

Education to care for the world: scientific, ethical, and aesthetic dimensions of teacher training

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"...we teach what we are, and in what we are lies
much of what we teach" (NÓVOA, 2009, p.38).

This text will address some foundations of ethical thought and their pedagogical implications. The conference will aim to conduct a literature review on the theme of ethics in our contemporary context, with an emphasis on the discussion of the theory of justice and the ethics of virtues. In addition, the pedagogical dimensions that can be considered at this intersection will be addressed. Ethics is assumed to be the foundation of this caring for the world, and caring for the world is understood as the ultimate meaning of pedagogical action.

When it comes to the dimension of care, I confess that the first thing that comes to mind is Hannah Arendt's pedagogical thinking. In her well-known text *The Crisis in Education*, the author emphasizes that care in education must be twofold: care for the world and care for the child. The school and the teachers represent the world to

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the child. The child is fragile before this world. We must therefore be careful with children, to preserve them from the inappropriate things that can come from the world. The child must gradually be introduced to this common world, which, like the child, also needs protection. In this sense, the educator is responsible for preserving the world in the face of its possible destruction and for the child in the face of their possible corruption. In Hannah Arendt's terms:

"The teacher's qualification consists in knowing the world and being able to instruct others about it, but his authority rests on his assumption of responsibility for that world. Vis-a-vis the child it is as though he were a representative of all adult inhabitants, pointing out the details and saying to the child: This is our world" (ARENDT, 1979, p.239).

It is necessary to consider, with José Sérgio Fonseca de Carvalho, that "the world to which the author refers is not a mere cluster of things, but a set of human achievements: concepts, languages, values, in short, a way of life that embodies a set of cultural heritages and forges a people" (CARVALHO, 2013, p.133). This idea of the common world is one of the key concepts that can direct pedagogical thinking towards more progressive ways of thinking about education and the formation of new generations. Moreover, as Leandro de Lajonquière points out, "what is learned is always borrowed from some tradition that already knew what to do with life. Thus, those who actually learn automatically incur a debt which, although they sometimes believe they owe to their occasional teacher, is ultimately based on the register of ideals or the symbolic" (LAJONQUIÈRE, 2002, p.173).

For Georges Gusdorf, this existential content is what legitimizes the meaning of care. The care we have to take in education is, above all, a care to pass on a legacy that history has given us so that we can communicate it to new generations. This cultural heritage, which includes what the older generations considered important to keep and preserve, is reiterated in every class and reenacted in every lesson we teach: "Every class is a first class, every lesson a new beginning" (GUSDORF, 1970, p.55). Knowledge is our subject, and we have to be careful with it too. In what a teacher teaches, the student expects much more from the teacher than what he teaches (GUSDORF, 1970, p.89). From Gusdorf's point of view, the teacher acts through example, as a guide. There is an intellectual encounter between a master and his pupil every day, in every class, even though our students are many and we are one. In teaching each topic, there is an encounter between the student and the knowledge, as

well as between the student and the teacher. If we think of this triad between the teacher, knowledge, and the student, not necessarily in that order, we will understand that the dimension of care in education will be based on what Herbart (2007) could call pedagogical tact. Today, the discourse that evokes the idea of competence and skills disregards this primacy of knowledge in the pedagogical process and replaces it with the vague and imprecise concept of competencies. New domains are evoked in the name of competencies, such as financial education or life projects... In short, such a characterization leads to the loss of school life's primary function, which is to familiarize the student with the mechanisms of knowledge acquisition.

If we turn more directly to properly educational issues, we can point to the works of Jan Masschelein, Maarten Simons, and François Dubet as references for addressing the theme of care and the relationship of pedagogy with knowledge and the transmission of knowledge. Masschelein's and Simons' main thesis is the meaning of school as free time, *skolé*. School would be a social time that is free from the constraints of work and, at the same time, separated from family intimacy. The school, however, reproduces the mechanisms of selection and discrimination that prevail in society. As Hannah Arendt already considered, schooling is conservative precisely because the teacher represents the older generation, carrying with them a body of knowledge structured by the past. Although we live in a society that presupposes lifelong learning, as characterized by Masschelein and Simons, school remains the institution where young people are prepared for integration into society, both through their initiation into the field of knowledge and skills, and through their socialization into culture and collective life.

These authors state that, since the school of ancient Greece, the institution has suspended the order of things. Teachers and students are situated in a temporality that is quite different from productive time. While the school has life, when the classroom door closes, external community life and society itself remain outside. In turn, "at school, there is always something on the table" (MASSCHELEIN; SIMONS, 2015, p.41). There is something of society that is at stake in school life. School brings the things of life into play, transforming them into subjects of study. In this way, school activity involves a creative process—one of inventiveness and transcendence—making each lesson an event to be remembered.

Masschelein and Simons argue that the etymology of the word interest refers to being in-between, outside of oneself, in the interval between one thing and another. They refer to this as precisely what drives us to study. School, then, would be the time and space of what we share. Schooling, as pointed out earlier, transforms the things of the world into objects of study. Shaping schooling would consist, from this point of view, of presenting the world to the student. However, being in school would require certain attitudes, suitable for the process of studying and writing: obedience to certain rules, minimizing distractions, and, therefore, discipline. All of this would enable the student to be called to what the authors characterize as the “present indicative.” Students and teachers will all need to be individuals who get excited, who live their teaching and learning with involvement and concentration; with dedication and respect; with attention and passion. In this way, in addition to the professional nature of his role, the teacher must act with some amateurism. He must be an amateur because “beside the love for the subject, and maybe because of it, she also teaches out of love for the student. As an amateur, the teacher is not only knowledgeable about something, she also cares about and is actively engaged in it” (MASSCHELEIN; SIMONS, 2015, p.77).

Schools and teachers, as Masschelein and Simons continue, should start from the assumption that students have capacities that are equivalent to one another. The school should refuse to legitimize and naturalize differences between students. Only by recognizing such fundamental equality among students can teachers be inspired by their students, their subject, and their material. This means sharing knowledge with the student, particularly the desire for knowledge—intellectual curiosity. At the end of the day, it is about love for a world to be shared and love for the new generation. The “school event,” as the authors put it, requires pulling young people out of their world and elevating them to someone beyond their world. Masschelein and Simons argue that the solemn time of school lies precisely in its ability to start something. It is a rite of initiation. The school desk, on the other hand, puts study, exercise, and training on the agenda. Through this procedure, the things of the world are transformed into the things of the learner from the moment the teacher puts himself at the service of his subject and brings things to the table. The school has thus become a public place where something can happen. The school's basic characteristic is this task of suspension: “Economic, social, cultural, political or private time is suspended, as are the tasks and roles connected to specific places. Suspension here could be regarded as an act of de-

privatization, de-socialisation or de-appropriation" (MASSCHELEIN; SIMONS, 2015, p.110). This suspension frees something; in other words, it frees things from their common use in the family and in society. In the words of Masschelein and Simons: "Someone becomes a school teacher by, as she sits in front of someone else, putting something on the table. The act of putting it on the table transforms something into a common matter, and transforms someone into a teacher and another person into a student" (MASSCHELEIN; SIMONS, 2015, p.111).

Masschelein and Simons also compare school to a game. Referring back to Huizinga, they say that a game is played for its own sake and that it remains outside the process of satisfying needs. Nobody appropriates either the space or the spirit of the game. It is as if school time were play time, when something is made available to us and freed from its everyday uses. In this sense, the school presents itself as a territory of suspension, because it is a place of initiation.

François Dubet takes a different tack. For him, what matters is finding out how the school can become as fair as possible. In this vein, he asks himself with the title of his book: *What is a fair school?* Based on this question, the entire book aims to understand the possibilities and limits of the current school model, which is anchored in what Dubet characterizes as the fiction of equal opportunities. For the author, this fiction became historically necessary, as it allowed the break with an aristocratic model of education, according to which opportunities were explicitly different. Against this model, schooling was established based on merit and the dynamics of what could be considered merit concerning the social positions occupied by each person. It turns out that the same society that institutes a supposed equality of opportunities will be the one that causes the same inequalities that pervade the fabric of society to also be found at school. It is as if the school recomposed, on its inside, the inequalities in which it, as an institution, was already endorsed. In Dubet's terms, we have the following: "The educational offer is far from equal or homogeneous, and, generally speaking, the school treats less privileged children worse." The school map registers social inequalities and its impositions are more rigid for the poor" (DUBET, 2008, p.34). Because of this, social inequalities are reinforced by school life: "It is also known that the school is more responsive to the positive guidance demands presented by parents who are socially and culturally closer to teachers than to those of working-class parents" (DUBET, 2008, p.36).

The unequal performance of students, under such an education system, is conceived as a manifestation of their own individual merit, in light of all the conditions obtained under the equal opportunity regime. All these, however, are necessary fictions because they allow individuals to perceive themselves as free and equal, despite the continuous formation of school inequalities" (DUBET, 2008, p.41). Such school inequalities may be the transposition to the school of the segregation and exclusion mechanisms of the broader society itself, or they may also be new inequalities, created by the school itself, in the act of comparing the performance of its students. For Dubet, equal opportunities would still be fundamentally situated as a normative horizon, which should, however, be questioned in order to establish a fairer school, or the least unfair as possible.

The least unfair school possible is not the one with the highest student evaluations. It is not the one that has the best results when it comes to its best students. The least unfair school possible is one that strives to equalize results. It is the one that narrows the gap between the students who learn the most and the best and those who have the most difficulty learning. Dubet says that "school failure is the prelude to social exclusion" (DUBET, 2008, p.100) and there is no natural authority in a system that imposes its values and knowledge unequally on different individuals, unevenly distributed on the social framework. What actually happens is that "the winners of the merit competition do not want to change either the content, the rules, or the pedagogical models that have benefited them" (DUBET, 2008, p.118). Today's teachers, having most likely been the good students of yesterday, validate the dictates of the school system, often without questioning its mechanisms of segregation and exclusion.

When reflecting on the issue of ethics from the point of view of schooling, some other aspects can be considered operative. The activity of teaching—as Eirick Prairat points out—constitutes a set of routines that arise in different situations of school life. In this case, the word routine does not have a pejorative meaning and expresses a way of giving validation and constituting experience. There is, in this regard, a teaching exemplarity, identified with what the author describes—evoking Herbart (2007)—as a teacher touch. Tact would be precisely this "ability to appreciate the characteristics of a situation and to decide" (PRAIRAT, 2017, p.95). Therefore, tact constitutes a way of judging that refers to the idea of an appropriate gesture or a fair word (PRAIRAT, 2017, p.49). Tact, in this sense, respects nuances and circumstances, as if educating were,

above all, "organizing the passage, the transition from the affective world to the effective world. The school is, in fact, between the family and the real world and is the middle ground, ensuring the connection, the passage from the family to the real world" (PRAIRAT, 2017, p.64).

For that reason, the school is established as an intermediate space between the domestic environment and the public space. In this regard, "tact" (*tactus* in Latin) comes from the verb *tangere*, meaning to touch. Tact is primitively the sense of touching" (PRAIRAT, 2017, p.72). To touch the hearts of our students and, at the same time, their specific circumstances. That's what it's all about. On the topic of pedagogical tact, António Nóvoa also remarks that the act of educating requires "a certain serenity from those who are able to command respect, winning over students to engage in schoolwork. Knowing how to lead someone to the other shore—knowledge—is not available to everyone. In teaching, the professional dimensions always inevitably intersect with the personal dimensions" (NÓVOA, 2009, p.30-1).

To revisit the intersection between ethical debate and the act of caring for the other, Victoria Camps offers an interesting perspective on the theme of caring for the world, primarily in her work *Virtudes Públicas*, in which she characterizes the social dimension that inscribes ethics within a given public context. For Camps, the discourse on morality requires an adaptation to the concrete reality in which it is situated. Returning to Aristotle's moral thinking, Camps considers that ethics, under this approach, would constitute a second nature, which enables the individual to live with others. In the light of the Aristotelian sense of virtues, Camps elaborates the concept of public virtues.

Tolerance would be, for Camps, an important virtue of public life. Adopting the idea of tolerance presupposes accepting the full freedom of all lifestyles, as long as they do not harm others. Everyone has the right to live as they please. Even so, the author warns that not everything is tolerable since certain patterns of behavior, such as harming others, should not be allowed or tolerated. Certain practices, under such a distinction, would be intolerable: pedophilia, terrorism, torture. Tolerance, in this respect, would be nuanced by the human rights dimension. To tolerate, for Camps, would be equivalent to enduring. If to tolerate is to endure actions to which we are not indifferent, then we always tolerate what displeases us, although not everything that displeases us ought to be tolerated. From such a perspective, tolerating some things implies disregarding or

disqualifying others. For Victoria Camps, thinking about ethics involves projecting some absolutes, in light of a “transcultural idea of justice” (CAMPS, 1996, p.88). Such an understanding of the topic would align with measures to reject situations of discrimination, domination, and violence. It would mean condemning dictatorships, recognizing the rights to sexual and ethnic equality. Tolerance is a virtue of pluralist democracy. Hence, she recognizes society's right and duty to provide education and protect children and the elderly in light of an ethical program guided by this conception of tolerance as a fundamental virtue.

Another virtue emphasized by the author is good manners: “know-how and savoir-faire, a certain instruction—a career, a trade—and a certain level of culture” (CAMPS, 1996, p.109). For Camps, education would require the very values of democracy: pluralism, autonomy, and tolerance. Educating would then be the transmission of a lifestyle. In addressing the virtues of the feminine condition, Camps refers to the thought of Carol Gilligan (1998), who argues that there are two types of ethics: one with a masculine matrix—the ethics of justice; and one with a feminine matrix—the ethics of care. These two ethics would be complementary, but considering their archetypes, they could also be taken separately.

The last virtue that Victoria Camps focuses on is identity. According to her, there are three levels of identity: all of humanity, communities, and personal identity: “having an identity is to give unity to one’s life, to gather the past and project it forward, to establish values, and to mark continuities and transitions.” In short, making one's own life a meaningful narrative” (CAMPS, 1996, p.146). For the author, our awareness of ourselves is shaped by the gaze of others, and there are multiple identities that shape us throughout our lives. In this respect, Camps is close to the perspective of Alasdair MacIntyre, who, in *After Virtue*, points out that there is a narrative concept of identity, since people live in narrative form. For MacIntyre, then, personal identity is referenced by the unity of the individual made up of the unity of their own narrative.

The relationship between identity and narrative form is heavily emphasized by MacIntyre, for whom the story of our lives is always written in the form of a narrative, intertwined with the stories of the communities that shaped our identities. In a narrative way, says MacIntyre, we integrate stories and connect ourselves to a given tradition: “I find myself part of a history and that is generally to say, whether I like it or not, whether I recognize it or not, one of the bearers of a tradition” (MACINTYRE, 2001, p.372).

Therefore, understanding the universe of public virtues requires a dive into the irreducibly singular and, at the same time, plural human condition. Public virtues consist of a journey from the particular to the universal and, from there, back to the singularities. Thinking about education in the light of virtue ethics means exploring the individual's ability to narrate, encouraging students to give meaning to their own lives in order to turn their existence into a meaningful narrative. In conclusion, ethical action is understood, in this way, as a constant search for the good life, a life that can only be acquired through the effective practice of just actions.

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