

THE MORAL ROLE OF TEACHERS REVISITED

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ABSTRACT

The development of values, norms and citizenship has been high on the political and education agendas again in the recent past. It is currently expected that education contribute to the necessary “restoration” of values and norms in society by attending to moral education and creating a good pedagogical school climate. During the nineties, more and more attention has been paid to the moral dimensions of teaching and the moral role of the teacher.

At the beginning of the renewed debate on the pedagogical assignment of education, the deeper questions of whether or not the pedagogical assignment actually belongs to the task of the teacher and whether or not the pedagogical assignment may simply detract attention from the cognitive aspects of the teacher’s task were raised. In my paper I will show how elementary and high school teachers think about that and the various aspects of their pedagogical and moral professionalism. A good insight into these aspects is important with regard to curriculum development, teacher training and educational practice. Empirically, relatively little is known about this. In the paper, the following questions will be considered: What does the current pedagogical assignment mean for the opinions and task performance of teachers? How do they conceive their moral role? What are the motives of teachers to pay attention to the pedagogical assignment? Do they make a difference between the instructional and the moral-pedagogical dimensions of their professionalism? What opinions do the teachers themselves hold with regard to the development or norms and values among students?

In several research projects I have probed teachers’ understanding of themselves as moral agents. We will report the results of questionnaire studies of primary (N=133) and secondary schoolteachers (n=452) and the results of qualitative in-depth interview studies by both kind of teachers as well. The teachers (N=15) interviewed were selected from the questionnaire respondents. In these studies I have tried to reveal teachers’ opinions about teaching as a moral enterprise. I have also tried to understand the perceptions of their actual teaching experiences. Their decisions and behaviors as moral educators. Teachers see the fulfillment of their moral task as a prerequisite for handling the cognitive tasks. In the quantitative studies two important motives for paying attention to moral norms and values are mentioned: (1) a ‘moral pedagogy motive’ directed at fostering the personal identity of the students, and (2) a ‘socio-political motive’ which is related to the discussion of the perceived moral decline of the nation. Many teachers consider the establishment of a solid pedagogical foundation to be a prerequisite for good teaching. The teacher serves an exemplary function and can, as such, be construed as a representative of moral values. In addition, the promotion of a moral climate within the institution and both the active and explicit promotion of value development are part of the professionalism of the teacher. Such moral and pedagogical professionalism is needed to realize the broadly formative task of education in the sense of personal and community development.