

**INTERESTS AND DIFFICULTIES OF STUDENTS FROM A SEMI-
PRESENTIAL SPECIALIZATION COURSE IN "ETHICS, VALUES AND
CITIZENSHIP"**

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Abstract: The school has a fundamental role in the moral development of the students and the São Paulo State University, under the program of the São Paulo Virtual University, offered for practicing teachers in public schools the free specialization course "Ethics, Values and Citizenship". The 4 groups on analysis was fulfilled in the Campinas State University. This study analyzed 32 essay thesis to get the students' interests from the keywords listed in the essays' summaries and used referees assessment for difficulties. As conclusion, the insertion of the moral education into the continuous formative process could improve the professional development.

Keywords: Moral development, teacher continuous formation, essay thesis on specialization course.

Introduction

People create values, principles and standards during daily contact, since childhood, with the adult, with peers, with the problems faced. Therefore, it is essential the existence of rules to ensure the harmony of social relations (Vinha & Tognetta, 2008). The rules are essential for moral judgments and the relations between moral and rules has often been studied (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977; Smetana, 1981; Darley & Shultz, 1990; Fini, 1991; Saltzstein, 1994; Martins & Branco, 2001; Lima, 2004; Queiroz, Ronchi, & Tokumaru, 2009).

Moral reasoning plays important roles in the human development and these roles are now seen as being more interpersonal - done to prepare for social interaction, rather than intrapersonal - done to find the truth or work out one's intrapsychic conflicts. Like sex, language or eating, morality is an aspect of humanity that is both deeply biological and profoundly cultural (Haidt, 2013). Brazilian and international researches indicate that schools significantly influence the moral formation of children and youth (Bagat, 1986; Araújo, 1993; DeVries & Zan, 1998; Vinha, 2000, 2003; Tognetta, 2003). But the direct transmission of knowledge is inefficient to make moral values become really important in the personality development and the teachers rarely present moral as object of study and reflection to the students. Rarely the concern of educational institutions with the pedagogical possibilities of conflicts are considered and efforts about "moral development" are more focused to achieve a "good behavior" of the student, often out of fear or conformity, and to contain the conflict than to the apprenticeship. (Vinha & Tognetta, 2008). Teachers, accepted as the backbone of education system, stay in the interface of the transmission of knowledge, skills and values and share a significant responsibility in preparing young people to lead successful and productive lives. Effective teachers can be a source of inspiration and provide a dependable and consistent influence on young people as they make choices about further education, work and life (Ranjan Puhan, Malla, & Kumar Behera, 2014).

The development of autonomy and more just, respectful and supportive relationships are some of the goals found in most educational projects in many educational institutions (Vinha & Tognetta, 2008). Despite good intentions and noble goals of educators, unfortunately it appears that the sociomoral environment of most schools requires quiet, submissive, passive and obedient students - in all aspects, mainly related to autonomy, initiative, and reflective thinking (DeVries & Zan, 1998). What teachers don't know yet, is what this really means, why it is important and how it can be done best. Another problem is that only very small percentages of students indicate teachers as role models, and many teachers consider 'respect' to be the most important virtue (Sanderse, 2013). The idea that teachers can only cultivate children's character if they display it themselves is even considered to be "the most important moral lesson in the character curriculum" (Lickona, 2004, p.118). Analysing teacher education systems in different countries is easy to find majority of teacher education reform efforts centred on reforming the knowledge base of teachers, and similarities can be observed in teacher education curriculum across various societies, showing the necessity to increase ethical values, philosophical thinking, and moral

development in education system (Ranjan Puhan et al., 2014). But moral can't possibly be studied by one discipline alone. (Haidt, 2013).

The inconvenient truth is that modelling attitudes by moral rules has been taken for granted to such an extent that the question whether teachers are morally good and effective role models has hardly received serious attention (Javidan, Bemmels, Devine, & Dastmalchian, 1995)). An education based on submission to authority and uncritical obedience to the rules, without understanding the needs and the underlying principles, mainly by conformism or fear of punishment, may modify external reactions, but hardly contribute to integrate or place moral values in a central place in personality development, which would result in more autonomous attitudes (Vinha & Tognetta, 2008). The moral dimension of teaching has less to do with explicit moral didactics, but with morality in a basic sense: moral education does not equal 'teaching morality', but being a 'moral teacher', which means extending everyday morality into the nuances of teaching (Sanderse, 2013). Interdisciplinary and integrated approach in teacher education curriculum should be so designed that integration among theory courses takes place, and this integrated pedagogical understanding flows into the skill dominated areas of methodology of teaching various subjects as well as into the attitude-building areas of work experience, health, physical and recreational education, along with social service (Ranjan Puhan et al., 2014).

In these context, the University of São Paulo (USP), under the program of the State of São Paulo Virtual University (UNIVESP), offered for practicing teachers in public schools the free specialization course "Ethics, Values and Citizenship". It was released in semi-presential format, with fortnightly regular classes and content available on the web. It aims to prepare teachers to promote ethics education and the construction of moral values.

Methodology

This study analyzed 32 essay thesis from 4 groups in Campinas region that was fulfilled in the State University of Campinas (UNICAMP). These groups began in 2012 with 49 participants and ended in 2013 with 38 enrolled in the last discipline of the course. The students' interests were taken from the keywords listed in the essays' summaries, totaling 101 keywords and 82 single indications, categorized into cultural, educational, moral, psychological, and social issues, besides a category to school levels.

The difficulties to write the essay thesis were revealed from direct observation during orientation classes and from 16 results of 8 essays that didn't pass in the first correction phase and were sent to the second phase of assessment. In first phase, each essay was submitted to

two referees, one internal and another external, and they considered the clarity and the validity of the students production to evaluate and make a critical appraisal. In case of discordance, the essay was passed to the second phase and the text was submitted to another external referee, using the same assessment criteria like in the first phase (clarity, validity and critical appraisal).

Discussion

The Table 1 shows the number of keywords by categories. From 101 categorized keywords, the main interest, as expected, stayed on pedagogical issues (27), social issues (25) and from school and it levels (19). There were 15 indications on moral issues, directly related with moral education which appeared in almost 50% of the 32 analyzed essays. There was also interest in psychological (10) and cultural issues (5).

Table 1 – Number of keywords by categories

Categories	Keywords
educational issues	27
social issues	25
school and it levels	19
moral issues	15
psychological issues	10
cultural issues	5
TOTAL	101

The Table 2 shows all keywords in alphabetical order divided by categories, the keywords are really scattered and diverse. These reflect the distinct professional background of the students, acting in different levels of the system education. Even if all of them were teachers in public school, some had another job as pedagogical coordinator, director or in private schools.

Table 2 - Keywords by categories

Categories	Keywords
cultural issues	Children literature (2), Short stories, Short stories and culture, Theater
educational issues	Cross-cutting issues (2), Didactic-pedagogical practices, Education (3), Education in human rights, Egalitarian education, Environmental education, Indiscipline (2), Ludic, Pedagogical activity, Pedagogical practices, Pedagogical projects, Pedagogical support, Pedagogical work, Professional identity, Teacher profession (2), Teacher role, Teacher training, Teacher work, Teachers opinion, Teachers perception, Teaching and learning, Transversality
moral issues	Autonomy, Children morality, Conflict resolution, Ethic values, Human dignity, Justice ways, Moral autonomy, Moral development (2), Moral dilemmas resolution, Moral judgement, Moral judgement in children, Rules, Value formation, Values
psychological issues	Affectivity, Challenges, Conceptions, Development, Disabilities, Disabilities assessment, Intelligence, Knowledge construction, Learning disabilities, Motivation
social issues	Agency, Bullying, Citizenship, Collectivity, Conflicts, Democracy (2), Educational policies, Fraternity (2), Inclusion, Liberty, Life quality, Micropolitics, Political function, Prevention, Relationship between family and school, Respectful relationships, School inclusion (2), School violence, Social networks, Social representations, Youth protagonism (2)
school and it levels	School environment, Childhood education (5), Children, Disabilities education (2), Early years, National Curriculum Guidelines, Primary Education, Public school, School (3), Sustainable school, Youth and adult education (2)

About the elaboration of the essay thesis, according to the observation during orientation classes, the most relevant difficulties are:

- the definition and delimitation of the subject, probably due to lack of experience of practicing teachers with the academic production - this problem is reflected on the keywords selected to the essays, where some of them are unable to characterize the text developed;
- in writing and with the exposition of their own ideas, probably due to lack of reading habit;
- with advanced use of computerized tools, as text editor - within paragraphs' characteristics or with the summary's automatic preparation, or spreadsheet - with data analysis and graphs.

This perception were confirmed by the information founded in the referees' indications: methodological problems (15 indications), writing problems (7), superficiality (6), confused ideas, erroneous and incomplete information (6), formatting problems (6) and plagiarism (4).

Even if plagiarism is the lesser problem found, it is important to mention that academic dishonesty is a growing concern among students in various academic institutions in the worldwide (Bachore, 2014). But first it is better to define plagiarism: when submitting work that includes someone else's words, ideas, syntax, data or organizational patterns, the source of that information must be acknowledged through complete, accurate and specific references and plagiarism occurs when a person represents someone else's words, ideas, phrases, sentences, or data as one's own work (Higbee & Thomas, 2002). The student cheating problem is an adaptive challenge that requires learning in attitudes, behaviors or values rather than a technical problem (Gallant & Drinan, 2006). To face this problem universities, colleges and school need to more clearly explain the rationale for promoting academic honesty and integrity in research work (Bachore, 2014).

Some reasons identified for the rise of academic dishonesty include pressure from teachers, parents, and peers, what probably can be minimized considering the course characteristics, mainly based on virtual mode. Another reasons that also contribute to the rise of academic dishonesty are the classroom environment, the self-centered culture, and the ever changing technology. These aspects can have affected the students because it was distance education with different environment from traditionally known by participants; by the difficulty to establish direct contact with peers and tutors; and by the difficulty to dominate the new technologies that mediate this new process of learning.

Only four students from 32 used some reference, identified by the references as plagiarism, without indication of its origin and it happened because there was clear orientation about plagiarism during the classes. The most relevant problem was about methodology (15 indications) and it could be related with plagiarism too, considering what was found as failure than an intentional omission, probably because the lack of experience with the academic production. The formatting problems (6) reveal the difficulty with the new technologies and can be considered a low rate, or as low as plagiarism (4), and can be easily confronted with the participants' individual effort.

The others indications from the referees - writing problems (7), superficiality (6), confused ideas, erroneous and incomplete information (6) - are much more disturbing because all together perform the higher rate (19) and probably reveal the lack in the teachers' formation or in habitude of reading. These are individual aspects but must be socially treated as cultural empowerment and better evaluated during the school and university years.

Conclusion

“Compared to the state of the art 25 years ago, morality is now seen to be more intuitive, the moral domain is seen to be broader and the function of morality is seen to be more social, less about finding truth” (Haidt, 2013, p. 294). Even if “a considerable amount of learning takes place through a process in which children learn behaviours, attitudes, values and beliefs by observing others and the consequences of others’ actions” (Sanderse, 2013, p. 29), it is necessary to assume that ethics is present in several school dimensions to encourage the growth of autonomy and more just, respectful and supportive relationships. It is necessary that students, and adults, have experience actually lived with moral values, providing a sociomoral cooperative atmosphere in the educational context. And opportunities must also be systematically provided to happen the building of moral values, as an object of knowledge which depends on the awareness and the critical think. Must be sought procedures that foster the rational appropriation of rules and moral values, self-knowledge and the knowledge of the other, the identification and expression of feelings, learning fairer and more effective ways to resolve conflicts and, consequently, develop the autonomy. (Vinha & Tognetta, 2008).

In many cases, the problems found in the essays did not refer to the moral education content but with methodological or personal/social issues. Against all, the theme served up as a motivation factor for enrollment and to develop the teachers' knowledge, did not matter how great were the difficulties founded. As conclusion, it must be highlighted the insertion of the moral education into the continuous formative process could improve the professional development and promote learning from diverse approaches to creatively deal with ever changing classroom situations.

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