Ethics and Education: 
The Normative Dimensions of Education

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Credit Rating 20 credits, SCQF 11

Course Description
This course offers master students the possibility to identify ethical issues that may arise when working in the field of education and to find a way of responding appropriately. The many things we do as educationalists imply that the lives of others, as well as the quality of the world we live in, may be affected to a smaller or larger extent. As such, this course prepares students to deal with decision-making, setting an example oneself as educationalists, organizing educational programs or community work projects, etc. The starting points of this course are that the work of the educationalist cannot be reduced to a technical skill, and furthermore that true educational action requires more than expert knowledge and professional competences alone. Rather, this course approaches education as a matter of care, i.e. as a way of relating to oneself, to others and to the world which involves oneself as a whole person. Another focus throughout this course is that educating is a highly embodied practice, and that ethical considerations should take this into account. Various themes are discussed (such as equality, justice, citizenship, the value of tradition, the role of humor and laughter) from a wide variety of past and present intellectual perspectives.

Learning Outcomes
On completion of this course, students will:

- be able to distinguish normative from other (theoretical or practical) educational questions.
- appreciate some of main educational issues in which ethical questions are implicated.
- have insight in major philosophical concepts, ideas and theories, and be able to form a personal standpoint on important ethical issues in education.
- be able to explore the implications of moral and normative issues for educational policy.
- be aware of the exceptional importance of the personality of the educator and of the role and importance of personal self-formation.
Teaching
10 x 2.5 hour seminars = 25 hours

Each session will involve some formal presentation of the issues in the form of lecture, guided reading or structured questions. This will be followed by seminar discussion.

Next to this, students are required to watch some films, which are a substantial part of the course material and which will form the background of our class discussions.

Assessment
One written essay of 4,000 words, which relates to one of the topics discussed during class.

Content

Weeks 1 - 2

Two Perspectives On Education

Education can be approached as a matter of expertise, meaning that it is seen as a category of action that can be ‘mastered’ if one possesses the necessary knowledge, skill and expertise, and that can be optimized on the basis of scientific insight only. However, education can also be seen as a matter of care, i.e. as a category of action that responds to a particular situation which resists full control, and which involves the whole person (it matters that it is this particular person who gives this answer). The educator’s professional identity might thus be defined in terms of what Ancient Greek philosophers called an ‘ethos’, a way of life. In this part we discuss:

- The distinction between ethics and morality, and between ethics and expertise/professionalism
- Two illustrations of the dominant discourse of expertise/professionalism (Ramaekers & Suissa on parenting; McWilliam on the repression of the body in education)
- Teaching as asceticism (De Marzio) and as ‘parrhesia’ (‘to speak freely’, Foucault)
Weeks 3 - 6

Topics In Ethics And Education

Education can be approached as a matter of expertise, meaning that it is seen as a category of action that can be ‘mastered’ if one possesses the necessary knowledge, skill and competences, and that can be optimized on the basis of scientific insight only. However, education can also be seen as a matter of care, i.e. as a category of action that responds to a particular situation which resists full control, and which involves the whole person (it matters that it is this particular person who gives this response). The educator’s professional identity might thus be defined in terms of what Ancient Greek philosophers called an ‘ethos’, a way of life. In this part we discuss:

- **The pedagogical relation**: a phenomenological account of the student-teacher relationship shows that education is intrinsically an ethically and existentially normative practice (Tone Saevi). Nell Noddings renowned point of view that ‘care’ is the very essence of the true pedagogical relation offers a feminist interpretation of this idea. We will also discuss critical point Gert Biesta raises, viz. that the possibility of disconnection might be at least as important as this relational dimension
- **Justice and equality**: discussion of some basic principles that structure the discussion concerning a just education and an education for all in a world in which resources are not equally distributed, such as adequacy, meritocracy and equality (Kenneth Howe)
- **Citizenship and educating for a democratic world**: we will study Biesta’s criticism of The Scottish Curriculum for Excellence and the depoliticizing effects a capability-approach towards citizenship might imply. Furthermore we will study Biesta’s alternative ideas regarding ‘public pedagogy’
- **The value of transmitting culture and tradition**: We will opposes Freire criticism of the ‘banking concept of education’ and Ken Robinson’s idea that the traditional school kills creativity with views that defend conservatism for the sake of continuity (Oakeshott) or for the sake of discontinuity (Arendt)

Weeks 7 - 9

‘The Ignorant Schoolmaster’: The Work Of Rancière

In this part we focus on a book in which the French philosopher Jacques Rancière provocatively holds that we all possess equal intelligence and that true human emancipation consists in freeing ourselves from the prejudice that there exist legitimate inequalities amongst people (between parents and children, teachers and students, politicians and civilians, etc.). Trying to come to an adequate understanding of these claims, it will become clear that Rancière’s work has bearings on each of the four topics discussed in part 2 and that it opens new ways to look at the role of the teacher, the importance of including established subject matters in the curriculum, etc. His ideas reflect and moreover specify the starting point of this course, viz. that the educator’s work is a matter of developing an appropriate educational ‘ethos’. As an introduction to his work, we’ll discuss a text by Cornelissen, who also shows how Rancière’s work raises serious questions regarding the main-stream view defines education in terms of students’ interests and needs.
Humor and laughter are usually not dealt with as important educational topics. Nonetheless, in recent years the unavoidable occurrence of laughter in pedagogical contexts (classrooms) has become more and more the object of study. We'll discuss two major but opposed school-of-thoughts in this regard:

- Mordechai Gordon: no laughter without humor (intimacy)
- Joris Vlieghe: laughter as immanent life-affirmation (i.e. as an intrinsically equalizing and communizing phenomenon)

Some Recommended Course Reading


Biesta, G. (2012). No education without hesitation. Thinking differently about educational relations. In C. Ruitenberg et al. (eds), Philosophy of education 2012 (pp. 1-13). Urbana-Champaign, IL: PES


### Films

Le Fils (Jean-Pierre & Luc Dardenne, 2002)

To Sir with Love (James Clavell, 1967)

*list to be completed*