

Reflections on value education in Slovakia

Júlia Klembarová

Abstract

This article is devoted to the conception of ethics in Slovakia. Main attention is dedicated to the issue of value education within this subject. It emphasizes the importance of explicit as well as implicit dimensions of value education which represents an important component in the moral development of pupils.

Key words: value education, ethics, values, moral development of pupils

Introduction

Values belong among the important components of the educational process in schools. In the Slovak system of education, the issue of values is mainly reflected within the subject of ethics because it has a significant axiological dimension. Axiology represents one of the fundamentals of education and its main aim is to develop and enrich human evaluative relations to reality and to provide the prerequisites for the development and maturing of personality (Kučerová, 1996, p. 46). Connected to this, we can say that education should be helpful in the development of human being and values function as important components within this process. In the words of Milan Darák, values are fundamentals, aims and also resources of education (Darák, 2004, p. 41).

Before focussing my attention on values education, I consider it necessary to define the basic concept in this article, the concept of value. Different authors work with its various definitions, but in the majority of cases, the definitions are linked with something that is important for humans and helps to meet their needs.

In defining this concept, I favour Vasil Gluchman's understanding of value. In a broader sense, the value is understood as everything which satisfies a human being's needs. In a narrower sense, values represent a basic category which meets human cultural needs, especially ethical and aesthetical needs. An objective basis of every value is the capacity to be useful and to meet some human needs and also to restrain them (Gluchman, 2008, p. 96).

In this article I deal mainly with those values which are necessary for personal development and which have an important role in achieving moral maturity of a human being. Based on this, we may see the fundamental aspect representing the importance of values. Their role is to help the humans (pupils) in their moral development and for this reason this issue should represent an important part of ethics.

Concerning the relevance of values, it is important to concentrate on the structure of individual subjects which are taught in schools. In connection to this, Margit Sutrop states that contemporary curricula are content-oriented and emphasizing mainly the development of pupils' knowledge. On the other hand, we can identify the absence of pupils' awareness of themselves and their own actions, their abilities, emotions, values, although within the educational process, this dimension is of crucial importance. Sutrop uses the concept of *road signs* for denomination of values, which are very helpful for better orientation of pupils in their life, for making conscious and responsible decisions (Sutrop, 2015, pp. 190–191).

Based on this, we can speak about the next dimension within the discussion on the importance of values. Values and value education should be an important part of the

educational process, because it prepares pupils for everyday life. Besides the knowledge and information gained at school, the child is offered a wider and richer understanding of the world which enables him/her to reflect upon and evaluate the reality surrounding him/her and also to think about his actions and their consequences.

Relevance of values and value education in contemporary society is also identified by Gabriela Jonášková, who speaks about the crisis and difficult situation in society. She emphasizes that one of the most appropriate ways to overcome this is to apply philosophy (including axiology) into education, because it has a positive influence on humankind, it teaches pupils to think and act politely and it leads them to development and formation of themselves. The aim of education (including value education) is to create a human being who does not only use other people as instruments for achieving his/her aims, but to create a personality with their own individuality, who respects other people, tries to eliminate disagreements among people, who is open to dialogue and compromises in relationships (Jonášková, 2003, p. 209).

A similar opinion is presented in the article *Attitudes of Social Studies Teachers toward Value and Values Education*, in which the authors point to the huge development of science and technology. The authors evaluate the positive consequences resulting from this, but on the other hand, they remind us to be aware of negative consequences, too. These negative aspects may be reduced by various methods among which belong, for example, value education (Celinkkaya & Filoglu, 2014, p. 1552). In connection to the presented opinions, I consider values and value education to be one of the possible ways which may help humans to overcome this difficult situation in contemporary society. In accordance with the above-mentioned attitudes it can be said that values and value education may a) help an individual pupil, b) represent a tool enabling contemporary curricula in schools to be formulated more appropriately and c) be a possible way to improve the situation in contemporary society.

I consider it important to emphasize one more dimension when speaking about the importance of values in our life and about the need for value education within the subject *ethics* taught in our schools. Stanislava Kučerová points out that main aim of our life is to become a human being and our role is to try to become more human every day (Kučerová, 1996, p. 115). I am convinced that values represent necessary tools to achieve this goal.

The above-mentioned author formulates several requirements for becoming a human being, for example authenticity. To become a human being, we need to be an *authentic person* conscious of the world around us, who is able to understand the law of nature and the laws valid in society, who is aware of our own abilities but also disabilities. To become a human being includes the requirement of *creativity*, meaning the *need of active and creative participation* in our life, in creating the world around us. An important prerequisite for creativity is the requirement of *freedom*. We need to have freedom to create and influence our own life and the lives of our relatives. Freedom is undoubtedly linked with the *responsibility* of human beings for their actions. In other words, to be a human being also requires responsible actions. Being a human also requires an individual to be a universal being who develops all sides of their own personality, to be an *integral and balanced being* (Kučerová, 1996, pp. 115–116).

Based on these requirements it is possible to formulate several important values that are necessary in the development of our personality, for example creativity, freedom, responsibility, authenticity, integrity and others. I think that value education and particularly education towards the presented values is one of the tools which help us to become a human being.

Ethics as value education

As I have already emphasized, I think that value education represents an important part of the educational process. In Slovakia, we don't have value education as a separate subject in schools; it is realized mainly within ethics.¹ Abroad, this subject is also realized independently, usually as *Value Education*, even though its substance is often very similar to the issues of moral development and moral education (Vacek, 2008, p. 104). Despite this, I think that value education has a perspective in the educational system. My opinion is supported by the research of Esra Dereli-Iman, which was oriented on the influence of value education on the development of children (5-6 years old).

The author points to the change in the behaviour of pre-school children over the course of a three month-long research project, within which they were involved in the Value Education Programme. During this programme, teachers led pupils towards various values, for example honesty, respect, solidarity, cooperation, responsibility, justice, friendship, mutual help, love and others. After this programme, the parents of the children studied confirmed that their children started to communicate more with family members, they shared their toys more, they chose which clothes to wear themselves, they had more order in their rooms than before, they cried less than before, they hurt their friends less frequently than before, they showed less aggression and less unacceptable behaviour than before and when they did something wrong, they apologized for it (Dereli-Iman, 2014, p. 266).

Another author, Terence J. Lovat, presents the results of his project, which was oriented on the influence of value education on the educational process. Lovat points to the positive changes which have occurred based on this project. He claims that well-structured value education has the potential to significantly influence the whole educational system and educational process. Value education has a positive impact on pupils' results in school, on the ethos in school, on the teaching practice, on the atmosphere in the classroom, on the attitudes and behaviour of pupils and also on the relationships among parents (Lovat, 2010, p. 495).

Concerning these projects, it is possible to state that value education positively affects pupils and other participants attending presented programmes. I am convinced that such a subject would be a significant and perspective component of the educational system in Slovakia.

Katarína Čižmáriková includes the subject *ethics* as an explicit dimension of value education in the contemporary educational system (Čižmáriková, 2013, p. 218). It means that within this subject, the basis of values itself is presented; pupils are informed about which value they are speaking. In other words, values are presented explicitly.² A second possible way to lead pupils in the pursuit of values is represented by the implicit dimension which includes the formation of pupils by indirect guidance towards values. The teacher doesn't have to state clearly that he is dealing with, for example, the value of responsibility, but he may lead the pupils towards it with the help of various stories or by using other methods.

I consider both dimensions of value education to be very important. I think that implicit value education is, in the majority of cases, included in the education of other subjects. For example, by using the subject *natural science* it is possible to implicitly develop in pupils respect towards nature and the need for its protection; within the subject of *biology*, pupils may be led towards respect for their body and life; within the study about our own country, we can develop, in pupils, love for their country; based on the education of all subjects we shape the understanding of responsibility for pupils' studies and so on.

¹ In my opinion, this situation is determined by the status of ethics in Slovakia. We can speak about the difficulties within this subject because a) it is taught in alternation with religious education, b) it is taught only once per week and c) it is taught by unqualified teachers.

² Adela Lešková Blahová also emphasizes the relevance of explicit dimension of values education. She points to the importance and the role of environmental values in ethics education (Lešková Blahová, 2015, pp. 41–49).

I suppose that while within the subject of *ethics*, education towards values is realized mainly in its explicit dimension; the implicit dimension of value education is present in each subject. Based on this, I can state that the topic of values represents an important component of the whole educational process. In connection to this, I agree with Sutrop who claims that basically schools and education without values cannot exist. Values are present and important everywhere, on the part of the teachers, in relation to their colleagues, pupils, in the way they communicate, in the methods they use and so on (Sutrop, 2015, p. 192).

Teachers represent a certain model for their pupils and they usually imitate them. Based on this, it is necessary for teachers to respect the values which they want to teach their pupils within Ethics. It would be counterproductive if the teachers, during the classes, try to lead their pupils to be responsible for their actions and teachers personally avoided responsibility for their actions. Using the words of Ivan Podmanický, “values can be taught by the teacher who believes in them and he is their representative” (Podmanický, 2004, p. 207). The author continues that teachers cannot only teach students certain values, these values should be lived (Podmanický, 2004, p. 207).

What does this mean? The author points to the necessity of interconnections between theory and practice. For example, I agree that the explanation and definition of tolerance is not enough. It is necessary to show the pupils what it means to be a tolerant human being. As we can see, crucial importance should be put on the application of important values into real life. This dimension is especially important for individual pupils and their everyday living.

Following these attitudes, it is possible to conclude the important role of the teacher within value education. Based on the implicit as well as explicit dimension of value education, the teacher has the ability to help in the upbringing of honest young men and women, in the education of pupils in the pursuit of positive values, in their decision making about right and wrong, in the formulation of their moral qualities, namely in everything that influences their socio-moral development in a positive way (Čižmaríková, 2013, p. 218).

All these aspects may be formed in pupils with the help of ethics because of the specific content of this subject. Blanka Kudláčová considers it important to emphasize that Ethics is a scientific as well as educative (formative) subject. It stems from the fact that a teacher of ethics should be prepared in a theoretical way; he/she needs to master the substance of ethics and its practical importance for humans that is, in a significant way, interconnected with the axiological dimension of ethics (Kudláčová, 2004, p. 199).

Sutrop also points to the fact that teachers during classes have power in their hands, meaning that they may lead their pupils to be aware of various values, to reflect and discuss them. Undoubtedly, it supports pupils’ moral development; it helps create their own hierarchy of values. On the other hand, the author notices that teachers should not offer the pupils their own values. Their role is to facilitate pupils to make it clear about values which are important for them (Sutrop, 2015, p. 194).

The teacher, during ethics classes, should use such approaches and methods which will motivate pupils and educate them as free human beings who are able to decide what is right and who are responsible for their actions and their consequences (Kudláčová, 2004, p. 199). Based on the above mentioned facts I can conclude that the role of the teacher in the development of value awareness in pupils is not only very important but also quite difficult.

The question is clear: how can we, as teachers lead our pupils towards values during classes of ethics? Which are the appropriate methods that should be chosen? Is it possible to proceed in all classes in the same way, or is it necessary to work with pupils depending on their age and also other factors? These are useful questions which I am trying to answer now.

The content of the current conception of ethics in Slovakia includes these topics: open communication; dignity of the human being, self-esteem, positive self-evaluation; positive evaluation of others; creativity and initiative; expression of feelings; empathy; assertiveness;

real and displayed models; pro-social behaviour – help, donation, cooperation, friendship; complex pro-social behaviour. These basic topics are complemented by six application topics among which belong: ethics as a basis of pro-social behaviour; ethics and economical values; ethics and nature, ethics and religions- tolerance and respect; my family; matrimony and parenthood education.

The conception of ethics is mainly oriented on the development of pro-social behaviour of pupils following the presented topics. Petra Fridrichová also points to this fact: “Ethics is primary based on the education of pro-social behaviour and it is reflected in moral values, attitudes and in regulation of pupils’ behaviour” (Fridrichová, 2012, p. 11). Based on this I can conclude that it especially deals with the value of pro-sociability, cooperation and friendship. On the other hand, it is important to emphasize that using these values; the axiological dimension of ethics is not complete.

This fact is also stressed by Lenka Rovňanová, who states that the aim of ethics is not only in the value of pro-sociability. Ethics should lead pupils toward the recognition of other values and their manifestation in their actions and also in the behaviour and actions of the people they meet in their lives (Rovňanová, 2013, p. 14).

Ethics including value education should not be focused only on one value (pro-sociability). It is necessary to support the plurality of values and to lead pupils in the pursuit of various important values, to teach them to distinguish between individual values and regulate their actions in accordance with chosen values. As we can see, the connection of theory and practice is really important. Pupils need to recognize various values and apply them in everyday life.

Value education is, during classes of ethics, primary realized through value reflection within a certain topic.³ In the first phase of the class (cognitive and emotional sensitization), the teacher uses various methods to attract the pupils’ interest in the chosen topic. Teachers in this phase usually work with various games, video-samples and so on. Consequently, on the basis of value reflection, these methods help to generalize and evaluate the experience gained by pupils. For example, the method of controlled dialogue with pupils may help to highlight the positive as well as negative aspects of certain behaviour. Within a dialogue, we can emphasize the importance of a particular value or certain behaviour pattern and it is possible to show pupils their level of responsibility for their actions (Fridrichová & Hajnalová Buvalová, 2012, p. 31).

The role of ethics is to develop the personality of a pupil who respects various values, for example the good, humanity, tolerance, hardwork, authenticity, initiative, justice, freedom, responsibility (Fridrichová, 2012, p. 9). In my opinion, other necessary values that are important for pupils are trust, empathy, friendship, honesty, respect, esteem and many others, which are, in the current conception of ethics, taught mainly in connection with the topic of pro-social behaviour.

These values are very significant for the moral development of the pupil. I think that it is inadequate to teach pupils only about pro-social behaviour. It is necessary to lead the pupils in schools (and of course in their family environment) how to recognize the values of justice, human dignity, responsibility, tolerance, empathy and others and how to apply these values in their life.

Ways and methods of education should be chosen and used in accordance with the age of the pupils and on the level of their development. According to Gluchman, appropriate methods of ethics in lower grades in schools, especially in the 1st stage of elementary school is

³ The basis of ethics classes is represented by strategy, which includes four major phases: cognitive and emotional sensitization, value reflection, training in the classroom and transfer. Sensitization and value reflection function as certain entry into a topic and their role is to attract pupils’ interest. Training in the classroom and transfer are practical training of desirable behaviour of pupils (Fridrichová, 2012, p. 9).

education by experience, including the education of pro-sociability. In higher levels, it is necessary to work with pupils in accordance with their intellectual abilities and the level of their knowledge and consequently to modify the content of the ethics. Gluchman emphasizes that in higher grades (the 7th to 9th grade of primary school and the 1st to 2nd year of secondary school), it is necessary to move on to intellectually more challenging issues (Gluchman, 2009, p. 64).

This content division of ethics and also value education is in accordance with knowledge on the cognitive development of the individual. Information on this development which can be gained by studying Kohlberg's theory of moral development enables one to use the differentiated approach to each pupil or group (whole classes).

As stated by Viera Bilasová, this knowledge helps teachers of ethics in theoretical orientation and it offers a certain protection against the risk of one-sided application of knowledge of moral development (Bilasová, 2014, pp. 23–24). The knowledge of their moral development may help the teacher to use appropriate methods which will lead them towards the desirable goal.

In my opinion, in lower grades, value education should be oriented on the recognition of individual values, including esteem, respect, responsibility, honesty, tolerance, humanity, human dignity and others. It is crucial for pupils to understand the substance of these values and to know how to apply these values into their behaviour and actions, in other words, to know how to behave in a tolerant, responsible and human way with respect and esteem for their schoolmates, teachers, families and other people around them.

On the basis of the understanding the nature of values and their importance in our lives, pupils are able to create their own hierarchy of values. I suppose that in the primary phases, this hierarchy of values may be motivated by values which are important for their parents and other people representing some kind of model for pupils. In my opinion, the creation of their own hierarchy of values can be understood as a move to the higher stage of pupils' moral development. Subsequently, pupils choose values which are relevant for them and they also decide and act in accordance with their chosen values.

One's own hierarchy of values also represents a certain tool in our decision making processes, because it helps us to decide faster in some conflicting situations. This fact is also stressed by Sutrop who claims that we live in a pluralistic world, in which we meet different understandings of values and it often causes various value conflicts. Moreover, values of the individual can be in conflict, too. Very often we face various dilemmas which at first glance seem irresolvable, but, despite their complexity, need to be addressed (Sutrop, 2015, p. 194). In such situations, values and ability of their identification and reflection are of crucial importance, as they represent the tools for the solutions to ethical challenges.

The topic of value conflicts is in my opinion very significant and I think it should be included in ethics. A suitable means to achieve this is to include moral dilemmas in the educational process. Of course, as I have already said, it is necessary to use dilemmas for pupils who have the sufficient mental capacities to solve them. Moral dilemmas and identification of value conflicts is in my opinion a more intellectually difficult activity and it is suitable for pupils in higher grades of primary schools and for students of secondary schools. These students should have a sufficient basis from the lessons of ethics in lower grades and it means they should have mastered the theoretical as well as practical aspects related to the topic of values.

Usage of moral dilemmas in education practically forces the pupils to think and consider various possible solutions to a given problem. It helps them to achieve the development of desirable behaviour and values and it develops divergent thinking about various issues. It is related to the awareness of the fact that every decision by a human being has certain consequences for which we bear responsibility (Valica et al, 2001, p. 87).

A dilemma can be characterized as a necessary choice between two equal possibilities. The decision making process between these alternatives is usually carried out under pressure and it includes unavoidable a value conflict in which, no matter what our decision is, one value is still violated.⁴ It is vital to deal particularly with the selection of appropriate dilemma. Valica et al. presents several requirements that need to be respected in volition of the dilemma which we want to use in ethics. Among these requirements is the need for value conflict in the dilemma, also pressure to decide in a certain way, the appropriateness of the dilemma for the students' stage of development, identification of the pupil with the person involved in the decision-making process, more proper are dilemmas from the pupils' real life. It is necessary to be aware of the fact that there is not only one right answer in the decision-making process. Argumentation and the ability to perform moral consideration in pupils, when thinking about individual alternatives, are very important. Emphasis should be put on the usage of various methods in selecting the dilemma (texts, role play, movies, newspapers and so on) (Valica et al, 2011, pp. 108–109).

Conclusions

Value education represents a vital component of the educational process. In Slovakia, it is realized in the explicit form within the subject ethics taught in schools. The implicit form of value education is manifested through other subjects and also on the basis of the general atmosphere of a particular school. Value education should be in accordance with the stage of moral development of pupils and this leads the teacher to the selection of various methods which point to desirable values.

Acknowledgement

This paper is a part of the research project – KEGA 005PU-4/2014 Nové výzvy pre učiteľa etickej výchovy v 21. storočí (New challenges for Ethics teacher in the 21st century).

Júlia Klembarová is a research assistant at the Institute of Ethics and Bioethics, University of Prešov (Slovakia). She has published several articles concerning various issues of human dignity, intellectual disability and consequentialism.

Corresponding author:

Júlia Klembarová, Institute of Ethics and Bioethics, University of Prešov, 17. novembra 1, SK- 08078 Prešov (Slovakia)
email: julia.klembarova@unipo.sk

References

- BILASOVÁ, V. (2014): Etická teória a jej význam v etickej výchove [Ethical Theory and Its Importance in Ethical Education]. In: V. Bilasová (ed.): *Etické zošity I.: Význam etickej teórie v príprave učiteľa etickej výchovy* [Ethical Textbook I.: The Importance of Ethical Theory in the Preparation of the Teacher of Ethical Education]. Prešov: FF PU, pp. 8–28.
- CELINKKAYA, T. & FILOGLU, S. (2014): Attitudes of Social Studies Teachers toward Value and Values Education. In: *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice*, 14(4), pp. 1551–1556.
- ČIŽMÁRIKOVÁ, K. (2013): Hodnoty v škole [Values in School]. In: V. Gluchman (ed.): *Etika v profesiách* [Ethics in Professions]. Prešov: FF PU, pp. 218–226.

⁴Among basic steps necessary for moral dilemma solution belongs the identification of given problem, identification of all participants, identification of values which are in conflicts, individual alternatives of solution of this problem, selection of one of the alternatives and its reasoning.

- DARÁK, M. (2004): Antropologicko-axiologický model výchovy [Anthropological-Axiological Model of Education]. In: M. Darák et al.: *Kapitoly z teórie výchovy* [Chapters from Theory of Education]. Prešov: FHPV, pp. 35–45.
- DERELI-IMAN, E. (2014): The Effect of the Values Education Programme on 5.5-6 Year old Children's Social Development: Social Skills, Psycho-social Development and Social Problem Solving Skills. In: *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice*, 14(1), pp. 262–268.
- FRIDRICHOVÁ, P. (2012): *Komplexná prosociálnosť v etickej výchove* [Complex Pro-sociality in Ethical Education]. Banská Bystrica: Pedagogická fakulta UMB.
- FRIDRICHOVÁ, P. & HAJNOLOVÁ BUVALOVÁ, E. (2012): *Etická výchova v primárnom vzdelávaní* [Ethical Education in Primary Education]. Banská Bystrica: Pedagogická fakulta UMB.
- GLUCHMAN, V. (2009): „Etická výchova“ a morálne myslenie (etika sociálnych dôsledkov ako východisko modelu mravnej výchovy) [“Ethical Education“ and Moral Consideration (Ethics of Social Consequences as a Basis of Model of Moral Education)]. In: Š. Ligas (ed.): *Mravná výchova v školách na Slovensku a v zahraničí* [Moral Education in Schools in Slovakia and Abroad]. Banská Bystrica: Pedagogická fakulta, Univerzita Mateja Bela, pp. 61–70.
- GLUCHMAN, V. (2008): *Úvod do etiky* [Introduction to Ethics]. Brno: Tribun EU.
- JONÁŠKOVÁ, G. (2003): Násilie a intolerancia – najvyššie hodnoty [Violence and Intolerance – Highest Values]? In: S. Gálik (ed.): *Hodnotové aspekty súčasného sveta* [Value Aspects of Contemporary World]. Nitra: FF UKF, pp. 209–213.
- KUČEROVÁ, S. (1996): *Človek. Hodnoty. Výchova* [Human being. Values. Education]. Prešov: Grafotlač.
- KUDLÁČOVÁ, B. (2004): Vplyv učiteľa etickej výchovy na osobnosť žiaka a jeho zohľadnenie v príprave na pedagogickej fakulte [The Influence of Teacher of Ethical Education on Pupil's Personality and Its Presence in Preparation on Pedagogical Faculty]. In: C. Diatka & I. Lomnický (eds.): *Osobnostná etika a etická výchova* [Personable Ethics and Ethical Education]. Nitra: FF UKF, pp. 197–203.
- LEŠKOVÁ BLAHOVÁ, A. (2015): The Relevance and Role of Environmental Values in Ethics Education (in the Context of Environmental Ethics). In: *Ethics & Bioethics (in Central Europe)*, 5(1–2), pp. 41–49.
- LOVAT, T. J. (2010): Synergies and Balance between Values Education and Quality Teaching. In: *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 42(4), pp. 489–500.
- PODMANICKÝ, I. (2004): Ďalšie možnosti rozvíjania eticko-sociálneho statusu učiteľa etickej výchovy [Other Possibilities of Development of Ethical-social Status of Ethical Education Teacher]. In: C. Diatka & I. Lomnický (eds.): *Osobnostná etika a etická výchova* [Personable Ethics and Ethical Education]. Nitra: FF UKF, pp. 206–212.
- ROVNÁNOVÁ, L. (2013): *Inovácie vo výučbe etickej výchovy. Osvedčená pedagogická skúsenosť edukačnej praxe* [Innovations in Education of Ethical Education. Experiences of Pedagogical Praxis]. Banská Bystrica: Metodicko-pedagogické centrum.
- SUTROP, M. (2015): Can values be taught? The myth of value-free education. In: *Trames: A Journal of the Humanities & Social Sciences*, 19(2), pp. 189–202.
- VACEK, P. (2008): *Rozvoj morálneho vedomí žiakov: metodické námety k realizácii prerezových tém* [Pupils Moral Consciousness Development: Methodical Inspiration for Realization of Cross-sectional Topics]. Praha: Portál.
- VALICA, M., FRIDRICHOVÁ, P., KALISKÝ, J., ROHN, T., HAJNALOVÁ BUVALOVÁ, E. & BRADOVÁ, G.: (2011): *Modely výučby etickej výchovy a kompetenčného profilu učiteľa etickej výchovy* [Models of Ethical Education and Profile of Ethical Education Teacher]. Banská Bystrica: Pedagogická fakulta, Univerzita Mateja Bela.