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The formation of the professional *ethos* as a factor of integration through the virtues

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Abstract

Although it is very common to hear about the professional *ethos* and to use this concept in the educational world, nonetheless there is a forgotten and proper idea given by the necessity of fitting the concept into its proper measurement and context. The professional task in education has an ethical dimension which is higher than technical. This task is focused on the idea that educational performance cannot separate teaching from formation. Teaching is not only instruction but mainly formation of persons fostered by the practice of habits and virtues. Therefore educational *ethos* has to be focused toward the development of virtues: justice, fortitude, temperance and prudence, in the teacher and the student. These virtues are not exclusive of the educational world. They have been considered all together, compatible with personal values, as an act coming from the teacher and going to the student, helping her to integrate her personal world as well as her relations with the rest of the students

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1. Introduction

The incidence of teacher competence upon the different levels of education is a widespread question as well as a famous and well-studied subject. Nonetheless, it is not the same luck with the *ethos* of professor that is the true origin of competence. As McLaughlin (2005, 306) points out: “ethos is relatively underexplored as a form of educative influence by educational researchers, philosophers of education, educational policy makers and teachers and educational leaders at classroom and school level”.

Perhaps the reason for this forgetfulness is that most of the studies about professional competence come from both qualitative and quantitative research (on these matters see D'aprix, Dunlap, Abel & Edwards, 2004; Kalishman, 2002; Krejsler, 2005; Pulana Lefoka, 1997) which leave underexplored the real being of the matter, because as McLaughlin (2005, 306) affirms: “the notion of ‘ethos’ is notoriously difficult to bring into clear focus in the context of teaching and schooling, as elsewhere”. Perhaps we have arrived to the moment, saying with Giddens (1992, 51) of looking for theories to explain facts: “contrary to the popular saying, facts do not speak by themselves. Many sociologists work with empirical questions, but if their theories are not managed by any theoretical knowledge

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it is improbable that their work will clarify anything”. This is the goal of this paper, to briefly reflect about the *ethos* of the teacher that goes with the professional of education as well as to show some qualities that have to be developed in him.

Without any doubt the idea that has influenced in this proliferation of studies about competences is the concept of internalization, or in other words, globalization. Even though the origin of the concept is the field of economics and law, it is a fact that has amplified its world of reference designing the existence of processes that act and are perceived in a transnational way, touching many social systems including education (Schriewer, 2000).

The incidence of education comes from the influence of:

The value of knowledge as a factor of development

The globalization of processes

The consolidation and expansion of technological information and communication

The increase in networks of individuals and institutions are sometimes substituting traditional structures such as; the University (Duderstadt, 1997, 2).

These factors tell us about a concrete and precise way of understanding this profession, and put the lens upon the core of the study on the same level and characteristics with the rest of current professions.

2. The *ethos* of the teacher as a profession

Diverse authors have formulated different stances about the question of profession remarking some peculiar elements (see, for example, Worthington & Higgs, 2003; Barber, 1995; Carr, 2000; Gichure, 1995). Though these works are valid in many ways, they are also incomplete, making it harder to understand and to give a satisfactory definition of profession as well as the process that we must follow in the path of professionalization. This is the reason why: “social prestige is a legitimate good attracting everyone. Undoubtedly the recognized professions have more reputation than semi-professions or manual labour. Prestige is linked to social influence and ascendance; for that reason it is licit to see it as an aspiration of every person. Nonetheless, we should not forget that happiness as any other superior good is not a direct and immediate object of actions, inasmuch as goals are remote from the action. When we act in a good way in our daily life we obtain the added value of prestige, fame and honour. In any case the human condition always makes possible a change of the basis: in this case, first and above all, looking directly for the fame in the first place, considering that obtaining fame justifies any action. We have to ask ourselves if this attitude is promoted with the professionalization of work and particularly in educational work, even though we can never arrive to a public and private admission of this problem”. (Altarejos, 2003, p. 37).

There have been many attempts to characterize professional work (on these matters see Mohan Raju & Srivastava, 1994; Lauwerys, 2002; Zuoyu, 2002) especially that of the professor from diverse points of view. One of these is proposed by Carr & Kemmis (1988, 26); in order to achieve a synthesis of the elements pouring light on this subject, and is given for recognizing the way and exercising the professional activity. These authors remark three peculiar elements in any profession.

2.1. *Knowledge founded on theory*

There is no practical knowledge considered as a sum of skills coming from pure scientific knowledge or theoretically pure wisdom. Even affirming an unreal and complete knowledge of the world, if it were possible, the human condition and its way of operating, we don't know what to do in the concrete situation in order to help the student in the labor of increasing his perfection. This is a permanent and open process, constituted by actions and permanently opened, constituted by actions as well as by possibilities.

2.2. *Subordination of the professional to the interest and the welfare of the client*

In these second characteristics it seems evident that the professional actuation is focused on the capability of service that is given to the client (see, Sahney, Banwet, Karunes, 2004). If we observe our society we can strongly

affirm these ideas in a general way. Nonetheless the problem appears when we go to the educational field (Silver, 2004). Who is the client for a professional in education? Possibly, the most common answer would be seeing the student as a client: “In the view of Willmott (1995), constituting the student as customer reifies the view that the university has become part of the corporate agenda which has transformed the degree into a commodity or a “meal ticket” as he puts it, the role of the academic is that of a service provider who treats the student as a customer as she (the academic) aims to receive excellent ratings, and thus continued tenure and research funding” (Constanti & Gibbs, 2004, 244).

2.3. *Autonomy of the professional in front of society*

Among these three characteristics, Autonomy is perhaps that one which provokes more unanimity between experts when we are trying to define what profession is. This feature simultaneously shows us the condition of the capability of having personal decision, away from external pressures, and the proper social responsibilities in face of the results that we look for and the quality of the work done. Clearly if we contemplate this element in education, then we must say that is not possible to aspire to a serious work except for reducing education to a mere instruction. Mature autonomy requires both emotional independence—freedom from continual and pressing needs for reassurance and approval—and instrumental independence, the ability to carry on activities and cope with problems without seeking help from others and the ability to be mobile in relation to one's needs. Simultaneously, the individual must accept interdependence, recognizing that one cannot receive benefits from a social structure without contributing to it, that personal rights have a corollary social responsibility (Miller & Prince, 1976).

3. Principals that lead the *ethos* of the teacher

The task of teachers has a personal subjective dimension that puts before the technical the ethical meaning of the work. Unfortunately the value of the ethical is minimal, therefore is hard to expect a social recognition of the intrinsic transcendence of the docent. Anyway, it would always be better to renounce social recognition instead of losing the true character of the teacher. This is the sense of the next expression of Alvira (1985, 16): “each educator has to feel deep down the greatness of his profession. He doesn't want to consider the myopic vision of society that doesn't affirm his value”. Therefore, instead of seeking to adjust the requisites of the educational work for being a profession it is better to get down into characteristics of the docent in order to induce a notion of profession.

The best option is indicated by the intentionality of the educator: we cannot split teaching from formation. Through teaching we obtain formation. Accordingly, a neutral education is not possible. The demand and global expectation in education has overflowed this short prospective going beyond the narrow communication of data and facts. It is not possible to conceive the docent as a mere shower of experiences, as a fake instructor of wisdom. The step that we must give between information and knowledge—where the importance rests in truth—should only be walked the educational intention of the teacher (Drucker, 1989). This stance was expressed in the recommendations presented by the International Commission for Education in XXI; gathered by the famous report of Delhors, *Learning: the treasure within* (1996). This report is summarized in the idea explained in four basic pillars of education:

Learning to know: education will succeed as far as it gives the basis for a permanent attitude of education along the personal life, developed within and outside of work.

Learning to do: this dimension tells us about the formation in competences in order to put into practice in conditions demanded by global work. More than a precise qualification this skill is given by professional formation, the attitude of team work, initiative, and others.

Learning to live together: to know and to respect the other is a primary element in order to reduce conflicts in a pacific society, inducing the raising of social trust which is necessary for developing common projects with social orientation in any level in the social structures. An education of quality is capable among those who go to school, the student, of promoting dialogue between citizens based on arguments.

Learning to be: education must be capable of helping to give a personal identity –who am I– which also appears in national identity, social, family, etc. –what am I–, translated into critical and judging skill as basic condition for the use of our personal freedom.

These orientations demand from the teacher not only a scientific formation but a personal wisdom: how to act in relation with science and in personal life. The best help that the student can receive is the communication of both types of knowledge.

4. Characterization of the *ethos* of teacher

The *Ethos* is above all the proper way of acting of free agent, of who has self-possession through the delivered action (see Allder, 1993; Glover & Coleman, 2005; Donnelly, 2000). The *ethos* or character is the personal way of being self acquired in the daily exercise of freedom ““For Aristotle, human development requires initiation into a culture in which qualities of personhood and character are recognized and practiced. It is important to note that all these processes cannot be reduced to mere socialization (on this matter see, for example, Carr, 1991, ch. 5)” (McLaughlin, 2005, 319)”.

The richness and psychological complexity of the human being impedes in fact understanding it in a direct and immediate consideration and more so expressing this concept in simple prepositions. “The concept of ‘ethos’ is notoriously difficult to analyze for at least two reasons. First, the concept of ethos is closely akin to, and often described in terms of, related notions such as ‘ambience’, ‘atmosphere’, ‘climate’, ‘culture’, ‘ethical environment’ and the like (see Allder, 1993, 60; Donnelly 2000, Glover & Coleman, 2005; Solvason, 2005). It is therefore difficult to focus attention on the specific meaning of ethos for the purposes of analysis and discussion. Second, the intangibility and elusiveness of the notion of ethos can be seen in the wide range of aspects of the life and work of the classroom and school through which it is manifested and in the wide range of modes of influence in which it is embodied. This wide range of aspects and modes can be illustrated by reference to the recent Scottish and Irish initiatives in relation to school ethos” (McLaughlin, 2005, 308-309)”.

It is only possible to access a true knowledge of *ethos* through the analysis that is the study of the constitutional elements of the *habits*. As Goethe says; “if we don’t try to know everything with exactitude, then it is possible that we know better everything”. (*Adagios en prosa*, 36). The professional habits can be studied taking into account previous and elemental conditions: they must be considered always together, they are not exclusive of a profession, and professional habits are a concrete specification of the common habits of a human being. Habits are the diverse qualities that the subject is permanently showing as result of the development of human operational capabilities which are at the same time congenital as well as acquired. Even being a habit in many ways a fruit of custom it is not mainly that; it has an automatic dimension as well, the repetition of permanent acts. In any case, habits are the concretion of a personal way of being; professional habits are defined by:

We can ignore educating in them

They give an operational definition of the nature of profession

They give a professional personal character

They are the central notions of deontology

5. Ethical virtues shaping personal *ethos* of the teacher

Virtue is the personal potentiality that gathers action for the future; this is the consideration of habits as far as it gives an operational energy to the agent. As Aristotle (1976, 1107a1) points out: “virtue is a character state concerned with choice, lying in the mean relative to us, being determined by reason and the way the person of practical wisdom would determine it”.

The *ethos* of the docent is a personal way of being that the educator is shaping through educational work manifested according to the personal life; taking into account that his personal work is very important in order to go forward in his proper humanization and personal growth (Tirri, 1999). The constitutional elements of the service professions are: competence, initiative, responsibility, commitment and dedication. These are the values and

qualities that compose the personal *ethos* of the teacher. Education has quality as far as the teacher adopts these elements and lives them in the institutions, when they change their personal work in an ethical act: “the educator as a professional must act ethically, as a person managing persons, giving to this reciprocally established relation a good moral sense: it has to be a personal moral act in itself and in its consequences. He has to be a good professor being a professor who is a good person” (Cardona, 2001, 19). Cultivating her character as a teacher and assuming her commitment in this task she will be an ethical and efficient professional.

The educational action of the good professor, as a person and worker, is focused on the task of trying to get the student to obtain the capability of self governing her proper life, which brings her to a permanent dedication to achieve self commitment from the student. This is only possible because the docent has authority and responsibility before her disciple. This authority is also reflected in the learning process of the student who would put the means in order to get the teaching of the master and would try to know what her teacher was showing in a concrete context.

Is authority enough? The answer would be given as: the master who has authority is who cultivates the personal *ethos* of teacher. That is, who cultivates the proper virtues that compose the professional *ethos*, therefore who receive the recognition of his authority given by his knowledge, learning to do and wisdom, understanding authority in such a way is enough as far as he does not forget that cultivating these virtues will be essential in the development of his life and will be with him all his life. In any case, we want to emphasize the mutual relation and involvement between professional *ethos* and personal *ethos*.

Table 1. Basic virtues

Template	Fortress	Justice	Prudence
Self-esteem	Altruism	Equity	Perspicacious
Tolerance	Constance	Veracity	Attention
True intention of learning	Patience	Rightness	

We do not want to forget that virtues that conform the composition of *ethos* of the teacher can be understood in a theoretical analysis but we cannot split them from the practical world (Sumsion, 2000). Also we have to add some nuances in order to achieve a better knowledge of virtues in general, but in particular of the idea of teacher that we are showing in these pages.

These virtues are not exclusive of the ethos of the teacher. Some of them, even many, can be applied to other professions, but probably without the same level of priority as with teachers.

We have to consider these virtues all together. Dealing with the virtues of the profession of the teacher none of them should be considered split from the others, and there is not one preminent amongst the others defining by itself the complete *ethos* of teacher. The humanization of the profession and the professional life of the teacher are related to the integration of every virtue.

There are more virtues implied. We have to consider, besides those which are already part of the *ethos*, other personal virtues, this seems in many cases very important. A human being is more than his profession, he is a person with a personal life overspreading from profession, even when this is very intense. There is a professional *ethos* but developed from a personal *ethos*, a proper way of acting and living, a personal addition of elements totally compatible with the personal *ethos*.

Virtues composing the ethos of teacher are concrete specifications of human virtues. The profession of teaching is only a part of human life, so the person acts in many environments and dimensions involving different virtues and possibilities. Also a profession involves many proper faculties of human beings; otherwise work would be inhuman. Therefore professional habits can be contemplated as concretions, as specifications of the *ethos* of the human being.

6. Conclusion

According to these specifications it is evident that our proposition must be amplified to other possible virtues of the professional *ethos* of the teacher, basically because in a practical way we cannot split the *ethos* of teacher from the general human *ethos*. This is the importance of remarking the value of the teacher in relation to the personal

signature in his professional development. The relevance of the true teacher that has, a deep professional formation, a personal formation and the prudence to apply this knowledge to diversity, individuality and the unity of person of the student.

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