A COMPARISON OF PARADIGMS OF ETHICAL LEARNING

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Abstract
In the summer term 2002 we carried out a survey based on relevant preliminary studies concerning the effect of two different paradigms of ethical learning in classes for religious education at teacher training colleges (paradigm 1: Dilemma-discussions: "learning by dealing with contradictions"; paradigm 2: hermeneutical tuition). This article outlines the most important results of this intervention-study.

Due to the fact that neither ethical learning nor morals themselves occur in "vacuous" i.e. context-free space (cf. the compilation by Edelstein & Nunner-Winkler 2000), we throw some light on the context in which ethical learning takes place within the framework of reflection in religious education (cf. Langer 1995) classes (see chapter 1). Not least of all, within ethical learning, the definition of the objectives and the search for a way there depends on establishing this context (chapter 2). In part three the two paradigms are examined empirically by assigning them to experimental and control groups followed by the conclusion (chapter four).

1. ESTABLISHING THE CONTEXT

1.1. Pluralism as a Pedagogical Task

Nipkow (1998) puts moral-pedagogy programmatically into the context of pluralism, without declaring it an end in itself (cf. 284). The pluralistic Gordian Knot can’t simply be cut to achieve the frequently desired unambiguity by declaring a certain paradigm a universal maxim nor by combining them in a harmonious way into a comprehensive system. The contentious positions became polarized: On the one hand there would be an inestimable variety of culture specific moral behaviour patterns. According to that there would neither be a timeless morality that spans all cultures nor a sole universal valid form of ethics. On the other hand there are attempts to restrict pluralism itself by taking an objectively given singular morality as a basis. A holism of that kind tends towards a certain form of dogmatism which obviously religions and religious systems of values could fall prey to (cf. Nipkow 2001a). What matters is that instead of dogmatizing, emphasis has to be put on reasoning in the process of communication.
To meet the spectre of relativism in the face of plurality and increasing pluralisation of society, the call for universality that is compatible with pluralism is becoming audible here and there (for possible reactions cf. Nipkow 1994). A society that is merely characterized by pluralism is not capable of surviving. Universal obligations are necessary (fundamental and human rights). A relative pluralism within fundamental common ground remains desirable (cf. Höffe 1994). Usually European curricula solved the problem concerning binding values with reference to the existence of such fundamental rights (cf. Göllner 2002; cf. also Bucher 2001, 293-295). Although tolerance, dialogue and discourse are indispensable in a world of undeceivable pluralism this can scarcely be the whole answer to this problematic nature of this subject. It is necessary to develop a “negative universality” where people are mindful of somebody else’s suffering which shall supersede the criticised ethical principle of giving the last fundamental reasons for morals by universal principles (Metz 2000).

It remains extensively undenied that plurality is a social fact (cf. Metz 2000; especially: Nipkow 2000a; Ziebertz 1990; 2001a; Feige 2002). In this modern age we have seen a release of the individual from its habitat. That is why morality is not just an everyday life practice to be introduced, but a process based on sensible reasons (Ladenthin, Schilmöller & Schulp-Hirsch 1999). We can not fall back on unambiguously correct ethical guidelines. Even the validity of rules and bans (e.g. prohibition of homicide) that have been existing for thousands of years can not be taken for granted anymore (cf. Ruhloff 1999). The existence of objective values and standards can not be assumed anymore (Ziebertz 1990). In the western “self-culture” (U. Beck) values and standards do not function as assistance for decisions and to help to predict behaviour but are mutated into concepts depending on the different situations. In the face of plurality one is obliged to permanently put things into perspective in the sense of connecting different principles with each other. In such a context learning takes place in the form of relativization (Feige 2002).

The radical plurality of values and standards is the context of ethical learning of today (Ziebertz 2001b). Young persons can’t be introduced to a certain value-conviction without questioning it. They are not to be protected from plurality but to be confronted with value-conflicts to enable them to practise arguing conflicting values. It is necessary to develop plurality into pluralism in the sense of a considered and reflected use of plurality (cf. Schweitzer 2000; Ziebertz 2002a). Plurality has to be agreed to. It is not an annoyance but expresses a substantial part of human liberty that is nowadays required to an extraordinarily high degree and is not covered