

# Curriculum of Ethical Education in Slovakia

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**Abstract**—Ethical Education is a compulsorily optional subject in primary and secondary schools. The Ethical Education objective is the education of a personality with one's own identity, with interiorized ethical standards, with mature moral judgement and therefore with the behaviour determined by one's own beliefs; with a positive attitude to himself/herself and other people and that is why he/she is able to cooperate and to initiate cooperation. In the paper we describe the contents and the principles of Ethical education. We also show that Ethical education is subject supported primary social-pathological prevention and education to citizenship. In this context we try to show that ethical education contributes to the education of good people who are aware of the necessity to respect social norms and are able to assume responsibility for their own behaviour in any situation at present and in the future.

**Keywords**—Ethical education, Curriculum of Ethical education, The Contents of Ethical education in Slovakia, The principles of Ethical education

## I. INTRODUCTION AND MOTIVES OF LAUNCH ETHICAL EDUCATION IN SLOVAKIA

THE Slovak society is according to the extensive sociological research [7], described as a state of moral anarchy and lawlessness, which resulted in the following seven most common manifestations of lawlessness (74-79% of respondents): people can never rely on justice, lack of clear and precise rules in this society, the most people wish property strongest, anyone does not get help if he needs it, people do not believe in anyone and anything, it is not cared properly for poor children and the old.

The question is which tasks should be performed by school as an institution with the implicitly expressed mission and impact, which should be transferred to the society and which depend on several factors. The fact that this problem is not new is shown in the documents of the European Committee on Crime Problems, which were presented to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in 1980. Reference [8] has been a great source of inspiration for experimental verification of preventive systems in schools. Many of the issues presented in this study are also relevant to the current situation in Slovakia:

- there are clear parallels between juvenile crime and poor achievement at school
- school is an ideal place for anti-social and criminal inclination detection
- schools can play a crucial role in crime prevention (this fact was verified in several general and specific models)
- it is necessary that school was the primary place for social discrimination and as an institution of social control

(in network of other institutions)

- some schools create space for instructional behaviour disorder of pupils
- structural isolation of a pupil has a much worse effect on his self-esteem than it is officially declared
- educational reforms must go hand in hand with research

The education reform in Slovakia, which has started in year 2008, anticipates the comprehensive care for the students' personal social, moral civic, cultural environmental, scientific, and logic skills development. Ethical education therefore plays an important role not only in students' development but also in the socio-pathological phenomena prevention. Ethical education teaching in schools in Slovakia is based on the Ethical education experimental projects implemented in the 1990 in selected Slovak schools. Ethical education was established as an alternative to the confessional-oriented Religious Education and it has been established as an optional subject for primary school and the first two classes of secondary schools with the subsidy 1 lesson a week in all classes since year 2005. The mission of the optional compulsory subject Ethical education is an effective promotion of moral standards understanding and interiorizing and the help by adopting behavior consistent with them. Ethical education prepares young people for life in the sense that as adults they will contribute to the creation of harmonious and stable relations in the family, at workplace, between social groups, within nations and among nations.

Ethical Education is a compulsorily optional subject in primary and secondary schools. The Ethical Education objective is the education of a personality with one's own identity, with interiorized ethical standards, with mature moral judgement and therefore with the behavior determined by one's own beliefs; with a positive attitude to himself/herself and other people and that is why he/she is able to cooperate and to initiate cooperation. Ethical education is thus subject oriented to personal development (self-understanding, positive self-esteem), social development (knowing other people, their positive judging, group work ability and willingness, empathy, assertiveness), moral development (understanding and acceptance of general ethical standards and principles, acting in compliance with ethical standards and one's own beliefs).

## II. THE CONTENTS OF ETHICAL EDUCATION IN SLOVAKIA – CONTENT OF EDUCATION OF GOOD PERSON

The contents of Ethical education comprise sixteen topics - 10 basic (in general, they are the topics of education for prosocial behaviour by [6]) and 6 applied topics (the additional topics compiled for the needs of Slovak pupils, worked out by

[8] and the teachers involved in the verification of Ethical education).

In terms of prevention of negative behavior, Ethical education teaches to create and maintain healthy and good interpersonal relationships through open communication, self-appreciation and the appreciation of others, adequate ways of expressing feelings, empathy and especially assertiveness. All these skills provide pupils with the necessary tools for coping with aggression, preventing passivity, minimizing various negative influences, finding the meaning of life, and consequently the skills also represent a tool for self-improvement and self-appreciation.

TABLE I  
10 BASIC TOPICS AND 6 APPLIED TOPICS

Open communication	Basic topics
Human dignity, self-respect, positive self-esteem	
Positive assessment of other people	
Empathy	
Expression of feelings	
Assertiveness	
Initiatives and Creativity	
Real and Represents Models -	
Pro-social behaviour	
Complex prosociality	
Ethic – The roots of pro-social behaviour	Applied topics
Ethic and Economical values	
Ethic and World religions	
The Family which I live in	
Education to marriage and parenthood	
Environmental education	

The contents of Ethical education offers Ethics teachers many topics that more or less contribute to the prevention of socio-pathological phenomena (especially by building up a positive relationship with themselves, with other people, by gradual self-appreciation and appreciation of others, the ability to name their feelings and cope with them, emphatically perceive needs, problems but also joys of others, and assertively express their own opinions), but also contribute to education to citizenship (EE is aimed at the training of a person who acts independently, according to his/her own conscience, regardless of the society pressure, but with the respect to general rights). Comprehensively it can be stated that ethics however, through its content, the potential to develop confident and authentic personality, not acting under the pressure of vicinity, but decide responsibly on their own judgment and in accordance with the norms and values of society.

We consider it important to point out how the content of this object is perceived by the teachers. Results of the research, which was conducted in 2009 - 2010 however, warn us that teachers of Ethical education attach the greatest importance to practical subject themes that have more Applied Psychology character, resp. have a direct impact on the

students/young people future lives. The consensus of respondents identified as the most important five themes: Family, where I live, Empathy, Open communication, Education for marriage and parenthood, Self-esteem.

In terms of "performance" were sub-themes of the curriculum by Ethical education teachers usually considered moderately as difficult. Relatively difficult to be perceived: Complex prosociality, Assertiveness, Ethics - the roots of pro-social behaviour, Empathy, Expression of emotions, Education for marriage and parenthood (AM > 3.5). For the least demanding are considered: Creativity and initiative, fair and display patterns, Nature Conservation and Environment (AM < 3.2).

Based on the research conducted among teachers of ethical education, we can conclude that teachers are aware of the importance of the subject for personal, social and moral development of their students. But also prefer topics that impact is immediate, so to speak, resp. perceives their impact on everyday life. On the other hand, issues requiring theoretical knowledge of psychology, sociology, philosophy, and ethics among those teachers perceived as demanding in terms of teaching. The question thus becomes whether the teacher ethics has been and is sufficient to implement such complex issues, which form the content of this article.

### III. THE PRINCIPLES OF ETHICAL EDUCATION AS A FUNDAMENT OF SPECIFIC EDUCATIONAL STYLE

Teaching Ethical education is guided by seven principles that regulate relations between teachers and pupils, and additionally, they can be understood as a philosophical-pedagogical basis for values education. The principles applied in Ethics education also create safe environment for the prevention of socio-pathological phenomena. Adherence to these principles teaches pupils to adopt habits and stereotypes of behaviour that make them good, tolerant, sympathetic and appreciative people. The principles lead teachers to look for the good in children/adolescents, to appreciate small progress and teach them to assess in such a way that stimulates their further self-development.

It is a basic rule of Ethical education to create an educational community in the classroom. Educational community allows pupils to work in the environment where they feel safe and are not afraid to ask for help. Furthermore, trust prevails in this environment, and learning allows them to use all their opportunities. Responsibility for school results is transferred from the teacher to children, who are aware that the teacher is their partner and provider of help. Such learning not only results in the fact that children are able to work in teams, but they are also able to assume responsibility, to adopt various learning strategies and to accept the opinions of others. In order for successful educational community and safe environment to be created in classrooms, it is necessary to apply (interactively) a common system of binding rules both for teachers and pupils.

Accepting the differences in children represents an integral part of informal and supportive environment (one of the principles of Ethical education). The love for children/pupils

must not be conditioned by meeting their demands. To love pupils also means to accept differences in children - with all their imperfections and faults. On the other hand, objective and sensitive critique encourages open relationship between teachers and pupils.

The formulation of precise rules, closely corresponding with the creation of individual community, represents an independent principle of Ethical education. The rules represent a possible way to a positive atmosphere in classrooms that (subsequently) supports the development of teaching functions. Teaching rules are in fact standards that guide the life of class, and offer some opportunities for progress in socially communicative, personal and civil competences. The rules of cooperation (for the life of class, or name them as you like, but always the rules for everybody in the class) allow pupils to express themselves in the class, not to be afraid of anything, and help with the creation of community where children feel good.

Accepting differences in children is another step in the prevention of socio-pathological phenomena in Ethics lessons. It is not good to condition our love for children, for example with the sentence: "I will love you if...". The teacher should be the first, with respect to the relation teacher - pupil, to express sympathy and love, and accept the child/pupil as a value. The acceptance primarily manifests itself if the teacher has some time to talk, appreciates pupils' qualities, instances of improvement, improved behaviour, as well as if the teacher is kind and attentive to pupils' needs and interests. This Ethics principle is in fact a kind of the reaction to the fact that present-day children have little time for discussions with their parents (according to a survey of the Slovak Children's Safety Line, children talk to their parents on average only 15 minutes a day, and their conversation is usually limited to commands and prohibitions). Conversations lack intimacy, children and young people have nobody to share their worries or joys with. If a teacher shows that he/she listens - accepts the child, then the child also starts to listen to others.

Attributing positive characteristics to children represents the next principle of Ethical education. In fact, this principle is closely associated with the previous rule. A child is influenced by the properties we attribute to him/her, but it is necessary to accept the principles of assessment. On the one hand, teachers should attribute positive characteristics to pupils, but it is inappropriate to ignore incorrect or inadequate behaviour. For this purpose, the principle of inductive discipline is used, the basis of which is to point to negative phenomena in pupils' behaviour and to their consequences. Inductive discipline and attributing positive characteristics to children are the principles of Ethical education that develop responsibility for pupils' own actions, but also develop those characteristics that are considered to be essential for the development of a good human and for the prevention of socio-pathological phenomena.

With respect to values education, the rule labelled as encourage desirable behaviour also seems to be very important. According to [4] and [5], encouragement is a certified educational tool, but the level of encouragement

depends. Encouragement of low intensity, without clear explanation what we expect, elicits no response. Contrary to this, encouragement of high intensity is not effective in values education, because such encouragement will meet resistance sooner or later. What is appropriate encouragement like? It is possible to specify it as reminding a child to behave according to some requirements, behaviour scheme, but it is also necessary to support our opinion by relevant arguments. All these should result not only in behaviour according to a "pattern", and without considering its suitability and importance, but also in internalised actions. Encouragement is especially important for the prevention of socio-pathological phenomena. Overlooking or ignoring the problems results in an illusion that a given instance of behaviour is satisfactory. However, overexposed prevention may give rise to a different reaction than expected. It is the most demanding task to look for the right intensity of prevention programmes. However, the effect that a teacher with a systematic and accurate work achieves can have a radical impact.

Reduction of punishments and rewards, undesirable elements in values education, is also fundamental for Ethical education with respect to the education of a good human. The imposing of punishments and rewards during education does not develop the feeling of responsibility for own behaviour. The punishments encourage children to avoid them, but we do not prevent negative behaviour, which we would like to eliminate. In general, rewards have the same effect, but there is one difference, children's behaviour becomes "resourceful" to obtain rewards. Even in this case, they do not reflect on their behaviour. However, when we draw attention (by applying the principle of inductive discipline) to negative consequences of their decisions, or when we point out the positive side of appropriate steps, then we gradually develop the ability to think about and consider our own actions.

Co-operation with parents represents the last, but not a less important principle of Ethical education. Teachers should consider parents to be their partners, because they are the first educators and teachers of their children, they know them and know what they experience. Teachers have no possibility to monitor children all day long. That is why, parents and teachers should co-operate during education. Teachers are able to reflect on child's behaviour in the environment of school, friends and authorities, and parents monitor and evaluate children's behaviour in the environment of relatives. Such co-operation promotes a complex, integral insight and enables both parents and teachers to understand the child, and to propose and implement the processes supporting the development of its personality. Values education should not be only limited to school environment, and similarly school should not rely on education in families. Teachers and parents should be one team focused on the aim to educate a good human. The child attending school learns to reflect own behaviour and the behaviour of friends, parents and teachers, gradually adopts desirable schemes of behaviour in the safe environment of class and describes his/her feelings; at home, the child can apply the learned behaviour schemes to everyday life. However, children and young people need someone who

shares their feelings, accompany them while experiencing something new, and it is their parents' role to help their daughter/son to decide upon the values that are typical of a moral and good person.

In 2012, [1] implemented the research of ethics among teachers in primary education. One of the topics on which to focus, were the principles of ethics. Found that the most common parenting style that principle, which incorporate teachers into educational curricula, the principle of creating the educational community in the classroom. Behind her followed the principles adopted child such as expressions and his friendly feelings. Third leading principle was the principle attributing positive attributes children.

From our perspective, it is surprising how the principles of teachers attach the greatest importance. While in terms of the theoretical analysis shows that all the principles together form a complex educational style that will promote pro-social personality or good, teachers have focused primarily on the attribution of positive characteristics to children. The question is whether teachers can consider the right level of attribution of positive qualities, but also alerting the negative aspects - applying the principle of inductive discipline considered significant only 5% of teachers. Again, the only question is whether teachers during training also focused on the area of their influence on personality development of the child.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS OR POTENTIAL OF ETHICAL EDUCATION

Following the Ethical education target an educated personality should able to act on interiorized ethical standards, should have mature moral criticism, but neither objectives nor Ethical education content, especially in higher education create a sufficient space for reflection, analysis and polemic about values recognized in students' lives or those that should be part of their value system. The epistemological basis is completely evaded according to the Ethical education topic units, class goals. They are not based on ethics or philosophy in general (such as Finland, Bavaria or Belgium). It is only realized through practical psychology training program aimed at pro-social behaviour. In this context, Ethical education in Slovakia does not sufficiently support the mature moral judgments ability adoption.

Another example is the target area of Ethical education – developing the ability to act according to interiorized ethical standards. While in the other countries we studied, they emphasize discussion, reflection and application of ethical standards or principles in practical activities and in the target areas this general objective is integrated in the sense of taking responsibility for their own behaviour and action, but also responsibility for general problems of the mankind, Slovak Ethics teaching does not pay any attention to this objective. This assumption was confirmed by the Ethical Instruction curriculum analysis, because the term standard does not appear among the thirty most commonly used terms (i.e., occurs less than 15 times).

The Ethical education objectives are formulated broadly; there is a reference to the philosophical foundations, social background, but also personal and social development. The

specific class objectives show that there has been an effort to link the education pro-social themes in wider logical units, but also the recommended methods and objectives effect as applied psychology. Compared ethics (its objectives and content) of equivalent objects (comparative research conducted in the years 2007-2010, see more in [2], [3]), we realized that ethics is the vintage of goals deprived of the necessary philosophical foundations and social contexts. European countries where Ethical education is taught demonstrate the need to teach students to think in global contexts, with respect to extensive knowledge base that will encourage their interest in social events and in their own successful and responsible life.

Slovak Ethical education imposes on students and their teachers ambitious goals, but the content and educational strategies do not use its whole potential. During the curriculum reform it is essential to respect the various models of personal and social education in order to be able to respond effectively to the needs of society. If Ethical education is understood as a targeted preparation for a responsible and full-valued life, we should also consider our ability to prepare children for their active role in the private, civic and professional life. In Ethical education we teach children to respect the rules, to listen carefully, to express their feelings adequately, we want to teach them to behave more empathically, assertively and pro-socially in socio-cultural contexts of their lives. All these personal characteristics could be classified as personal, social, ethical, civic and cultural competence. Even from this perspective Ethical education is a part of moral education.

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