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## **Professional Deontology for Future Teachers**

### **The Philosophical Basis of *Professional Deontology***

In the following text, we proceed to the presentation of educational provision in terms of the personal, social and professional development of Pre-Service Teacher students that is provided in the discipline of *Professional Deontology*, which takes place in the 4<sup>th</sup> year of their training courses at ESEC.

The main idea supporting our educational work is the acceptance as a starting point that education presupposes an axiological orientation, which structures the whole practice tending to implement the project that it contains and assumes. Education is not neutral and the intention to present it as such carries in itself an ideology, pursuing specific objectives to be reached by their dissimulation (Freire, 1974, 2003). Educational agents – teachers, in particular, and regardless of the schooling level in which they are active – are a very special kind of conveyers of values and their personal ethical development ought to be considered as a central concern of teacher training programmes. As such, those agents have a particularly relevant impact on the development of their students and of the community of which they are part, while they carry out their life project development, in which professional training and career plays a very special and significant role in contemporary society. The teaching profession poses particularly relevant ethical and deontological demands concerning the personal and professional development of its agents. Therefore, the person of the teacher should be the direct object of the Training Practice to a considerable extent, both in Pre-Service and in In-Service Training. Authors like Gusdorf (1970), Reboul (1982), Torres (2000) and Veiga (2005) insist on the role of the person of the teacher as an irreplaceable factor in pedagogical relationships and encounters.

The philosophy of education underlying the Portuguese Education Act sees education as a remarkably significant phenomenon in terms of personal development objectives.<sup>1</sup> To educate is much more than developing, acquiring abilities or competencies, socializing and – surely – much more than teaching or merely conveying information (Reboul 1982). Although implying all these aspects, education is still – and

<sup>1</sup> LBSE (1986/1997). In it we are able to see a major concern about the personal and social development of the students. A simple quantitative analysis shows us that 50% of the general objectives of the Portuguese Educational System correspond to this issue, while the specific objectives for Basic School include 36% of references and in Secondary School the number is of 21% (Comissão de Reforma do Sistema Educativo, 1988: 119). The Teacher's personal and social formation is also aimed at art. 30<sup>th</sup>, n° 1, a). The rest of the legislation embodies this perspective.

above all – a global and integrated project of forming the personality of the students, as well as a project for the development of their communities (Freire 1974).

Having this in mind, the programme proposed for the Curricular Unit of *Professional Deontology*, included in the 4<sup>th</sup> year of the Pre-Service Teacher Training courses (Pre-School and Basic Education) as an optional discipline, is organised on the basis of the following presuppositions.

Education is seen as an intrinsically social phenomenon, based on a relational structure, in which individuals, groups and communities develop actions of reciprocal influence. This social structure is situated in two dimensions, one ontological (Heidegger 1994) or metaphysical (Levinas 1965, 1974), the other phenomenal. Societies lie on the ontological structure that constitutes human being and in which an inter-subjective causality works (Nédoncelle 1963, 1974, 1977). From these educational actions follow consequences that are able to determine the specificity and the complexity of the nature both of its agents and its communities. That's why it is considered that education constitutes not only an important factor in students' development (and, correlatively, teachers'), but also a determinant feature of the development of the community.

Education is also defined as a phenomenon of modeling, for the interactive dimension of its actions contribute decisively to the configuration of its own essence. Seen as a self-regulated system, education produces results that, by its reintegration in the system, modify it, thus giving birth to dynamics that confer on education a character of permanent openness and renewal. Consequently, education may be addressed as a fundamental way of emphasizing and promoting the politics of change; i.e. innovative and personal, economic, social and cultural – but not in a technocratic manner (Freire 1974).

With the development of new social configurations, dynamics and values, the promotion of reforms and revision of educational systems takes place, in a permanent and continuous process. These changes, generally, have two goals. One is to bring up-to-date the educational propositions of institutions in which the birth of new necessities occurs. But they seek also – and above all – to generate within the very bosom of the educational system forces that are able to raise new values and dynamics to be introduced in society. Thus, social and individual change takes place from the convergence of the definition of new realms of possibilities to be, the desire of individuals to reach them and their social praxis.

A strong professional conscience and its correlative deontology should assume the previous aspects as an essential dimension that Teacher Training should include. Teachers should be seen, in this perspective, as particularly relevant agents of social transformation through the educational relationship in which they exist. Assuming this, a Curricular Unit of *Professional Deontology* (Reis I.; Ramos F., 2004) in the Curriculum of Pre-Service Teacher Training Courses (Pre-School and Basic Education) was included in our educational offer in order to achieve the relevant training quality of our students as far as their personal and professional development is concerned. Also pertinent is the use of teaching and learning methodologies that promote not only an integration of the theoretical contents of the sciences of education, but also a mutual integration of theoretical preparation and pedagogical practice, both of them continuously linked to a process of reflection upon the professional life project of the students.

Entering the teaching profession poses its future actors particularly relevant ethical and deontological challenges concerning their personal and professional development. As such, an essential reflection about the training of teachers is required. Its object should be the conscience of professional identity, as well as its transposition into a Deontological Code (explicit in the official normative documentation regulating the profession in our country) and to a Personal, Professional and Civil Ethics (which is frequently non-thematised) (Braga 2001; Cunha 1996; Estrela 1991; Monteiro 2004; Reis 2001).

To give future teachers categories and means of action in this field is a transversal demand of our Pre-Service Teacher Training Courses. This is also focused by the articulation of the Curricular Unit of *Personal and Social Development* (Reis I.; Ramos F., 2004a), which is administered in the 1<sup>st</sup> year of these courses. The pursuing of such objectives has played an important role in our educational offer for many years. It has been revealing its pertinence, if we consider the increasingly relevant attention that these objectives deserve from other institutions in other kinds of courses (v. g., Harvard University – Faculty of Arts and Sciences 2004: 22; Buckeridge & Grünwald 2003). In a recent study intending to establish strategic guidelines for the development of ESEC, we have also met the necessity felt by our potential public for ethical formation (ESEC 2005).

The positive effects of our use of the Non-Formal Education approach have been shown in our previous research and studies. As a matter of fact, the results of the trainees' evaluation of the training administered in this area allows us to conclude that it is pertinent and necessary. One of these pedagogical experiences is shown.

### Programme of the Curricular Unit/Development of the Course

During one semester, with 45 hours of training in the classroom and an estimated further 45 hours of independent work by the students, the Curricular Unit of *Professional Deontology* is aimed at achieving the following objectives.

The first is to allow the students the opportunity to reflect on their personal experience as students, both in Basic and Secondary School and in Higher Education. Thus, the discipline is supposed to give birth to a process of personal and professional growth. The ideal conditions to achieve this would be to turn the discipline into a one school-year module, but the present legal definition does not allow it.

The students are also supposed to evaluate their training as Pre-Service Teacher Trainees. The situation of the discipline in their last year of training gives them an opportunity to look back on their previous learning experience and reflect upon their expectations and projects, doubts and certainties, abilities and motivations, hopes and fears. By creating such conditions, students are also given the space and time for sharing experiences. This way, the frequent personal and professional problems that often arise at the beginning of their career (Simões C.M.; Santos M.L.; Gonçalves J.A.; Simões H.R., 1997: 255; Braga 2001: 57–73; Serrazina & Oliveira 2001) may be avoided or at least diminished in their effects. Particularly important to this action is the fact that our training courses set the students in professional contexts from

the beginning of their enrollment: by doing this, they have a deeper awareness and experience of what the profession and its concrete conditions are.

Another objective is to recognise the importance that personal and social development has in the Portuguese Education Act, both in relation to teachers as well as to the students, as we have referred to previously. To make this explicit, and to become aware of their projects as a Person, a Citizen and a Professional, is another important objective we try to achieve with the discipline.

The core value of the concepts of *Citizenship*, *Democracy*, *Duties*, *Rights* and *Human Rights* as an ethical founding platform for contemporary educational praxis is also intended.

Finally, the development of competences in interpersonal relationships in different contexts is also an objective to be reached.

The Programme deals with the following items and subjects:

- a) Basic notions of *Deontology*, *Ethics*, *Moral*, *Profession*, *Deontological Code*; the specificity of a Deontology of the Teaching Profession; School as a significant space and time for the construction of an ethical and social project;
- b) Main documents that regulate the duties and rights of teachers in the Portuguese education system or that allow their definition and explication;
- c) Being a Teacher and the Nature and Meaning of Education and Educating – for a critical and reflective praxis; Teaching Profession and Citizenship – Duties and Rights of the Teacher/Educator-Citizen; Professional Ethics and/or an Ethical Profession.

The methodology presupposes the establishment of links with the previous training of the students, in other curricular units of the course as well as in pedagogical practice. Therefore, the classes are run both by the professor responsible and the students, with the use of exposition and dialogue (vertical and horizontal), the simulation of group dynamic situations, group work/cooperative and meaningful learning, development of projects, production of research papers and a reflective portfolio about their personal and professional development.

The use of this methodology is based on a training strategy that *combines intellectual* and *practical* strategies (Estrela, 1991). The students deal with theoretical notions and the contents of Ethics, Human Rights and Philosophy of Education, and apply them reflectively to the documents/texts/works they produce. This task is always guided by the deontological focusing of the issues and subjects that are dealt with. Discussions and reflection are also driven by philosophical texts in which the essence of being a teacher is the major theme.

This strategy is mainly justified by the intention of providing the students with a critical view of educational and pedagogical issues.

No less important, the absence of a specific professional order and a consequent Deontological Code in the Portuguese Education and Labour System advises choosing an approach to the legal regulatory texts which is as critical as possible. With this we aim at developing as much as possible the students' autonomous thinking, allowing them the opportunity to get from those texts their spirit and to be able to transfer and apply their content to new situations and circumstances. More than acquiring a "recitative" knowledge of these legal documents, they are expected to produce a critical, well-based and justified reasoning susceptible of guiding their practical choices and courses of action and even to create new solutions and ways of solving practical deontological issues.

Besides participation in the classes, the students are expected to produce two different works.

One, in groups or individually according to their own choice, is oriented to be presented in a session. It is supposed to produce a group dynamic whose issues are dealt with in whatever manner the students think will be able to produce the most convenient activity so their fellow students can attain the programme's objectives. Each work produced and performed by the students was driven by their own interest in the subject, that is to say that they choose to investigate and work with what was or has become an issue for reflection for them. As such, they have to make explicit their own questions regarding them and the profession, to investigate its aspects and bring them into the classroom. The presentation strategies and activities are also chosen by them and have to be dynamic, learner-centered and use meaningful and cooperative learning. The Non-Formal Education approach and its methodologies of promoting values and personal development are given a relevant place in this curricular unit.

The other work, mandatorily an individual one, consists of a reflective portfolio, in which their student experience and teacher training, seen from the deontological perspective, is the major concern. Its structure is as follows:

- Chapter 1: Characterisation of my whole professionalising and academic training.
- Chapter 2: Expectations towards my training – What has been achieved or not, difficulties found,
- Chapter 3: My personal and social development in Higher Education – Values I brought, I've achieved, I've set apart,
- Chapter 4: My experience as a Basic and Secondary Student – Experiences, values,
- Chapter 5: My projects as a Person, a Citizen, a Professional.
- Chapter 6: Works produced in the Curricular Unit of *Professional Deontology*.
- Chapter 7: My path in *Professional Deontology*.

The Unit was launched in the previous semester of this school year. 23 students enrolled the unit and finished it with proficiency; 22 were female and 1 male.

### Evaluation of the training by the students

To evaluate the results of the course in terms of the personal and professional development perceived/acknowledged by the students, we chose to collect material from the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of the portfolio – “My path in *Professional Deontology*” –, which furnished the *corpus* that was submitted to Content Analysis. Nevertheless, some pertinent data for this purpose may be collected from other parts of the portfolio, since they have a direct correlation to that chapter. The collected data were evaluated from a qualitative perspective (Vala 2003).

The evaluation objectives and the respective categories of analysis were defined *a priori*, and then applied to the *corpus*. The categories respect the demands of fidelity, exhaustivity and exclusivity in order to be internally valid (*id.*, *ib.*).

The objectives of the analysis were the following:

a) To detach the students' perception/acknowledgement of their personal change;

b) To detach the revelation of meaning (personally/professionally) perceived/acknowledged by the students.

They are correlated with these two categories of analysis:

a) Category 1 – *Personal change*. Within the range of this category are included data concerning aspects correspondent to a perception/knowledge of some change of the students' person due to the work done during the semester of *Professional Deontology*.

b) Category 2 – *Meaning revelation* (personal/professional). Under this category we gather those elements susceptible to the revelation that the sense of what it is to be and work as a teacher – considered simultaneously as the Person and the Professional – were enlightened by the learning process that took place in *Professional Deontology*.

Once we have analysed the material gathered in these two categories of analysis, we may conclude the following.<sup>2</sup>

In a brief overview of the whole of the material produced within the context of the portfolios, we are entitled to say that the training reached very satisfactory results according to the self-perception of the trainees. They were faced with an experience that surprised them positively. A proposal of turning the discipline into one that lasts for a whole school-year was made by many of them, recognising the importance of time in the growing process of the person and the future professional. This is an experience that we have had for many years in the frame of the Curricular Unit of *Personal and Social Development*, also administered in our institution, and which has a whole school-year for its functioning. For the moment, this change is not possible for *Professional Deontology*, but it will be taken into consideration in future curricular changes.

More specifically, looking at and taking into account the material gathered within the range of the Content Analysis' categories, some conclusions may be drawn as follows.

Given the nature of the discipline's programme, we expected to have more registration units under Category 2 than Category 1. This was what happened. Category 1 registers 21 entries, while Category 2 shows 38 entries. This may be interpreted as meaning that the training was perceived as having some effect on personal change, but the most considerable effects were felt in the understanding of the meaning of the profession the students are about to enter, after their long training (between 3 and 3 and a half years).

If we pass on to the consideration of the specific categories' entries, the following conclusions are possible.

The first category's registration units show us some relevant issues such as the recognition of a contribution of *Personal Deontology* to:

– Self-knowledge, both in terms of process<sup>3</sup> and products, like knowledge<sup>4</sup> and competencies<sup>5</sup>;

<sup>2</sup> The material supplied by the portfolio is immensely rich and it would provide many other possibilities for study and training. We will come back to it on other occasions.

<sup>3</sup> Entries 1, 3, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17.

<sup>4</sup> Entries 7, 19, 20.

<sup>5</sup> Entries 2, 4, 19, 21.

- A conversion in the way things are seen<sup>6</sup>;
  - The development of the critical spirit<sup>7</sup>.
- As to the second category, we may detach the recognition of:
- The importance of the development of the Teachers' person to the profession<sup>8</sup>;
  - The relevance of the discipline for the profession<sup>9</sup>;
  - The structuring of their conceptions of the profession<sup>10</sup>;
  - The role of the teacher in the students' personal development<sup>11</sup>.

### (Not) To conclude

It seems to us that this experiment allows the extraction/consolidation of a fundamental idea which is able to give education a critical practical sense. Through the development of the programme of *Professional Deontology* and its results, the need to stress the importance of the person of the teachers and its personal development has become clearer to us. Once this development is a never-ending process, it has to be combined with their professional development, which may be attained by the introduction of a critical deontology. Within this framework, Non-Formal Education processes are to be implemented and promoted.

This is also a way of giving education, through its professionals, the ability to develop a critical reflective practice, enabling it to produce the necessary and required changing of reality, without which it loses its fundamental sense. As a matter of fact, if education was to be seen just as a means of adapting people to the existing reality, this would only allow us to be the prey of reductive, dominant neo-liberal and technocratic ideology. We would be totally unable to become conscious of its dominance and unable to say the word capable of overcoming it and liberating people (Freire, 1974). For this process, an inter-subjective founding of education provides the necessary philosophical basis (*id.*).

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<sup>6</sup> Entries 5, 14, 16, 18.

<sup>7</sup> Entries 2, 10.

<sup>8</sup> Entries 1, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 19, 21, 22, 27, 28, 30, 31.

<sup>9</sup> Entries 3, 4, 8, 9, 12, 18, 23, 26, 32, 34, 35, 38.

<sup>10</sup> Entries 5, 14, 20, 24, 25, 33.

<sup>11</sup> Entries 2, 17, 29, 36, 37.

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