Psycho-Didactic Approach in Religious and Moral Education

The psycho-didactic approach in education is becoming more and more popular. Its supporters emphasize the great values that are associated with the implementation of this approach to various fields of science and school subjects. The greatest value of the psycho-didactic approach is supporting the personal growth of the learner by respecting the developmental factors involved in each subject's learning processes. Psycho-didactics could also be used in the design of core curricula and their implementation in the field of religious, ethical, and moral education. By supporting personal development through moral and religious education, it is possible to simultaneously influence the agency of each learner. Personal agency in self-development, as well as in religious and moral development, is one of the greatest challenges for modern education and one of the most significant issues of positive mental health advancement in the field of education. Within psycho-didactics, it becomes possible to foster every student in an individual way, therefore all methods and techniques used in the psycho-didactic approach are focused on the student's needs.

1. Introduction

This paper focuses mainly on the meeting point between educational psychology and the didactics of religion and ethics in order to establish a new quality of moral education for adolescents and adults. Supporting overall personal development is also supporting mental health. Moreover, it seems that spirituality and morality are particularly important areas of personal development (Maslow 2014). It is possible that a high level of personal development is associated with a correspondingly high level of moral and spiritual development.

To establish how effective it was, the level of knowledge obtained by a student had to be measured accordingly for every school subject. What is more, mental health translates into the development potential of an individual. It is also seen as mental health prophylaxis in terms of providing tools to protect the student from psychological trauma. One of the possible criteria of positively understood mental health is acceptance of oneself, growth and development, or personal integration and autonomy (Jahoda 1958). Mental health and personal growth can be also catalyzed by moral and spiritual growth (Weber and Pargament 2014).

There are no publications or studies linking the assumptions of the psycho-didactic approach with teaching in the field of religious and moral education, fostering of religious development, or of moral competence in the realm of positive mental health. Their main goal is—as in psycho-didactics—the personal development of an individual as an autonomous agent, but in a spiritual or moral context. Even Kohlberg assumed that the highest stage of development of moral reasoning is closely related to the personal development and spiritual commitment of the individual (Kohlberg and Power 1981). In all cases, religious development is parallel to personal development and moral development

2. Psycho-Didactic Approach to Education: Background and New Possibilities

As has already been mentioned, the subject-centered approach states the meaning of specific knowledge in every school subject and defines the development of a student in terms of the results of the measurement of theirprogress in gaining this knowledge. The distinction between the curricula of the different school subjects has its practical aspect, but also causes limitations in the overall educational processes. Finding contact points between different areas of the knowledge, thinking synthetically, finding mutual references across disciplines—these are examples of the abilities, the acquisition of which guarantees educational success. However, at the same time, this acquisition causes problems that the students and teachers must manage within the subject-centered approach.

is the emphasis on the role of self-determination in the process of shaping the personality of an individual within the realm of education, as well as an autonomy-supportive teaching context (Ryan and Deci 2000; Reeve and Cheon 2021). Many authors who sympathize with the psycho-didactic approach underline the importance of psychological processes such as motivational processes or the need for self-regulation as the main driving forces of all learning processes (Ryan and Deci 2006; Niemiec and Ryan 2009). In the face of this, education is seen not only as a process of knowledge transfer and evaluation of its' effects, but also as a process of supporting the personal growth of an individual. It has a lot do with psychological, moral, and religious growth in terms of providing positive mental health support for each developing individual (Bewick et al. 2010).

The psycho-didactic approach is strongly focused on the meaning of affective factors in the learning processes. Emphasizing the affective properties in the process of acquiring knowledge (e.g., fostering motivational processes), as well as in the process of personal growth (e.g., shaping the agency), makes the psycho-didactic approach one of the best suited educational approaches. It is especially useful for ethical dilemma discussions involving religious beliefs and moral attitudes, such as discussions considering the problem of modern reproductive choices (Khan and Konje 2019). It is crucial to take into consideration that social-cognitive understanding is therefore deeply grounded in affective abilities, e.g., emotional empathy (Cuff et al. 2016).

A safe learning environment must be based on mutual support and respectful communication between the teachers and the students (Clapper 2010). To achieve this goal, psychological knowledge, as well as psychological methods, should be used by the teachers (Nussbaum and Dweck 2008). As it is shown in research, positive social support can have a very positive impact on student wellbeing. It is a necessity of the psycho-didactic approach to have a positive impact on the students through self-conscious and reflective teachers who know how different psychological processes may influence the development of the student.

3. Psycho-Didactic Approach to Religious and Moral Education

Within the realm of school education, moral and religious development is influenced by the stability of participation in the classes, the methodology used by the teachers, and the topics raised. It has already been shown that mixed methods used in an educational context increase the complexity of ethical and moral decision-making, therefore putting moral education closer to real-life scenarios, making it more effective It also applies to religious education, which should be centered on individual spiritual needs. Despite the fact that the psycho-didactic approach to education is novel in the field of religious and moral education, there already are some methods and theories used in the realm of moral and religious education that could be treated as 'psycho-didactic-like', even if their introduction was not based directly on this paradigm.

The very first example for moral education could be Lawrence Kohlberg'sJust Community Approach (Kohlberg 1985), which is based on John Dewey's idea of putting autonomy, responsibility, democracy, and education into one process of promoting the democratic and moral competencies of school students (Dewey 1997). In this approach, students are equally engaged in democratic decision-making within the school management. They make joint democratic decisions on issues related to school life regarding equality, equity, and reciprocity (Higgins 1995). The feeling of being responsible is deeply rooted in the attitude of care and awareness of specific values to be engaged with.

Georg Lind's idea originates from Lawrence Kohlberg's theory, according to which cognitive development is to be regarded as a prerequisite of overall moral development (Kohlberg 1985). At some points, Kohlberg's theory ignores the complexity of moral development by reducing it to the meaning of cognitive aspects. This theory cannot be used as a sufficient basis for educational practice supporting general developmental capabilities, including moral development as well as personal moral growth. Therefore, fostering moral competence which is used in dilemma situations requires more than the stimulation of cognitive development.

An example of a method of teaching religion based on psycho-didactic assumptions is the approach that combines religion with the analysis of literature (Boscaljon and Levinovitz 2019). It is an interdisciplinary approach that uses a variety of ways to connect literary threads with the religious context or vice versa. A student may relate to different religions, but also to different aspects of a given religion. This is especially important in such a sensitive area as individual spirituality.

that can be introduced to moral education as well as religious education (Thambu and Rahman 2017). Theatre in education, in general, could be considered to be a tool of change in the behavior, also in moral and social actions, as it creates a space not only for role-taking but for going through important experiences. Participants are confronted with a

play that shows some kind of social problem which is vivid among them, which additionally triggers reflection and emotional insight This is a serious argument for the possibility of treating such an approach as psycho-didactics in the field of moral education and religious education.

These are just examples of well-known and already widely-evaluated psychological methods and approaches to teaching religion, morality, and supporting the overall development of an individual. There are many others, just to mention a few: Sustained Dialogue (Saunders 2001), conflict management(French All of these methods could be used in moral and religious education within the framework of the psycho-didactic approach. What is more, in moral and religious education there is a strong need for innovation (Schreiner 2014).

One more method must be emphasized here as important, not for fostering the development of a student directly, but that of the teacher themself. The teacher is not only the "knowledge giver", but also a tutor, a facilitator, and someone who knows the learner to such an extent that they can choose appropriate psychological methods to provoke a personal change in their sense of personal growth and development. The psychological education of teachers should be considered to be a very important aspect of the psycho-didactic approach. Only a reflective teacher, aware of developmental processes and the impact of different educational factors on individual development, will be able to plan and implement educational interventions that would actually have a positive impact on the learner's personal growth.

4. Psycho-Didactics for Moral Identity Development—A New Strategy for Moral and Religious Education

The psycho-didactic approach to education aims to foster the personal growth of the learner in terms of individual psychological development. Regardless of the idea of neutrality, there is general agreement in education about certain issues related to a specific order of things. It is difficult to agree that individual development and personal growth are undesirable or bad. As it has been shown in research, religious adolescents reported not only prejudice and criticism of their beliefs but also a distortion of their religious traditions.

Here, another question arises: to what extent can moral/religious identity be an aspect of identity in general, and what is its role in the personal and psycho-social development of the individual. It is widely argued whether, for example, moral identity can be described in terms of itscentralityfor the overall identity and personality development (Narvaez and Lapsley 2009b). In such a case, moral identity must be taken as something of great consistency in respect of one's life. In the realm of education, identity (also moral and religious identity) should be considered to be a dynamic system consisting of many parts, in which one can distinguish elements of self-knowledge, organizing the processing of information about oneself (Lester 1993).

What is more, research shows that, in defining oneself, moral categories turn out to be more accessible than competence-related features The motivation behind involvement in this issue is the assumption that a high level of moral reasoning does not logically indicate morally correct behavior, as well as religious thinking, does not necessarily lead to the desired way of conduct. During emerging adulthood, religious identity generally remains stable over time despite a possible decline due to social reasons which appear rather temporarily (Uecker et al. 2007). In many religions, certain moral attitudes derive directly from religious doctrine (e.g., Christian morality).

From the point of view of moral and religious education, this is something to be expected and which is highly desirable as an effect of educational interventions. The psycho-didactic approach seems to be the answer to those needs and expectations. It brings some new ideas regarding putting psychological techniques and knowledge into the new pedagogical and didactic context in order to improve the personal moral and religious growth of the learner.

References

1. Maslow, Abraham H. 2014. Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences. Bowdon: Stellar Books.

2. Jahoda, Marie. 1958. Current Concepts of Positive Mental Health. New York: Basic Books.

3. Weber, Samuel R., and Kenneth I. Pargament. 2014. The Role of Religion and Spirituality in Mental Health. Current Opinion in Psychiatry 27: 358–63.

4. Kohlberg, Lawrence, and Clark Power. 1981. Moral Development, Religious Thinking, and The Question of a Seventh Stage. Zygon 16: 203–59.

5. Ryan, Richard M., and Edward L. Deci. 2000. Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being. American Psychologist 55: 68–78.

6. Reeve, Johnmarshall, and Sung Hyeon Cheon. 2021. Autonomy-Supportive Teaching: Its Malleability, Benefits, and Potential to Improve Educational Practice. Educational Psychologist 56: 54–77.

7. Ryan, Richard M., and Edward L. Deci. 2006. Self-Regulation and the Problem of Human Autonomy: Does Psychology Need Choice, Self-Determination, and Will? Journal of Personality 74: 1557–86.

8. Niemiec, Christopher P., and Richard M. Ryan. 2009. Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness in the Classroom: Applying Self-Determination Theory to Educational Practice. Theory and Research in Education 7: 133–44.

9. Bewick, Bridgette, Gina Koutsopoulou, Jeremy Miles, Esther Slaa, and Michael Barkham. 2010. Changes in Undergraduate Students' Psychological Well-being as They Progress through University. Studies in Higher Education 35: 633–45.

10. Khan, Mohammad A. Z., and Justin C. Konje. 2019. Ethical and Religious Dilemmas of Modern Reproductive Choices and the Islamic Perspective. European Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology and Reproductive Biology 232: 5–9.

11. Cuff, Benjamin, Sarah J. Brown, Laura Taylor, and Douglas J. Howat. 2016. Empathy: A Review of the Concept. Emotion Review 8: 144–53.

12. Clapper, Timothy. 2010. Creating the Safe Learning Environment. Professional against Improperly LabelingActive Learners 3: 1–6.

13. Nussbaum, A. David, and Carol S. Dweck. 2008. Defensiveness Versus Remediation: Self-Theories and Modes of Self-Esteem Maintenance. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin 34: 599–612.

14. Kohlberg, Lawrence. 1985. The Just Community Approach to Moral Education in Theory and Practice. In Moral Education: Theory and Application. Mahwah: Erlbaum Associates, pp. 27–87.

15. Dewey, John. 1997. Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education. New York: Free Press.

16. Higgins, Ann. 1995. Educating for Justice and Community: Lawrence Kohlberg's Vision of Moral Education. In Moral Development: An Introduction. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, pp. 49–81.

17. Boscaljon, Daniel, and Alan Levinovitz. 2019. Teaching Religion and Literature. New York: Routledge.

18. Thambu, Nadarajan, and Muhammad Hasbi Abdul Rahman. 2017. Forum Theatre as a Behavior Change Strategy: Qualitative Findings from Moral Education Class. The Journal of the South East Asia Research Centre for Communications and Humanities 9: 25–46.

19. Saunders, Harold H. 2001. A Public Peace Process: Sustained Dialogue to Transform Racial and Ethnic Conflicts. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, Available online: (accessed on 4 June 2021).

20. Schreiner, Peter. 2014. Religion in Education: Innovation in International Research. British Journal of Religious Education 36: 106–8.

21. Narvaez, Darcia, and Daniel K. Lapsley, eds. 2009b. Personality, Identity, and Character: Explorations in Moral Psychology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

22. Lester, David. 1993. On the Disunity of the Self: A Systems Theory of Personality. Current Psychology 12: 312–25.

23. Uecker, Jeremy E., Mark D. Regnerus, and Margaret J. Vaaler. 2007. Losing My Religion: The Social Sources of Religious Decline in Early Adulthood. Social Forces 85: 1667–92.