthy life style.

Within lectures and especially practice lessons future educators get acquainted with themes, activities and situations, which they should pay special attention to when preparing for their own teaching practice at elementary or secondary schools (see (Vacek)). In the following part of the text the chosen topics and activities used in Ethics lessons in the teacher training programme for future teachers the University of Hradec Králové are introduced. These might be applied in lessons at elementary and secondary schools.

When planning a lesson teachers are imparted that the main aim of this procedure is to make pupils, through various forms of simple exercises and especially experience activities, familiar with different kinds of prosocial behavior and to guide them towards the application of this behavior in normal life. Mostly pupils work in groups, cooperate to solve model situations, imagine being put in somebody else's place.

Aids: paper, coloured markers, cards with names of material

Communication

Aim: open non-verbal communication

Organization and time management: participants (pupils) are divided into pairs and by means of gestures and mimicry they tell each other their feelings (3 minutes)

Aim: open verbal communication

Organization and time management: participants (pupils) swap their partners and by means of words they tell each other their feelings (3minutes)

Final reflections: perception analysis of the message told through different forms of communication

Self-assessment

Aim: positive self-assessment

Organization and time management: participants (pupils) form groups of four and each from this group talks about his/her virtues (6minutes)

Aim: realizing own limitations to be able to work on their removal

Organization and time management: participants (pupils) stay in groups of four and each from the group talks about his/her vices (6minutes)

Final reflections: discussion on positive and negative qualities of every single person, analysis of possible ways leading to elimination or moderation of the vices, diversity acceptance

Positive assessment of others

Aim: positive assessment of others

Organization and time management: participants (pupils) form new groups of four and every group chooses from its members one "volunteer". The other members of the group draw a coloured picture characterizing the positive qualities of their schoolmate

Final reflections: discussion on personal feelings, evaluation of the activity, highlighting the benefit of the appreciation of other people

Creativity

Aim: development of creativity

Organization and time management: participants (pupils) form groups of three and select by lot one of the offered material (wood, stone, water, corn, grass,..). They work together and write down all things, which come to their minds, concerning usage of the material as well as how this material could further possibly serve human purposes. (5minutes)

Final reflections: presentation of outcomes and suggestions of further possible usage of the given material, followed by discussion and analysis of ecological factors of raw material use.

Empathy

Aim: to learn to understand people's feelings (empathy) and to be able to give them necessary support in their difficult times

Organization and time management: a teacher creates the model situation- conversation with a friend, who is just coming through a difficult life period (illness, death in a family,..). Participants (pupils) form pairs and act out the friends' dialogue- one in the pair is consoling the other one and trying to comfort him/her (5minutes)

Final reflections: mutual analysis of feelings

Assertiveness

Aim: to teach participants (pupils) to act assertively (to repeat a certain demand with the assertive technique of a broken gramophone record)

Organization and time management: a teacher creates the model situation- we have got a 50% discount voucher in a restaurant,

but the owner of the restaurant does not want to accept it. Participants (pupils) form pairs and make a model conversation (3minutes).

Final reflections: discussion on assertive, passive and aggressive behavior

In the following chapter there is presented an example of an Ethics lesson implemented in grammar school education.

Lesson proposal - 2nd study year at grammar school

Opening: collective contemplation about the theme Cooperation. What does it mean? What does it enable? Does cooperation make anything more difficult? If so, what is it?

1. Activity: Foot in a circle

This exercise helps to remove fear of touch and in a form of a game it should contribute to solving the problem.

Performance:

A group leader draws a circle (when there are 12 participants the circle diameter is c.80 cm, when there are more participants he draws two circles). The participants' task is to stand in the circle with only one of their feet. The end of this task comes not until every participant has really only one foot in the circle.

Evaluation:

What was important for the mutual cooperation?

Final reflections:

Analysis of the point of cooperative behavior and its use in everyday life

2. Activity: Adventure in the Antarctic

The class is divided into 4 groups of c. 5 students.

This exercise instructs participants to creatively cope with difficult situations and at the same time participants learn to behave cooperatively in the emergency state.

Performance:

Participants form groups of 5 or 6 players. Their task is to imagine they are members of an expedition team, which studies the ozone hole in the Antarctic. On their way to the exploratory station the crew on motor scooters gets stuck in a snow storm. When the storm dies away the expedition leader finds out that they have lost their way. He estimates that the station is approximately 25 km south from their place. Since the fuel tank of motor scooters is empty and there is only 10 l petrol left in the fuel reserve can he decide to search for help on his own with use of a compass. The help should come in at latest 24 hours. However, one and a half day is gone and rescuers are not yet there. It is 9 p.m. and the stores consist of a match box, a pocketknife, three woolen covers, a tent, a bag of sweets, three signal flares, a rifle, five small cans of liver salami, five packages of delicate bread, a shovel and five magazines.

Team players must find a solution, which all of them can agree on. They write down all activities that result in solving the situation and consequently they present them to their classmates.

Final reflections:

Analysis of the cooperation importance, especially when coping with difficult life situations.

3. Activity: Car park

Groups of 5 students

This activity is a smiling situation, which can take place practically every day. The aim of this game is both to clarify which criteria we follow in our decisions and to improve participants' argument skills.

Performance:

There are 5 people chosen from a group. They are employers of a firm, which sells paper planes, and the workers need to park at the firm. Right at the building, which is situated in a quiet area of the inner part of a city, there are only three parking places available. The employers must agree on how the places will be divided. The sales manager opens the conversation.

Evaluation:

Which criteria were chosen for division of the parking places?

Which arguments were to the benefit of the cause, which were to the detriment of the cause?

Final reflections:

Evaluation of mutual cooperation

What is important, difficult, easy?

Homework

Think about the situation you really went through and which needed a kind of cooperation. Output is given in a form of a brief record.

Results and Discussion

For a few past decades almost all types of pupils' intelligence have been trained at our schools: verbal, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical-rhythmic, but unfortunately cultivation of the social (personal) intelligence was rather neglected. The social intelligence might be divided into two types: interpersonal intelligence, which means the ability to act with others, to perceive the needs of others, to empathize easily with others, and intrapersonal intelligence, which refers to the self-reflective capacities, understanding of the self and own behavior and the skill to take control of it. Therefore, the social intelligence is necessary for social relations, especially in communication.

With respect to main objectives Ethical Education can to a great extent contribute to the social intelligence development (see e.g. (Winston, 2007) and (Winston and Bahnaman, 2008)). Unlike other subjects concentrating on personal social development, which shapes the personality in a neutral way, Ethical Education primarily aims to prosocial behavior cultivation. It means behavior in favour of another person, the motivation of which is not a duty, it is the behavior without asking for anything for return and at the same time without abuse of one's own identity as a person acting in a prosocial way (see Lencz and Krizova, 2005).

Conclusion

In conclusion let me cite the words of prof. PhDr. Petr Piřha (Conference on Ethical Education, Olomouc, 2009), which I fully agree with. "The introduction of Ethical Education in schools is a must. School without education is not school and society without morality has poor future. It will decay because

of inner crises and as such it will become an easy prey for dull dictatorship. Man is independent only when he is well-disciplined, meaning well-behaved. An undisciplined man will quickly lose his freedom."

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