

## **Unit G 20: Ethics education**

### **1. Summary**

This text is about two things: on the one hand, the question of the meaning and role of ethical education, and on the other hand, the most common developmental models of moral judgment in children and the meaning of ethics in adult education. The ethical content of education is addressed to other texts.

### **2. Ethics and conceptions of life**

Matthias Beck (2015:55) has posited that happiness cannot be made, but that it occurs "if one lives right and follows the good spirit."

The great educator Pestalozzi saw man as the "chief work of himself" (Mynarek 2014:36). And in Kant's sense, man can be seen as what nature makes of him, and as what man himself makes of himself (cf. Mynarek 2014:36/37).

And Albert Einstein (1986:73) has paraphrased the task of education as follows: "In what does the function of education and school consist? Both are to help the young person to grow up in such a spirit that the fundamental principles are as natural to him as the air he breathes. This can only come to him through education" (Einstein 1986:73).

Mynarek (2014:60) has argued that one can "naturally demand or expect from every human being the realization of ethical values, the fulfillment of ethical norms and duties."

However, every child must receive an ethical education (cf. Dalai Lama 2011:117): "Today, however, it is hardly realistic to assume that children automatically receive an ethical education. Religion no longer has its former influence in society, and firm values within the family, which were once mostly rooted in religious faith and reinforced by a strong sense of community, have also been eroded, often by materialistic values and economic pressures" (Dalai Lama 2011:117). Therefore, according to the Dalai Lama (2011:117), children no longer

automatically receive knowledge of inner values. The Dalai Lama (2011:117) concluded that "the responsibility of schools for spiritual and ethical education has increased considerably."

The humanist Julian Huxley (1964:116) defined education as follows: Education as a social process is for Huxley "a human organ in society whose basic function is to ensure the continuity and further progress of the evolutionary process on earth through the transmission and transformation of tradition" (Huxley 1964:116/117, translation from English by CJ).

As early as the 1960s, Julian Huxley (1964:122) wrote: "Most educational systems are highly resistant to change because they are controlled by dogmatic religious organizations, or because they are too closely tied to the established social order, or simply as a result of inherent conservatism. Today we need radical systemic change; and, of course, the new system itself must be evolutionary, not change-resistant but change-promoting. It must change as well as mediate" (Huxley 1964:122; translation from English by CJ). These prophetic words hold true to this day, except that in the meantime an increased business orientation and purely economic efficiency thinking has further reinforced the conservatism of the education system - and the transformational capacity of the education system has been largely lost. This is even more true for ethical education - if it has not already been completely sacrificed to the idol of economic benefit.

According to the Dalai Lama (2011:120), good teachers - in addition to patience, enthusiasm, dynamism, the ability to carry along and to convey material vividly and clearly - need three qualities: Scientific excellence, moral integrity, and a friendly nature. On the ethical level, in the eyes of Buddhist philosophers, every person needs three things: "An ethic of restraint - consciously avoiding causing actual or potential harm to others; an ethic of virtue - actively cultivating and developing our positive behavior and inner values; and an ethic of altruism - honestly and selflessly devoting our lives to the welfare of others" (Dalai Lama 2011:127). Possible ways or methods to do this may include: Conscientiousness, mindfulness, and inward-looking awareness (cf. Dalai Lama 2011:132).

All of this means that there needs to be a much stronger emphasis on ethical education in the training of teachers and those who teach. In particular, questions of the image of man and also of fundamental value attitudes must be addressed much more strongly and fundamentally. Inclusion, resilience research, intercultural pedagogy or violence prevention are only meaningful and possible at all if it is clear on what basis and with what intention they take place. It is not enough to simply pose these topics or concerns as pedagogical postulates.

In a world of growing heterogeneity, every teacher is faced with the problem that he or she is supposed to homogenize through performance, but has no or only limited means to do so, starting with human resources, the necessary time, and - last but not least - the necessary possibilities for differentiation in the classroom.

In this context, the be-all and end-all of a successful performance-based education system is clarity about what tasks the education system is supposed to take on: Is it about the most efficient selection possible, should students only be made fit for their later professions, should children simply learn a catalog of basic skills - such as reading and writing - or should the education system impart ethical values and normative basic attitudes such as a sense of responsibility, empathy and solidarity toward all disadvantaged people? What ideas about society and the economy should the education system pass on, and to what extent can and should the education system facilitate effective collective learning as a kind of collective memory of the last 500 years of human history? Today, the justified question arises whether the current education system is at all capable of taking on such tasks. The tendency to run the education system ever more strongly and in part exclusively according to business management mechanisms, and to subject education only as one among many and as a completely normal service also to the corresponding international trade agreements such as the WTO, leads to education - and especially top education - becoming more and more a purchasable commodity that fewer and fewer people can afford.

That is why today - more than ever - there is a need for a global discourse on the basis on which education should take place, what its central goals and content should be, and which areas of education should not be commercialized - or, to put it another way, which aspects

of education should not be regulated by an education market, however organized, according to the principle of supply and demand. This is not about censorship of educational content, but about ensuring that all people have access to education and the ability to learn from human history. Education must under no circumstances be reduced to training(s), otherwise it will lose its central mission and ultimately its emancipative justification.

## **2.1 Stages of ethical and moral development in children**

Ćurko et al. (2015:6) have rightly pointed out that "ethics ... is the foundation of our relationship with ourselves and the way around us." The goal and function of ethics was - and still is - "the preservation of the human being as a person, of human dignity, and of the conditions for a good life" (Ćurko et al. 2015:6). Ethics should also promote justice, solidarity, compassion and cooperation. Rightly, Ćurko et al. (2015:6) call for an integrative approach given the comprehensive nature of ethical reflection and awareness.

Two classical approaches are central to the education and upbringing of children and adolescents: on the one hand, Piaget's theory of moral development and, on the other, Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral judgment.

According to Piaget, children between the ages of five and ten have fixed ideas about universally valid and unchanging rules, which Piaget calls "moral realism" (cf. Ćurko et al. 2015:11). Children of this age follow these rules to avoid negative sanctions (punishments) or other negative consequences.

From about age 10, children learn to take the perspective of others, they see the rules less black and white and more as community-centered and given by it - but also relativized. Piaget calls this stage "morality of cooperation" (cf. Ćurko et al. 2015:11). In addition, children - always according to Piaget - now begin to judge actions according to the intention of those acting. A sense of "fairness" emerges in the sense of "ideal reciprocity" (Ćurko et al. 2015:11).

Piaget's ideas strongly influenced Kohlberg's research.

The following diagram shows how Lawrence Kohlberg saw the development of moral judgment in children, adolescents, and adults:

<b>Preconventional level</b>  <i>Most children up to nine years old</i>	Stage 1: Obedience and punishment	Reasoning in terms of authority and power, reward and punishment. Rules are not broken because of the punishment that follows.
	Stage 2: Individualism and reciprocity	Recognition that there is not one "right" way, but different perspectives. Orientation to own needs, but sense of justice based on reciprocity.
<b>Conventional level</b>  <i>Most adolescents and adults</i>	Stage 3: Good interpersonal relations	Norms and authority are internalized. Interpersonal relationships play a crucial role, so moral judgments and actions are evaluated according to whether they receive the approval of others.
	Level 4: Maintenance of social order	Increasing awareness of social order, which is why moral judgments mean conformity with laws.
<b>Post-conventional level</b>  <i>10-15% of adults, not under mid-30s</i>	Level 5: Social contract and personal rights	Awareness that rules and laws can serve the good of the majority, even if they do not always correspond to the interests of an individual. However, there may be exceptional situations in which other principles (e.g., preservation of life) are more important than following rules.
	Level 6: Universal principles	Developing and following one's own moral principles (such as justice, equal dignity, human rights). These principles apply to all people, but do not necessarily have to be in accordance with the law.

Kohlberg's stages of moral consciousness. Source: Ćurko et al. 2015:12.

One of the criticisms of this model was that it did not include gender aspects. Only boys were surveyed by Kohlberg, but no girls. Later studies showed that boys often reached level 4, while girls were often at level 3 (cf. Ćurko et al. 2015:11). Another problem is the poor interculturality of the model - intercultural differences were often neglected, although undoubtedly present.

Another, third model is Erikson's stage model of psychosocial development:

Level	Age	Crisis	Virtue	Description
1	0-1	Trust vs. mistrust	Hope, confidence	Babies learn (or not) to be optimistic and trust their parents to meet the child's basic needs
2	2-3	Autonomy vs. shame and doubt	Will, Determination	When toddlers are encouraged to do so, they begin to develop independence and confidence in their abilities
3	4-6	Initiative vs. guilt	Purpose, Courage	By kindergarten age, children typically gain further independence and begin to show initiative
4	7-12	Zeal vs. inferiority	Competence	By learning new things, children continue to develop their self-confidence. However, they need encouragement and praise to do so.
5	13-19	Ego-identity vs. identity diffusion	Loyalty	Adolescents care what others think about them and begin to form their own identity by experimenting with who they are.

Source: Ćurko et al. 2015:13.

Without further discussing the advantages and disadvantages of these models of moral development, one thing is clear: There is a biographical development of ethics and morality. In all likelihood, this development does not cease with the onset of adulthood.

## 2.2 Ethics in Adult Education

It may seem surprising that the role of ethics in adult education is discussed here. After all, there are clear adult education standards, such as voluntariness, person-centered methodology, and empathy/respect for others.

But the problem of ethics in adult education goes much deeper than just didactics or down to the relational level.

First of all, it is hardly possible to sensitize children and young people to the topic of ethics if the adults themselves do not behave according to ethical principles. In addition, one's own ethical attitude and understanding of ethics change again and again in the course of one's life. In this sense, we are all "ethical learners." This means that we have to question and

reflect on our own ethics and our ethical-moral convictions again and again: Are they (still?) correct, do we adhere to them, do we need new ethical rules?

In addition, due to the increasing penetration of the economy and society by short-term business criteria such as utilitarian thinking, efficiency, (direct) cost-benefit considerations, as well as self-interest and particular interests, social-ethical solidarity and responsibility going beyond immediate individual interests are increasingly marginalized or even disappear.

Therefore, every kind of professional further education and personality development and its transfer to professional and private everyday life should always be checked for the communal ethical consequences - ideally within the framework of the respective further education itself. Providers of continuing education should regularly check their offers for ethical implications or for their reflection, if possible within the framework of systematic quality management.

In principle, every continuing education should also increase and address the ethical self-competence of the participants.

### **3. Control Questions**

1. According to Einstein, what is the task of education and school?
2. According to the Dalai Lama, why do many children today no longer receive an ethical education?
3. How does Huxley see education?
4. According to the Dalai Lama, what are the characteristics of a good teacher?
5. What are the questions of the education system today?
6. According to Kohlberg, how does morality develop in children?
7. Name the five stages of psychosocial development according to Erikson.
8. What ethical requirements should adult education fulfill?

#### 4. Links

##### **Ethische Bildung und Erziehung**

<https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/wirelex/das-wissenschaftlich-religionspaedagogische-lexikon/lexikon/sachwort/anzeigen/details/ethische-bildung-und-erziehung/ch/9fc406f18478d7f00e96ced13a533873/>

##### **Ethische Bildung durch Wertreflexionskompetenz. Überlegungen zur Werteerziehung Von Sabine Anselm**

<http://fd.phwa.ch/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Werteerziehung-Anselm.pdf>

##### **zebis – Zentrum für ethische Bildung in den Streitkräften**

<http://www.zebis.eu/home/>

**Und dort Text: Ethische Bildung, Information und Diskurs**

#### 5. Cited literature and further reading

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2013<sup>2</sup>: Ethik des Lebens. Grundlagen und neue Herausforderungen. Zweite, aktualisierte Auflage. Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder.