

Training x education, Deontology x ethics: rethinking concepts and repositioning professors

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ABSTRACT

Starting from teachers' concerns and reflections, we seek to problematize some concepts often taken as synonyms in the context of professionals' health education, revealing alternative conceptions of ethical and pedagogical doing. The analysis focuses on ethics hegemonic idea that forms a particular meaning for the expression "ethics in training," in opposition to what could be called an "ethical dimension of education." Through a dialogical writing about common topics to every professor, the rationale is to provoke the reader to his/her academic praxis examination and to question what are we doing in universities: developing vocational training or higher education? The arguments expressed in this essay seek to encourage the (self) questioning so that each one responds, in his or her way, and then collectively, to the essential question regarding ethics: "What should we do"?

Descriptors: Ethics. Moral Development. Education, Higher. Professional Training. Universities.

1 FROM ETHICS IN TRAINING TO AN ETHICAL VIEW OF HIGHER EDUCATION

It would not be surprising if the reader of this text would feel some strangeness or uneasiness already at the moment of deciding to read (or not) what follows, from the summary. There we use the term "ethical dimension of education", superior or university, rather than the most usual expressions - "ethics in vocational

training" or even "ethical professional training". It is then necessary, through zeal and elucidation, to explain that we refer to higher education as opposed to vocational training, on purpose, to demarcate a dispute of visions. A clash of conceptions about the function of the university in contemporary societies, about their mission in our social and academic imaginary¹.

On the one hand, a progressive university

that prioritizes effectiveness and efficiency in "professional training" at the service of the social and political community, at the service of the market. On the other hand, an idea of a classic university, which values excellence (professional and personal) through "university education", which would be a "humanistic formation"^{1,2} aimed at the development of citizens – whole, complete, autonomous, responsible and cautious people³. A university that should guide society about what it needs and what should interest it, not only responding to its demands¹. Who understands and welcomes the inexorable transforming role that it has in the lives of those who enter it. Who takes responsibility for it and therefore fosters personal construction, offering subsidies so that its graduates, not only do well but also do good.

These are complementary concepts that coexist and feed each other, even as forces acting in opposite directions, in permanent tension. But the balance between them has been really difficult, as many of us, teachers, we can prove. The so-called "professional training" has been the focus of the contemporary university which attributes to moral and cultural education less value⁴, thus neglecting the human character of those who will be responsible for meeting the desires of an increasingly neglected population. And that, precisely because it remains unassisted in its humanity, it is frustrated to receive technique without solidarity, care without empathy, treatment without care. And so it returns, as in a revolving door, to the starting point, hoping, perhaps one day, to actually be attended to.

It is worth noting here that we understand moral education as a "process that involves each subject in the sociocultural construction of his moral personality"⁵. It is a construction because it is not an imposition of external models, nor the simple discovery of internal values, nor the

development of certain moral capacities. But a process designed to shape one's identity, and for that very reason, the process of building a moral personality. Something complex, ranging from the acquisition of social conventions to the configuration of autonomous moral consciousness, from reflections and judgments to feelings and behaviors. A work at the same time owns and shared - done with the others. Thus, "moral education, more than a space contiguous to other educational spaces, is a formative dimension that crosses all spheres of education and personality"⁵.

2 HIGHER EDUCATION AS A LOCUS FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE MORAL PERSONALITY

It is proven fact by different researchers that medical^{6,7}, dentistry⁸, and nursing⁹ students suffer a process of stagnation and regression of moral competence throughout the graduation. Precisely moral competence (understood as the ability to resolve conflicts of values based on their own moral principles¹⁰), a prerequisite, therefore, for an ethical competence¹¹ which is, in turn, a central element for the support of democracy and human rights. We need to ask ourselves about what happens to those adolescents who come to health courses full of ideals, wanting to do good to people, wanting to make a difference in the world we live in, and leave disappointed and focused on their insertion in the professional market^{12,13}? Teenagers, who come excited and full of expectations for university life, and go to adulthood, tired as if finished a marathon, a race with obstacles in pursuit of a degree¹? What happens in this period of "professional training" which in the end seems more like a period of "deformation" or "formatting" of minds, ideals, and desires?

In fact, the process of professional socialization - the one in which we learn the

culture, and therefore the models and values more or less valued by the peers of the chosen profession - also includes the learning of the hidden curriculum¹². In other words, in addition to the issues foreseen in the pedagogical projects of each course, all the academic experiences (inside and outside the walls of the university), all the relationships in which we participate (among colleagues, teachers, patients, institutions); all the professional models with which we make contact (the different specialties and types of professional activity), play a certain role in our professional formation¹⁴, in our new social identity that we are building in relation, and that is building us at the same time¹⁵, giving substance to our moral personality.

To recognize the importance, to welcome and, perhaps, to understand the habitual psychic phenomena of this period, is one of the educational functions. It is therefore fundamental to understand that the acceptance of curiosity and idealism are not part of the process of maturation, but rather of a desensitization or denial in the face of the accumulation of frustrations and conflicts experienced and not reflected, which leave aside the hope of reconciling different humans values.

If the ethical dimension of the education of health professionals needs to be valued and improved, as for example in dentistry^{13,16}, we need to analyze more closely what is happening (and also what is not happening) in our undergraduate courses and also in university life, since all professional competence includes knowledge, skills, and attitudes. In other words, it is the know-know theory, the know-how of practical classes and know-being of everyday life. But while skills are valued and technical-scientific knowledge overvalued, attitudes are relegated, disregarded, made invisible. It is the "subjective part" of the assessment that terrifies teachers for the alleged difficulty of proving. It is what is (poorly) evaluated under the title of

assiduity and punctuality, thus forgetting other values and attitudes such as respect, empathy, understanding, responsibility, and solidarity, which we see today faded in large part from professionals of health.

Moral and ethical skills fluctuate depending on the opportunities offered for their development. Biomedical courses usually have a rigid, hierarchical, authoritarian structure¹². Reproduce the macho and heteronormative society¹⁷ of which they are part. They do not promote respect for divergent thoughts, be they moral or political, and treat uncertainty as an expression of incompetence¹⁸. They do not include a reading of society, its situations of discrimination, inequalities and violence, even when these occur (daily) in the academic environment¹⁹. They do not support the conceptual exploration of the world of human values and morality. They do not prioritize dialogue and ethical deliberation²⁰. Nor do they encourage the analysis of conflicts that show power for the development of reasoning and moral judgment. They are courses that consider fulfilling their ethical mission to include disciplines, thus named, but that do not promote an institutional *ethos* that prizes its teachers and students, that prioritize them, that recognizes them and that takes care of them²¹.

Unavoidable, therefore, to speak in ethics in the care professions without analyzing the care one has with who teaches and with whom one learns²¹. An example of this is the scarcity of resources available to meet the frequent psychic demands evoked in this period²². Mental suffering, drug use, violence, and suicide²²⁻²⁴ are increasingly present among university students, without institutional responses being implemented in most cases. Like trotting, such phenomena are treated as if they were exclusive to students' private lives, not as part of a stage of socialization over which the university has an

important function.

Professional health training usually occurs in an environment focused on convergent thinking²⁵, who longs for the correct answer, for the security of the known, for the uncritical obedience to the rules of professional codes, for maintaining the *status quo*. By not addressing the moral, aesthetic and political dimension of human and social life in the education of the professional future, we have wasted a unique opportunity. We keep our students at the conventional level of human morality, as Lawrence Kohlberg would say, who turned morality into a subject of scientific research and laid the groundwork for the objective measurement of moral competence²⁶. For this American psychologist, there were three levels of development and moral learning: the preconventional, when the individual judges morally from his selfish interest; the conventional, when it considers fair what is accepted by the rules of the community; and the postconventional, when it distinguishes universal principles from conventional norms, judging what is right, "putting itself in the place of the other." Most adult people in our contemporary societies are no more than the conventional level as the name says, that is, it does not take full advantage of its potentiality⁵. Put another way, consider that "if it's in the law, you can." It matters little whether or not everything that is legal is moral.

University life should be an excellent opportunity for the construction of the moral personality that is the essence of the ethical dimension of higher education. To do so, the actions of the university should be directed towards the integral education of the students - their autonomy, humanity, personality, and character^{1,4,27}, or in other words, for the optimization of the human being. This would

imply a particular kind of link between teachers and students and the appreciation of the educational influence of the former over the latter. An influence that is rooted in the encounter between them, because it has to do with the humanity of both².

3 FROM HETERONOMY TO AUTONOMY, FROM DEONTOLOGY TO ETHICS: CONCEPTIONS AND CONFUSIONS

Having said that, two central questions to the ethical dimension of education can be deduced. The first concerns our conceptions of ethics. This is because the term "ethics" is trivialized. We can hear it and read it in the media headlines quite often. In popular parlance too: ethics appears as a synonym for morality, as if they were, in the same way, about customs, beliefs and character, and not as two distinct logical levels of the moral phenomenon, with ethics analyzing morality, taking it as object^{27,28}. Professions and institutions also contribute to the banalization of the term when they reduce ethics to a purely deontological conception¹¹⁻¹³, that is, when they take it as a synonym of obedience to rules.

But ethics is more about formulating questions than getting answers. Ethics is what we need in situations of uncertainty, precisely when the good, the right, the fair is unknown. When we are faced with a conflict of values, and the best we can do is act with prudence and responsibility. Beyond searching what laws or articles in a code of professional ethics would be the solution to a particular problem, ethics deals with comprehensively understanding the facts and the values involved and then deciding what to do²⁰, giving even margin to the discovery of the insufficiency of a certain moral code in the specific case and, therefore, of the necessity to push it forward.

Our criticism is not directed at

professional ethics or institutional or professional codes of ethics. Are necessary. Our criticism is directed at the often limited understanding of ethics they end up encouraging. Now, if what is considered "correct" is already standardized, we need only be obedient. But when we analyze obedience as a moral value we face the fact that the values are ranked in order, that is, in every time and in every society, establish the values most and least valued. We also come across the fact that there are different types of values. There are values of use, or instrumental, that are sustained because they promote hierarchically superior values: the so-called "intrinsic" values. They are the values proper to living beings and people, such as health, life, solidarity, justice, freedom, dignity and happiness, among many others^{3,27}. Thus, considering that obedience is an instrumental value, we understand that it can serve totally opposite ends from the moral point of view, depending on what intrinsic values or devalues it is in service.

It was Jeremy Bentham²⁹, an English jurist and philosopher, who in the eighteenth century tried to unite morals and laws for the first time, found the concept of deontology. Since then, it is understood by Applied Deontology the study of professional duties from an ethical-legal ground. It is fundamental, however, to understand that this utilitarian philosopher's attempt to make ethical action more practical would never be able to simplify it to such an extent. Deontology and Ethics can not be confused, nor Law and Ethics²⁸. Both the law as the ethics require the experience of moral minimum, without which the company or corporation not "survive" and apply penalties when they are violated when the collectively agreed rules are not enforced. It is the logic of the so-called "Professional Ethics",

that less confusion would provoke if it were denominated only of Professional Deontology. Ethics, which we are referring to, is not about the minimum, but on the contrary, it deals with the promotion of maximum. Because what it demands is nothing short of great. For no other reason than the verbal tense of ethics is the imperative mode: "be the best you can be!" This is what ethics charges us: excellence.

Such ethics - the critical reflection on moral aspects of reality capable of orienting us in practical life - demands, however, moral autonomy, not obedience²⁰. One possible autonomy when it carries out the construction of moral personality of each individual⁵. "We all begin by being heteronomous, and the achievement of our own humanity, both individual and collective, is the achievement of autonomy"²⁰. Following codes of deontology does not confer nor at least stimulate autonomy in anyone.

And from there, the second central question that concerns us here arises: how to teach ethics then, if the teaching of Professional Ethics has proved insufficient for the qualification of our health professionals^{30,31}? This is not a simple question. There are many who seek to respond, some of them even collectively, such as through the International Association for Education in Ethics (IAEE)³² or the Red Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Educación en Bioética (REDLACEB)³³. But a previous question to this still would be: is it possible to teach ethics?

This question makes a lot of sense depending on what we mean by teaching. If we understand it as the transmission of certain knowledge, for example, from a certain set of moral values such as those contained in the deontological codes, then yes, it would be possible. But if we understand that ethics does

not depend only on knowledge, but above all on skills and attitudes, then this traditional conception of teaching would be really questionable. It would rather be an experience - multiple experiences - than a teaching. An improvement in character, in the moral personality⁵, more than learning rules. There should be opportunities that allow and facilitate the recognition of values and against moral values: caring-carelessness, justice-injustice, solidarity-selfishness, freedom-authoritarianism, in other words, all those who present themselves to health professionals in the form of moral conflicts, ethical problems, demanding from us a silent dialogue, which is the activity of thought itself. A critical analysis and, above all, self-criticism. A necessary dialogue with the other, broadening our perspectives, fostering the understanding of other points of view that can relativize our own, thus improving sensitivity and moral competence. And it deals precisely with moral deliberation - an indispensable method for all truly educational projects²⁰.

4 TOWARDS A REPOSITIONING OF TEACHERS AND INSTITUTIONS

A deliberative pedagogy - one that seeks to create spaces of learning based on argument and dialogue, favoring the collective construction of democratic attitudes³⁴ - requires interlocutors capable of withstanding the anguish that the uncertainty usually causes. Teachers who exercise humility, responsibility, and dedication to those in education. Aware that more than teach, can foster an environment where significant learning occurs, grow in complexity and results in a real gain of moral autonomy. Therefore, discussing the trot is fundamental, discussing affirmative policies is fundamental, discussing gender issues, social inequalities, health inequities, behavior of

patients, students, teachers and, especially, the health professionals themselves in their practices. A discipline or a course of ethics isolated in an extensive curriculum tends to be insufficient due to the strength of years of life, schooling and professional training experiencing situations in which values are trivialized.

Freud is credited with the assertion that psychoanalysis would be a "second chance" in psychic development. In the wake of this statement, great investments are made, and important personal achievements are achieved in analytical processes. But in the case of the construction of the moral personality, there are those who say that character comes from home, that "comes from the cradle" and that if it did not come, there is not what we teachers can do. Most of the students themselves also share this opinion when they start their university course.²² Such a mistake must be undone, since it has been proven that education is not only a matter for families, but also for schools and universities^{1,5,12,29}, because the construction of the moral personality is not old enough to end. It does not complete with the majority, it is a permanent process that accompanies our biographical life⁵ as well as our constructions of identity, especially those that occur from work¹⁵. Now, our moral development can stagnate, regress or evolve in the context of dependency in which we operate, whether it is from family, school, work, social.

To conclude, it should be remembered that ethics implies reciprocity, in mutual correspondence. So, if we want our students to be dedicated, we should devote ourselves. And if we want the teachers of the institution of which we are part to commit, we must strive to make the institution with all a commitment. Because as Ghandi said, "we must be the transformation we want to see in the world."

RESUMO

Formação x educação, Deontologia x ética: repensando conceitos, reposicionando docentes

Partindo de inquietações e reflexões docentes, buscamos problematizar alguns conceitos frequentemente tomados como sinônimos no contexto da educação de profissionais de saúde, descortinando concepções alternativas para um fazer pedagógico eticamente comprometido. A análise se centra na ideia hegemônica da ética que conforma certo sentido para a expressão “ética na formação”, em contraposição ao que se poderia denominar de uma “dimensão ética da educação”. Por meio de uma escrita dialógica sobre temas comuns a todo (a) professor (a), quer-se provocar o (a) leitor (a) para o exame de sua práxis acadêmica e para o questionamento sobre o que temos realizado na universidade: formação profissional ou educação superior? Os argumentos expressos neste ensaio almejam fomentar o (auto) questionamento para que cada um (a) responda, a sua maneira, e depois coletivamente, a pergunta essencial que a ética nos faz: “que devo (emos) fazer”?

Descritores: Ética. Desenvolvimento Moral. Educação Superior. Formação Profissional. Universidade.

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