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## **Relevant Aspects in the Training of Teachers for the Moral Education of Adolescents**

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## The need for special training to teach moral education

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study is to give some guidelines to help teachers responsible for moral education. It explains first of all some key concepts to understand how to develop this education in adolescence, and then shows that moral education is a form of help given by the teacher to the student, avoiding indoctrination. This is followed by an exploration of the difference between the growth of the “human essence” and that of the human person. It underlines the necessity to focus on human individuals and avoid a blanket approach in teaching the virtues, since it is necessary to respect the unique character of the individual. The study also explains that the acquisition of virtues corresponds to the improvement of the will, and shows that it is insufficient on its own, if not accompanied by personal growth. The activity most proper of the human person is love; thus the virtuous can love more. The study suggests the importance of relying on methodological tools that help to reinforce the acquisition of virtues. Finally, it indicates the necessity of an adequate training for teachers responsible for moral education.

**Key words:** moral education, virtue, learning, teacher training, person.

### Introduction:

For many different reasons—fear of indoctrination, cultural pluralism, postmodernism etc.—moral education in schools entered into crisis a number of years ago; at the present moment it tends to be a matter of theoretical ethical content only. But, as we know from Aristotle, simple theoretical teaching does not make anyone virtuous; and an educational system that does not contribute to helping each person to achieve virtue leads to a society without moral resources. Thus, within our respect for the freedom and individuality of the students, it is becoming increasingly necessary to structure a training plan for teachers of moral education, particularly in the adolescent stage, as it is a key moment in personal development.

Moral education requires the distinction of double human growth: of the essence and of the act of being of the person (Polo 2003). The acquisition of virtues improves the will and the intelligence, but it is not the end of human person: this end is happiness. Moral education—that is, helping students to achieve virtues—is a personal duty of the educator.

When talking about the virtues, we will not propose any particular system but simply explain the importance of educating in some specific virtues: temperance, fortitude and prudence. We will explain why these virtues are the most important in moral education of young people, and show the necessity of educating in these specific virtues from an analysis of human behaviour. We will two more virtues to these: friendship and humility. Friendship is a key virtue, according to Aristotle’s ethics, and he explains that it is essential in order to reach happiness and because it is the highest external good that can be desired. Humility is an important virtue in moral education because we need to accept our own character in order to give to others the good acquired by virtues, and it is easier to do this if we are humble.

If we want to educate young people adequately, the teacher responsible for moral education must have appropriate training. This requires designing a plan of formation that contributes to facilitating the acquisition of virtues by students. As we shall see, this plan requires some knowledge of anthropology, psychology and ethics; and we also need some methodological strategies to do it well.

## **1. Some concepts to understand education in the virtues**

The education of the virtue is included in moral education as a way to enable students to improve as persons and to reach happiness. This relation between virtue and happiness comes from Aristotle. There is agreement in accepting education in values, but there is much less agreement over which values are needed in order to educate to young people: this is implied by the existence of different programs in school moral education. It is not possible here to evaluate some as better than others and it is not useful to define a single model of education, because there are no predetermined rules for the acquisition of the virtues. It is important to understand that virtue is not innate; thus MacIntyre (1981) notes that it is a consequence of education. There is no “method” to educate in virtues because the most important point is to know how each student is.

The first point is to clarify an important difference between virtues and values. The characteristics that each person is born with constitute their natural character and it is possible to improve this by the acquisition of virtues. Values, on the other hand, do not perfect character because they are simply the consequence of an evaluation accepted by people. The aim of moral education must be to improve human persons. On this point I take up a distinction proposed by Leonardo Polo (2003) that distinguishes between two types of growth: one of the “essence” and other of the “human person’s act of being”. He considers that duality is the principal characteristic of the human being, and explains growth by the relations that exist between the different dualities that constitute the human person. This particular way of explaining human growth is important in order to understand the existence of a double growth: one of the human essence, which consists in the improvement of the will and of the intelligence by the acquisition of virtues; and another of the human person’s act of being that Polo (2003) called the “optimization of the human person”. This second form of growth is more important than the acquisition of the virtues as a way of bettering the human person. This growth implies the necessity of establishing which the most important characteristic of the human person is. Here Polo (2003) indicates that the thing most proper to the human person is to love, and this is the way we can give sense to the moral growth achieved through the acquisition of virtues.

In the same way I also accept the concept of education as “helping the student” affirmed by Polo (2006). This is essential, because this particular conception of education does not permit us to identify moral education with indoctrination. Arthur (2003) defines indoctrination as “to teach something that is true or universally accepted, regardless of evidence to the contrary or in the absence of evidence at all” (p. 37). Haydon (2006) affirms that the development of virtues is not only a transmission of knowledge and values, and thus education at school has limited influence in their development. The educator educates in order to help student, respecting his freedom. To educate someone in what the good is, also indicating which actions are bad; is not indoctrination but rather part of the help given to the one who is being educated. It is important that the educator does not impose anything when he is educating. This indicates that education in the virtues does not consist in teaching a list of good acts that are needed in order to be good: rather, it is based in teaching students to learn how to do good because they are capable of discovering it. The transmission of knowledge about what the good is cannot be indoctrination, because knowing good does not directly imply doing it. The person does not do good acts only in reference to norm that he knows; he does them also because they are good in themselves. Ethics is a set of rules, but it is also about the good and virtues: it has three dimensions (Polo, 1997). Thus MacIntyre (1981) says that ethical behaviour is not only a matter of fulfilling norms. Moral

education consists in helping to discover the good, but sometimes indoctrination is confused with relativism, leading to a fear to teach what good is: for relativism affirms that good and truth do not exist, and so each one has his own good and nobody has the right to teach what good is.

Regarding who is the most useful person to teach how acquire virtues, there is a striking difference between Plato and Aristotle, according to Sherman (1989). She indicates that Plato considered that this duty was the responsibility of an expert in ethics; Aristotle, on the other hand, stated that the parents are those most responsible for ethical education. Children see their parents as models to emulate, and parents are also best people to attend to the specific needs and requirements of their children; they also have more authority to educate their children in the acquisition of virtues. On this point it is worth commenting that Aristotle considers that virtues are taught by emulation or *mimesis*, and for this he gives special importance to the character of the people responsible for teaching virtues. Steutel (2004) points out that the role of educator in this teaching is essential, even more than Aristotle would tend to say. The parents are essential in the moral education of their children for several reasons: they are the most interested in it, they probably are the ones who best know them and surely they have more authority over them. This implies the importance of educating some matters in the family because of their emotional nature: friendship, because is related to human relations; and intimacy and happiness, because are related with the personal act of being. Thus education in the family is essential during youth.

It is not easy to indicate which ethical virtues are the most appropriate in order to educate young people because there are several different suggestions. The proposal of Aristotle in the second book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is not adequate because, as Arthur (2003) indicates, “the system of Aristotelian virtue and character formation is not the same as modern virtue ethics or character education” (p, 36). Arthur affirms that Aristotle proposed virtues thinking how it was possible to be happy in the *polis*. Macintyre (2002) indicates that Aristotle’s system of virtues would be as “the code of a gentleman” in contemporary Greek society. He wanted to explain how the habitants of the *polis* could become better persons, because this was the way of achieving a perfect city. This relation between virtue and society is useful to understand that virtue must be achieved in order to help others and thus it gives sense to the acquisition of virtues.

Aristotle says that happiness is not possible without virtue and this relation is important for moral education. The double form of growth indicated—in essence and in personal act of being—means that in order to be happy is not sufficient to be virtuous. Virtue is the end of human nature, but not of human person. The good is the object of the will, but the end of the human person is not the good: it is happiness. Aristotle also indicates that happiness, as an end, is superior to virtue. This distinction between virtue and happiness as different ends—one of the human nature and another of the human person—has importance in the moral education of young people and thus it must be explained well. Happiness is the end of the human person, and so it must be related to the most proper act of the human person. Polo (2003) says that this act is love. Thus virtue is acquired in order to increase our love for others. Happiness does not only mean being virtuous: it is not enough to be happy; we also need to improve our love for others by of the growth of virtues. This means that the acquisition of virtues has to be useful to love more others; thus the most virtuous person can love others more and can be happier. This difference between virtue and happiness and its relation with the double form of growth involves important consequences in the education of youth.

Friendship is key virtue for educating young people in morals. On this point, Wadell (1989) indicates that “friendship is an appealing model for the moral life” (p. 7). Adolescence is a period to understand what friendship is and to appreciate the relevance of the relationship with

friends. Aristotle indicates that friend is the one who helps his friends to change when they are wrong (NE, 1155a 11-12). He distinguishes three things that are lovable: the useful, the pleasant and the good, and using this distinction he proposes three types of friendship: to “love each other for their utility” (NE, 1156a 10-11), to “love for the sake of pleasure” (NE, 1156a 13-14), and the third, the “friendship of men who are good, and alike in excellence; for these wish well alike to each other qua good, and they are good in themselves” (NE, 1156b 7-9). Aristotle affirms that the friend is “another me”, something that young people can understand, and it should be explained well to them. The meaning of this statement is that a friend is “another me” because I wish the good that exists in his virtues and I wish him to have the good that exists in my virtues. Friendship, therefore, needs reciprocity between friends, and it is an essential condition for it, because without it the three types of friendship proposed by Aristotle would not exist. But only the virtuous person sees the good that exists in his friend and wants it for himself. This is important because the virtuous person knows what the good is and how his friend has achieved it. The virtuous wishes it for himself, and wants it because he is ready to do whatever is necessary to obtain it. Finally, friendship is the nearest thing to intimacy (Sellés, 2008), and is the most useful virtue to understand what love is. This question needs an ontological explanation, but for the moment it is sufficient to accept that Aristotle considers friendship as a principal virtue.

Friendship is also important because it is needed for education in the virtues (Rodríguez, 2000). This explains why the good is wished for the friend, but the friend needs to know what good is for him and thus the virtuous person is the one who knows the good better. Therefore the best friend is the virtuous friend, according to Aristotle. On this point Rodríguez (2000) also indicates that the friend is the one who helps us in self-knowledge, making possible the most efficacious exercise of the virtue of prudence. The importance of friendship does not mean that it is necessary to begin education in the virtues with friendship, because this is only possible in a perfect way between the virtuous but children are not still virtuous, according to Aristotle. Castillo (1992) specifies two reasons to start education in friendship at secondary school: because to be a friend of another, one needs to know oneself better; and because one needs to fight in order to acquire the virtues. This shows the need to explain friendship to young people in a special way.

Humility is also an essential virtue for moral education in young people. However this virtue is not very important in Aristotle’s theory and so is not very present in moral education. In my opinion there are two interesting points about humility. Firstly, humility is necessary for young people know their character and accept it with its virtues and faults: without this acceptance, it is difficult to understand why it is necessary to acquire more virtues. Secondly, humility is useful to enable us to see the good that each one has and the good that he achieves in order to be given to the friend. Friendship lets us know what our friend needs, but it is not sufficient because to give him that he needs it is also necessary to be humble. Another virtue related to humility is forgiveness, and it is also important in education in friendship that a friend forgives his friend. A friend does not want that friendship to end, and so he always forgives his friend. It is useful to learn to forgive oneself and also forgive others and these acts characteristic of humble people. This implies that it is necessary to include these two virtues in moral education of young people although Aristotle did not explain them much. Nevertheless, to learn to be forgiven oneself and to forgive others are acts of humility that must be taught.

## **2. Education of virtues in young people**

To explain education in the virtues, we need to explain what the process for doing a good action is. This point is necessary to understand how we can educate in virtue while avoiding the accusation of indoctrination. Aristotle indicated that the character was the “first nature”, in reference to the set of natural virtues that the human person has when born. This is the base for the acquisition of virtues because these perfect the character, and for this reason he calls virtues the “second nature”. Intelligence and the will are different, both as human faculties and by their acts. The will tends to the good and is able to choose it, but it is incapable of knowing what is good because it is simply a tendency. This implies that it will need the help of the intelligence, which presents the good to the will. The virtue of prudence is also necessary to appreciate the good that exists in things and in the acts that it is to carry out. Prudence presents the good so that it may be chosen by the will, but before this the emotional nature intervenes with its feelings, passions and tendencies. This intervention of the emotions is essential in order to facilitate the accomplishment of the action of the will, but it can also obstruct it. This suggests that it is important to educate the emotional nature. It is useful that the emotions accompany the acts of prudence, thus facilitating the good acts of the will. Finally, the human person is the one who carries out the action through a personal decision. The human person is superior to the dominion of the will and to the act of the intelligence, because he is free to act as he considers adequate.

The analysis of this process is useful to establish the points in which the educator can intervene to help the student.

1. To improve the knowledge of the good and also what is the good for each one and for the others. Learning to distinguish between good and bad is knowledge, and can be taught. On this point, however, we need to be careful not to indoctrinate. The duty of educator is not to indicate what is good: it consists in helping the student to discover it—although, as has already been noted, it is not sufficient to recognize what is good in order to do it. Thus the act of striking a friend is not bad because it is established in an ethic code; it is not good in reality, because it does not observe the value of mutual respect. The key is in explaining why certain acts are good so that the student understands it. On this point it is important to help him to know when something is good for friends and for others as well. This knowledge is the object of the virtue of the prudence.
2. To educate one’s feelings: this is in relation to the education of one’s emotional nature. For this the education of two cardinal virtues is required: temperance educates the concupiscible appetite, and fortitude educates the irascible appetite. These virtues are essential in order to educate young people, because in this phase of their life they feel a strong tendency to do what they like. In this respect, it is important to educate people to withstand caprice because the capricious person thinks only of himself and thus it is more difficult for him to do good to others.
3. To strengthen the will to desire the good presented to it by the intelligence. The intelligence presents the good to the will by means of the virtue of prudence; nevertheless, sometimes the will does not choose it. On this point young people can be educated to be able to do good. This is related to the virtue of fortitude, because in order to evaluate the rightness of accomplishing the good presented by the intelligence, young people can consider the difficulty of doing it and sometimes decide not to accomplish it because they need to make a lot of effort; fortitude is the virtue that helps them to do the

good when difficult. Fortitude is also the virtue that helps to resist perseveringly in reaching the future good.

4. To help in the acquisition of virtues: the virtuous person has a stronger tendency to desire the good and it is easier for him to do it. This explains the relation between the virtues. The acquisition of virtues is the way to perfect human nature and growth in virtues indicates the facility to desire the good.

These points are related with the acquisition of virtue and they are part of the education of the human essence, but for the double growth indicated above we also need the education of the human person. This implies adding one more point: and this is the education to optimize the human person by loving others.

5. To help the human person always to realize the good: the decision to accomplish the good is that which is most proper to the human person. Everybody should understand that the choice of the good makes him better, because to be more virtuous makes it easier to help others more. This also helps each person to choose to do good to others, because in the same way it is the good that helps him. However young people desire the good for themselves but do not do it to others: thus it is necessary to educate them explaining adequately this point.

On this point it is appropriate to explain the meaning of life. The acquisition of virtue improves human nature, but what is the point of this growth? In answering this, it is important not to indoctrinate about what the sense of life is. Happiness is not an emotional state, nor a feeling, because it is the end of the human person. This implies that it is not part of the human essence, because the end of this is virtue and so cannot be happiness. Thus happiness is related to the most proper of the human person—which is, as has been indicated, love. The most virtuous person is the one who loves more. This involves a relation between the growth of the human essence and the end of the human person: happiness. In conclusion, this point is also important in the education of virtue and requires teaching some basic questions.

1. The knowledge of what the character is. Each human person needs to know how his character and if he wants to help adequately his friends, he should know the character of his friends. Aristotle says that the character is important for the choice of friends. On this point Zagal and Aguilar-Álvarez (1996) note the possession of more natural virtues implies that the human person is better and thus he can acquire the perfect virtues with less effort.
2. The knowledge of what intimacy is and what the “human person” is: the period of adolescence is interesting because it is the moment in which young people start to know what the intimacy is. During this period of his life the adolescent know what means “human person” and this knowledge involves understanding that he also possesses the capacity of having personal decision.
3. The knowledge of what the virtue is and what the good is: It is necessary the knowledge about what the virtue is and which are the consequences of choosing the good. On this point it is useful that teacher explains some systematizing of the virtues in order to describe which are the most important but it is necessary to explain how can be achieved the virtues. Lázaro (2007) says that to do good imply to know how doing good but it is

not sufficient to acquire virtue; it is also necessary doing it and this requires the exercise of the freedom. On this point Aristotle indicates that virtue is an “activity” and this means that virtue is acquired by repetition of acts.

4. The knowledge of the happiness like end of the human personal being: It is necessary to explain that the happiness is not feeling because it is love and this is the most important characteristic of the human personal being.
5. The difference between of “freedom of choice” and “personal freedom”: this distinction is indicated by Polo (2003) and it is necessary to understand that the “freedom of choice” is a characteristic of the will but the human person is superior to will. This superiority implies that human person has other freedom different to the “freedom choice” that Polo (2003) calls “personal freedom”. The human person is who deciding to do good but this decision requires knowing which is the end of each human act. This is the way to make sense to every human action and the human person is who must have the decision about which is the sense of life.

In conclusion, the education of virtue implies a relation between the educator and the student but this relation should always understand like a help. This involves that the educator must not strain to the student to do good, he should only propose to do it. The efficiency of the help of the educator implies that has an essential role and the best way of exercising this help is being friend of the student. This is related to the friendship Aristotle’s conception because he establishes that the relation between teacher and friend is friendship and between the parents and children as well. In the same way the educator is model to teach the virtue. It is preferable that the relation between the educator and the student is friendship. This relation of friendship helps to know the good that exist in the friend and it is the best way to understand how helps him. This explanation involves that to teach adequately the education of the virtue is important a methodology that facilitate to do it well.

### **3. Methodological aspects in the education of virtues.**

The authority of educator teaches virtues do not directly imply indoctrination but it is necessary to check which is the methodology used to avoid that it happens. There is no a method to teach virtues because it is not knowledge that it could be learning by some techniques. The education of the virtue implies the presentation of the good as something desirable and also as something that it should be acquired. Besides it is necessary to explain well that the improvement of the human nature by the acquisition of virtues contributing to bettering human person. The first step to educate in virtue is to recognize the good and after it is necessary that the good is accepted by the will and this acceptance is also necessary to do good. On this matter to explain virtue can be interesting the suggestion of some guidelines:

- a. To propose ethics models of good behavior: about this Friedman (1993) notes that “novels, biographies, and autobiographies may do as well, and sometimes, even better than friendship to promote our moral growth” (p. 201). It is important that students think about these characters.



- b. To read stories about good persons. On this point, Noddings (2002) proposes that students can learn what friendship is with the reading of different stories about relations between friends and examining what these characters give to the friendship.
- c. To resolution of ethics problem: this type of activities helps students to understand what the good is and how is possible to recognize it. The different situations proposed will also help to know which the relations between virtues are.
- d. Ethics dilemmas: Foot (2002) says that the ethics dilemmas are interesting in moral education but the problem consist in explaining how is possible to recognize the evidence of a good act and how to know that it is superior to evidence of a bad act.
- e. To distinguish values: it consists in presenting different behaviours of people to students and they have to find what virtues are present on these characters. Besides they should distinguish which are the good values. In this kind of activities the most important is that the students understand why these values are good, because this is the way to learn doing good in the next occasions.
- f. To do imagine which should be the behaviour of a good person: this activity can realize by the technique of role play. It is interesting because requires the student interprets a specific role in a particular situation to explain how should be the good behaviour.

It is important the education of the emotional nature and there is much written about this question. The most important in this education is that each student knows how his character is and understands which his feelings, emotions and tendencies are. In this question I only indicate one point, the necessity of explaining to the student is preferable that his emotional nature accompanies to virtue of the prudence to doing good.

#### **4. Some questions for designing training of moral education teachers.**

The duty of moral education involves that the teacher responsible for training young people has a particular formation. Lázaro (2007) notes that is necessary a specific formation because to be a teacher of humanity it is necessary to be a teacher with virtues. The most important thing, therefore, in moral education is taught by the most virtuous teacher because he will be able to help more students. But this question is difficult because it implies the necessity of knowing who is the most virtuous for it. Carr (2003) says that is difficult to determinate what standards are indispensable to judge someone as morally suitable for teaching. The second point underlines that the teacher chosen to do this instruction must previously acquire some knowledge about moral education because this will help them to realize it better. This means that there is a part of moral education related to knowledge and, thus, it is useful that the teachers know deeply some topics. Some of them are the following:

1. Knowledge of anthropology: it is essential know that is human being and how human relationships are, which the human person is, and what intimacy is.
2. Psychological understanding: it has been indicated that one of the knowledge that have to be transmitted in moral education is what character is and which the different types of character are. It is also necessary to educate the emotional nature and, thus, it is important to know it well and understand how it is possible to educate it adequately.
3. Knowledge of ethics: the teacher has to understand what virtue is, knows the different types of virtues and which are the most important and he also should distinguish how is possible to achieve each virtues. It is opportune that he knows the history of ethics because it is useful to teach virtue better.

These are the knowledge that the teacher should have, but it is appropriate that he has experience about other questions as:

1. Teacher needs to correct student when he is wrong, but to make this well implies to respect him and to listening to him. Teacher has to accept student with his characteristics because this is the best way to help him. These points are included in different virtues so it confirms the necessity of educating in moral education the most virtuous teachers.
2. To know how is possible to motivate student: on this point Lázaro (2007) affirms that the way of teaching virtue implies differences in how virtue is achieved. Feeling is present in acquisition of virtue and this can facilitate doing good act. It is important, therefore, to motivate student for doing good but for it the teacher requires an especial training. It is necessary having knowledge of what the motivation is and how it is possible to help young people using it.

Besides of this knowledge it might realize an analysis of which virtues should have the teacher to help more in moral education. This question is difficult and, thus, it will be indicated only some of them. Patience is an essential virtue because the acquisition of virtue is achieved with repetition of acts and, thus, it is preferable that teacher is patience. Optimism is also necessary to correct student being positive and perseverance to help him knowing that is possible to acquire virtue. On this point there is an important but difficult question at the same time. Virtue is achieved by repetition of acts and for it is a stable habit, as said Aristotle, but it is not simple to determine when someone has a virtue or when he is virtuous. It is not possible exact quantitative measurements to determinate how many acts are necessary realizing to achieve one virtue. On this point, the utilization of indicators is interesting for education of virtue like way but not like end because being virtuous does not consist in accomplishing acts expressed by rules. Jiménez and Sanz (2015) do a study to implement a program of the evaluation of four habits and values at secondary school. They propose rubrics like indicators to measure the achievement. These rubrics describe "different levels of development of each one of the aspects included in every indicator" (p, 86).

The questions indicated might complete a program to help teachers responsible of teaching in moral education in their duty. But as this education is a practical knowledge probably is more effective to choose the most virtuous teacher to teach it. In some way it is that Aristotle proposes.

## **5. Conclusion:**

The moral education is an important and not simple question in training of young people. It has been realized an analysis of how can be the help of the teacher to student on this point. One of the previous questions explained is the difference between the growth of the “human essence” and the “human person”. The first consists in improving the human nature by virtues and the second consist in being happy. On his point it has been indicated that happiness is love. This implies that the moral education of the virtues should focus on principally in teaching how the human person can love others. Besides it has been explained that the acquisition of the virtues is the best way to love more others. The virtuous person can love more others because he has more virtues that to help them.

This education needs the intervention of the teachers to help students to be better, acquiring well the virtues, but avoiding the indoctrination. I have also distinguished some points that could be important in this education from the analysis of how the good action is realized. Therefore, it concludes that help of the teacher is possible in the education of the intelligence and of the will and of the emotional nature. This help indicates the priority of educating in the virtue of the prudence, the temperance and the fortitude. On this point, according to Aristotle, it has been indicated the importance of the virtue of friendship. But it adds the necessity of educating humility and to learn to forgive oneself and others.

Respect to the methodology for moral education have been showed some activities that can contribute to the education of the virtue. It is not a deep analysis but I have tried to insist that the methodology to teach moral education is also important. Finally, it presents some guidelines that could be interesting for designing a plan of formation of the teacher responsible for moral education at school. Nevertheless, on this point the essential is to choose the most virtuous teacher to realize this duty because this is Aristotle says in his ethics.

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