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Challenges in Teaching: Perceptions and Experiences of Teachers of Ethics in Poland

Wyzwania w nauczaniu: Opinie i doświadczenia nauczycieli etyki w Polsce

Introduction

International comparisons have shown that some countries offer high quality education for their students, whereas other countries are in the earlier stages of education development, striving to expand access to elementary and lower secondary education and to ensure transmission of basic skills. The question is: why is this? What policies and practices on teaching and in teacher education have been developed in countries that have good education systems, and how do they support the changes within them? These questions are especially significant when we look at current tensions and paradoxes in teaching (Ben-Peretz, and Flores, 2018). Policy changes have been affecting teachers' sense of professionalism, their practice, and teacher education programmes. Currently, we can observe not only competing expectations of

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teachers' work related to the implementation of externally-determined policy and the exercise of their professional autonomy, but also considerable tensions between achieving immediate results and success in external exams versus the need to prepare students in an era of growing migration, diversity and economic change.

This paper reports on a mixed methods study that investigates teachers' perceptions and experiences of their work in the contemporary educational context, full of changes and uncertainties. Special attention is paid to the challenges faced by teachers of ethics, including how this relates to these wider societal changes. The focus is on teachers who teach ethics, which is a relatively new school subject in Poland. Specifically, the research question is: What are the major challenges that are faced by teachers in teaching ethics at schools in Poland?¹

The study derives from a project completed between 2013 and 2017 entitled "Ethics in the Systems of Education in Poland and Selected Western Countries (Germany, United Kingdom, Spain, Portugal, France, USA, Norway, Finland)" that was implemented under the National Programme for the Development of Humanities of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education in Poland. It was conceived as a contribution to educational research and knowledge on the teaching of ethics in the school system and to the building of ethics as a school subject in the education system in Poland.

Ethics as a curriculum subject at school

The political transformation at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s led to social changes, also in the area of individual attitudes. Introducing religious education as a common school subject in response to the freedom for parents to choose attitudes for their children forced the government to introduce a subject which could be an alternative to it. This subject became ethics (not, for example, religious

¹ Some of the results presented here were included in the following papers: J. Madalińska-Michalak (2017). *Teaching of Ethics in Schools in Poland: Main Challenges*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of European Educational Research Association ECER 2017: *Reforming Education and the Imperative of Constant Change: Ambivalent roles of policy and educational research*. Network 27: Didactics – Learning and Teaching, Copenhagen, 25 August 2017; J. Madalińska-Michalak (2018). *Teaching of Ethics in School Education in Europe: International Perspective*. Paper presented at the Invited Session at Annual Meeting of American Educational Research Association AERA 2018: *The Dreams, Possibilities and Necessities on Public Education*. New York City, 13-17 A.

studies). The education system faced a dilemma: who should teach this subject? By trial and error, and often also irrevocable facts, the teaching of ethics, though fledgling at first, began to develop. The problem that appeared in this process, however, was a shortage of teachers who could teach ethics at schools. The lack of experience in educating new teachers of this subject resulted in deadlock.

In European countries, ethics functions in the education system as an independent subject or as part of another one. It may be compulsory or optional (Pépin, 2009; Robbers, 2013). In Poland, as in Germany, Spain, Finland and Slovakia, ethics is currently understood as an independent and optional subject, which was introduced as an alternative to religious education. It can be defined as one of the subjects within the core curriculum, which defines common foundations for the system of education. The core curriculum is a legal document, formulated by the Ministry of National Education, and it describes all stages of education, the aims and content to be taught to pupils, and the methods of achieving these objectives with assessment procedures. The document ensures, to some extent, the uniformity of the education system in Poland. However, it leaves space for teachers to develop more detailed school programmes and to make decisions about textbooks, as well as forms and methods of teaching. In practice, it means that the core curriculum defines aims, content and tasks for the school, but there are no references to the ways in which they should be achieved.

In Poland, the history of ethics as a curriculum subject has its beginning in the original text of the Education System Act of 7 September 1991 (Journal of Laws of 1991, no. 95, item 425), which explicitly states that “recognizing the parents’ right to the religious education of their children, state primary schools provide religious education at the request of parents, post-primary schools - at the request of either parents or students; after coming of age, students decide about religious education on their own.” This content was repeated in the first consolidated text of the Education System Act of 1996. What was crucial in this situation was the fact that the provision of Art. 12 Para. 2 of the cited Act became the basis for the Minister of National Education to issue relevant regulations. Apart from that, it also became the subject of a widely commented ruling of the Constitutional Tribunal of 20 April 1993 on the guarantee of the freedom of conscience and religion.² One of the first legal acts

² The ruling of the Constitutional Tribunal of 20 April 1993 on the guarantee of freedom of conscience and religion (U 12/92, OTK ZU 1993, item 9.).

currently regulating the teaching of religion and ethics in schools in Poland was the ordinance of the Minister of National Education of 14 April 1992 on the conditions and manner of organizing religious education in state schools.³ Already in its first paragraph, this regulation defined ethics as a curriculum subject alternative to religious education in state schools.⁴

Ethics as a subject taught in Polish schools – according to the survey results described in *Ethics in the Education System in Poland*⁵ – initially had a rather marginal position in the education system. However, year by year, it has been gaining in recognition among students, as well as their parents. The position of ethics in the education system is becoming stronger, which is proved by increased interest in this subject and the adequate response of schools to satisfy this demand, especially from September 2014, when the possibility for attending both religion and ethics classes in schools has been regulated by law and introduced into practice.

Methods

A mixed methods design was used in this study, with the combination of quantitative and qualitative research components for the purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration (Johnson, Christensen, 2017; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, Turner, 2007). In the first stage of the study, a quantitative study approach with a survey aimed for generalizability was used. In the second stage, a qualitative study approach with narrative interviews was adopted. In this paper, I will focus on the first stage of the study, which is an example of descriptive survey research (Cohen, Manion, Morrison, 2007, p.

³ The ordinance of the Minister of National Education of 14 April 1992 on the conditions and manner of organizing religious education in state schools (Journal of Laws of 1992 No. 36, item 155, as amended).

⁴ More on the subject of legal regulations which determine the conditions and manner of organizing ethics in Polish schools can be found in the book: J. Madalińska-Michalak, A. J. Jeżowski, S. Więśław (2017). *Etyka w systemie edukacji w Polsce [Ethics as a school subject in the system of education in Poland]*. Warszawa: Wolters Kluwer, pp. 32–39.

⁵ The study covered the years of 2006-2015 since it was the period of increased interest in ethics on the part of both students and their parents. Schools and the system of teacher education responded to this demand with an appropriate offer. The study provided answers to the questions about the extent to which teaching of ethics is carried out in Polish schools, how the accessibility of this subject has changed and which tendencies of its transformation can be observed. The results are presented in the following monograph: J. Madalińska-Michalak, A. J. Jeżowski, S. Więśław, *Etyka w systemie edukacji w Polsce...*, op. cit., pp. 39–99.

206). Survey research has been used to scan a wide variety of issues connected with ethics as a school subject and its place in the education system in Poland (for more, see: Madalińska-Michalak, Jeżowski, Więśław, 2017). This study is concerned mainly with teacher experiences and their points of view on ethics as a school subject. It also sets out to identify, describe, compare, analyse and interpret the challenges in teaching it at schools.

For the purposes of the presented study, an online survey was implemented to learn about the experiences and work conditions of teachers who teach ethics at schools in Poland. In the survey, a place for learning from the individual voices of teachers was given to create a space for the deeper understanding of the teachers' experiences and perceptions within their contextual conditions. This approach was chosen in order to facilitate knowledge of the phenomenon associated with the challenges in teaching ethics as a school subject at schools. An online survey aided in several aspects:

- gathering data on a one-shot basis and thus being economical and efficient;
- capturing data from multiple choice, closed-ended questions, and open-ended questions;
- representing the views and perspectives of teacher participants;
- contributing insights into key relevant concepts;
- covering the contextual conditions in which the teacher participants work;
- studying the meaning of teachers' work under real conditions;

In order to explore participants' experiences and opinions on challenges in teaching ethics at schools in the specific educational, political and socio-cultural contexts, some questions were posed, including:

- What are the major challenges you've faced as a teacher of ethics in your classroom?
- What are the major challenges you've faced as a teacher of ethics at this school?
- What are the major challenges you've faced as a teacher of ethics at this school, regarding external factors that have impacted your work?

The tool designed specifically for the needs of the presented study was a questionnaire entitled "Teaching of ethics in schools." In order to standardize it, the questionnaire underwent a critical evaluation performed by teachers and school principals.

For the purpose of the study, purposive sampling was decided on, which resulted in inviting all ethics teachers from state and non-state schools of various types and levels of education: primary schools, junior high schools, high schools, secondary technical schools and basic vocational schools. One of the priorities was to maintain the confidentiality, privacy and anonymity of the participants. To ensure confidentiality, researchers provided consent forms to each participant. Anonymity was assured, and pseudonyms are used in the findings section.

As a result, the study was nationwide and presented an overview of the whole population (saturation survey). In response to the invitation addressed to the teachers, a total of 1266 questionnaires were obtained. After verifying their completeness, 1094 remained for further analysis. Data obtained from the questionnaires that qualified for the study underwent a quantitative statistical analysis and a qualitative assessment.

Regarding the open-ended questions, the ones connected with the issues of challenges in teaching ethics, a qualitative method was employed to analyse the data. The basic components of this were coding, categorizing and forming themes. Each teacher's responses to the open-ended questions were re-examined, comparing concepts found in other responses, enabling constant comparative analysis to ensure thoroughness and rigour of analysis. All codes were re-examined to identify connecting ideas, which formed concepts. Those coded concepts were then clustered to form categories and were constantly examined for clear relatedness to each other. After categories were formed, the data was re-examined and coded again to establish a consistency of codes (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, 2013). The categories were then re-clustered under relevant themes that emerged from exploring the categorised data.

Findings

The analysis of the data collected on the basis of open-ended questions showed that more than 98% of study participants responded to open-ended questions related to the main challenges of teaching ethics at school (a total of 1080 statements). The analysis resulted in 1547 various indications/codes regarding these challenges, and in forming eight main themes and the most articulated thematic categories connected with them. Analysis showed that study participants reported major challenges, such as the following:

qualifications of ethics teachers, teacher education, didactics (teaching and learning), teaching materials and teaching aids, attractiveness of ethics as a subject at school, organization of work, pupil traits and teaching programs, and stereotypes related to the perception of ethics as a school subject. Due to the limitations in the length of this paper, I will focus mainly on the first two challenges: the qualifications of ethics teachers, didactics and teacher education.

Research findings showed that one of the main challenges for teachers of ethics is the issue connected with the delivery of lessons, which was contractually labelled as “didactics” (this was indicated in 31% of the obtained statements). The second among the most popular themes that emerged from the teachers’ responses was related to didactic materials and aids (22.6% of the total number), in particular to the lack of these materials and aids, their imperfection or low attractiveness. The organization of the work (17.1% of total indications), the prestige attached to ethics as a school subject (9.8% of total indications), and the traits of pupils (9.6% of total indications) were also emphasized by teachers.

Qualifications of ethics teachers – the need to reinforce the position of ethics teachers

Almost every teacher participant commented on the quality of teacher education and training. While sharing their thoughts on their own qualifications, as well as the qualifications of their colleagues teaching ethics, the participants emphasized that ethics is often taught by teachers without any adequate professional preparation. The participants indicated a need for changes in teacher education, claiming that qualification requirements should be modified in order to avoid inconsistencies in schools. They also expressed critical opinions on the current situation in Polish schools, where almost any teacher can become a teacher of ethics – it is sufficient if they attended, for example, philosophy lectures during their university education. The participants do not accept the situation in which teachers conduct ethics lessons only because they need to obtain the required number of teaching hours.

The following statements refer to the situation in Polish schools, teachers teaching ethics, as well as participants’ opinions:

The school principal ordered me to teach ethics for the first time this year even though my specialisation is different. Philosophy was indeed one of the subjects I had to study, but I graduated from university a long time ago. Besides, ethics has a slightly different dimension. As a result, I was alone in the dark. I bought some books, I surfed the Internet and I found some websites devoted to ethics. I'm trying to meet the requirements, I think up different ways to make these lessons interesting, but I feel that I am still missing something. Currently, there are no ethics teachers at schools. I work in a primary school.

E1-0233

Teaching ethics should depend on someone's qualifications. Teachers should be required to complete studies in philosophy, or even a postgraduate course, whose curriculum would cover the most important issues of the modern world (social, scientific, political and other).

E1-0426

The fact that such classes are conducted by teachers without appropriate qualifications (completing studies in philosophy) is a big mistake. They often do it for completely different reasons, such as obtaining the required number of teaching hours. I think that philosophy programmes should offer more courses devoted to the didactics of ethics.

E1-0757

I think that we should appreciate the proper education of ethics teachers. Someone who has just completed a philosophy or ethics course can't be allowed to teach ethics.

E1-0075

First of all, I think those teachers should be educated. I teach ethics in school because I studied humanities, which currently is enough to teach this subject. However, nobody has shown me how to teach ethics, and nobody controls how I do it. You won't find any sensible textbooks or lesson plans on the market, especially when it comes to younger students in primary schools and seeing that sometimes we have both 6- and 9-year-old students in the same class (and I think my school is no exception).

E1-1244

Basically, these can't be random teachers. They should complete an appropriate postgraduate course in ethics or have a degree in the field of social science, philosophy or sociology. Due to the complicated nature of this subject matter, it is not possible for random people to deal with it. Teachers should be obliged to participate in special courses organised by universities, and there should be some funds for that, e.g. from the central, voivodship, province or municipality's budget, so that they don't have to pay for their in-service education out of their own pocket. Since I do everything on my own, preparation for classes requires a lot of initiative, work and time. Personally, I think that taking part in some inspirational courses or seminars (broadening my knowledge), as well as practical classes (workshops for ethics teachers, specific lesson plans, games and projects), would be good for me.

E1-0799

The participants agreed that ethics should only be taught by teachers who have completed higher education in philosophy or ethics, or those who have completed postgraduate courses in the field of ethics teaching. Some of the respondents expressed quite extreme opinions, claiming that only teachers holding a degree in philosophy or ethics should be allowed to teach ethics.

First of all, it's necessary to specify who has the right qualifications to do that. Most teachers did not complete any studies or postgraduate courses in the field of philosophy. That's why they only pretend that they teach ethics since they don't have any knowledge of the concepts.

E1-0258

These should be exclusively philosophy graduates, of course with pedagogical preparation because studies in philosophy allow for keeping the right perspective on various ethical concepts and values. Besides, while studying, one also learns about the so-called rationality of philosophy - a discipline of knowledge which enables a more profound understanding of ethical issues.

E1-0885

It should be clearly stated that one can teach ethics only after they obtain proper education – MA or postgraduate. Attending philosophy classes or lectures during master's degree studies is definitely not enough.

E1-0914

The requirements for ethics teachers should be changed – these should not be religion, Polish language or history teachers who attended history of philosophy lectures during one semester of their university education. These must be teachers who completed studies in philosophy, a postgraduate program or professional training, as is required in the case of other school subjects.

E1-0055

Ethics should not be taught by teachers of other school subjects who obtained qualifications after a year's in-service course, but by those who hold a degree in philosophy.

E1-0690

An ethics teacher should be a person who has a degree in philosophy, who specialises in the field of ethics or who completed an additional course. The course should correspond to the well-prepared core curriculum. In fact, any teacher who had a basic philosophy course during their university education, who forgot most of what they had learnt, can become an ethics teacher, which is a mistake. Currently, ethics teachers are thrown in at the deep end, which means that they don't have any basic information, a good curriculum (there is only one – “Human Paths”), textbooks or online materials to work with. The quality of ethics lessons depends on the knowledge and determination of the teacher, and we all know that teachers are different and not all of them feel comfortable in this respect.

E1-0250

In their statements, the teachers also mentioned the issue of ensuring world-view neutrality while teaching ethics. They claimed that school principals should not entrust ethics teaching to teachers who already teach religion in those schools. This point of view is illustrated in the following statements:

These teachers are frequently teachers who used to teach religion, which means that their morals are purely Catholic.

E1-1179

Ethics should not be taught by a religion teacher or any teacher with extreme political views.

E1-0039

A teacher (assuming they do not hold a degree in philosophy or ethics) striving to obtain qualifications which would entitle them to teach ethics, should complete

a postgraduate course in this field; short trainings should be eliminated. Besides, they should also have a flexible personality and a relatively objective world-view (I think religion teachers should not teach ethics, especially if they already teach religion).

E1-0872

Teacher education of ethics teachers

The questionnaire developed for the purpose of this study contained questions about the teacher education of ethics teachers. One of the questions was formulated as follows: Should there be any changes in the teacher education of ethics teachers? According to the analysis of the results, almost one third of participants believe that, in terms of this education, the status quo should be preserved. A different opinion is shared by more than one fourth of teachers (26.3%).

What seems to be thought-provoking, especially in the face of the situation described above (concerning school reality and qualification requirements for ethics teachers), is the fact that as many as 43.2% of the ethics teachers participating in this study have no opinion on this matter.

Table 1. Teacher education of ethics teachers

Should there be any changes in the teacher education of ethics teachers?	Number of responses	Percent
Yes	288	26.3
No	333	30.4
No opinion	473	43.2
Total	1094	100.0

Source: own elaboration.

Taking into account not only the general distribution of the results showing how much ethics teachers are satisfied with the education offered to them, but also the distribution of results depending on variables such as the type of school, education or length of service as an ethics teacher,⁶ it can be noted that the dissatisfaction with the education offered to ethics teachers is expressed

⁶ The detailed distribution of the results depending on such variables as voivodship, type of school, education, completed field of study, place of work, location of school or length of service

mainly by teachers of school complexes - a primary and junior high school (see Table 2)⁷ - and teachers with higher professional qualifications (see Table 3). Teachers with the lowest qualifications (a bachelor's degree) claim that the education of ethics teachers is satisfactory and should not be changed – half of the participants shared this opinion. Only 1 in 10 teachers with a bachelor's degree are in favour of changes.

Table 2. Teacher education of ethics teachers (according to school types) [%]

Should there be any changes in the education of ethics teachers?	Yes	No	No opinion
Primary school (independent)	23	31	46
Junior high school (independent)	29	26	45
School complex (a primary school with a junior high school)	36	25	39
High school (independent or in a complex with a junior high school)	26	30	43
Post-junior high school (a complex of post-junior high schools)	26	41	33
Other	41	31	28
Total	26	30	43

Source: own elaboration.

Table 3. Teacher education of ethics teachers (according to teacher's education) [%]

Should there be any changes in the teacher education of ethics teachers?	Yes	No	No opinion
Doctoral studies (PhD)	31	16	53
Combined degree studies (MA)	29	29	42
Second-cycle studies (MA)	22	34	44
First-cycle studies (BA)	10	50	40
Total	26	30	43

Source: own elaboration.

as an ethics teacher are presented in: J. Madalińska-Michalak, A. Jeżowski, S. Więśław (2017). *Etyka w systemie edukacji w Polsce...* op. cit., pp. 148–153.

⁷ It is necessary to emphasize that these schools are usually located in rural areas, and that they are rather small considering the number of students. Noticing the need for changes within the education of ethics teachers results, among others, from the influence of the environment where a school functions, and more frequent situations in which a teacher must face arguments against ethics teaching given by other teachers who oppose it.

Teachers of ethics with three to five years (37% responding “yes”) and over 10 years of work experience (34% responding “yes”) are significantly more in favour of changes in the teacher education of ethics teachers than others. Those who have worked in this profession for no longer than two years have difficulties in taking a position – 46% claim they have “no opinion” on this matter. Therefore, it can be assumed that their professional experience is insufficient and does not allow them to evaluate the education of ethics teachers in Poland in a precise way. In comparison with other teachers, they are the smallest group in favour of changes in the education of ethics teachers (23%) (see Table 4).

Table 4. Teacher education of ethics teachers (according to the length of service) [%]

Should there be any changes in the teacher education of ethics teachers?	Yes	No	No opinion
Over 10 years	34	32	34
Six to 10 years	26	30	44
Three to five years	37	29	35
Up to two years	23	31	46
Answer refusal	40	0	60
Total	26	30	43

Source: own elaboration.

Pre-service and in-service education of ethics teachers – suggested changes

In the study, the participants were asked to justify their position and suggest changes which, according to them, are crucial in the education of ethics teachers. The collected results saw responses from 288 participants, among which prevailed: 1) teachers with degrees in philosophy and ethics, Polish language teachers who changed their qualifications, and representatives of other social sciences; 2) teachers with six to nine years of service, teachers teaching ethics for three to five years and more than 10 years.

Based on the analysis of the statements, it is possible to conclude that the participants referred to, among others, university education (175 indications) and in-service education of ethics teachers (66 indications).

Teacher education at universities

While explaining what they find necessary for improving the education of ethics teachers, the participants paid attention mainly to studies in the field of philosophy and postgraduate courses in ethics teaching. They emphasized that, on the one hand, the quality of education offered during this type of studies should be improved and, on the other hand, postgraduate courses should become more available. The statements of participants obtained in this survey were so direct and explicit that I would like to quote them without any further comment:

The monthly seminar at the In-Service Teacher Training Centre in Poznan for ethics teachers provided me with more essential and practical competences within one year than one and a half years of a postgraduate course at the Faculty of Philosophy, where I had the impression that most lecturers did not know what they wanted to tell us. There should be more precise facts and attempts to conduct classes which are, after all, specific but very interesting.

E1-1021

I have been a teacher for 25 years. Currently, I am completing a postgraduate course in ethics, but I am not really satisfied with its level. The knowledge which we, students, get there is 85% different from the school reality – from the core curriculum of ethics in both primary and junior high schools. And I must admit that the information which I get there I use in my work only to a minimum extent.

E1-0589

Organising postgraduate courses in smaller academic centres so that teachers have an opportunity to complete them.

E1-0149

First of all, they need to be educated. In my opinion, teachers who have just completed their courses or studies know nothing about teaching, let alone teaching ethics.

E1-0580

Universities should have a vision of the competences with which they want to provide teachers. From my own experience, I feel that the choice of lectures is very

random. Lectures, though very interesting and broadening horizons, are helpful to a minimal extent. They do not help to improve teachers' skills and tools, or to imagine what a teacher's work should look like. You need to obtain basic skills and tools on your own, frequently struggling with the difficulties of a particular school and the attitude of the environment.

E1-1140

Certainly, the number of classes devoted to the preparation of ethics teachers for working with the youngest students offered in postgraduate courses should change. It is also necessary to control the content presented in classes at universities. From my postgraduate course, I remember one subject which many hours were devoted to, and which was run in a way completely distinct from the subject matter.

E1-0249

Participants referred to the curricula offered during their university education. They paid attention to the demands placed on them, the content of education, the subjects of education and the number of classes devoted to them. They had many different suggestions – they would like to give a higher rank to some of the subjects and strengthen their importance by increasing the number of classes devoted to them (e.g. ethics, philosophy, ethics teaching, the methodology of ethics teaching, rhetoric).

In the case of other subjects, the suggested solutions were completely different – participants claimed that some of them should occur to a minor extent (e.g. metaethics, professional ethics, professional practice) or should not occur at all. They emphasized that the education of ethics teachers should be conducted in a way that instilled in them a sense of importance of the subject they teach.

Ethics teachers should be educated in such a way that they are aware of the connection between ethics, philosophy and other fields in the humanities, and are able to develop their psychological and educational skills. They should not get the feeling that ethics is a substitute for religious education.

E1-0318

There should be more emphasis on didactics, the methodology of teaching this subject. Teachers can read the theory on their own, but they need to talk to practitioners experienced in working with adolescents, who can share their knowledge, experience and methods of work.

E1-0662

Broadening the scope of issues related to ethical choices in the modern world.

E1-1086

They should also be trained in the field of rhetoric so that discussions with students are substantive and concrete.

E1-1150

The curriculum at the Pedagogical University of Cracow was unevenly distributed. In the first and second semesters, there were lots of classes and work, whereas in the last one - definitely less. I also think that it would be good to reduce the number of classes devoted to some subjects, e.g. professional ethics. This time could be used for other purposes.

E1-0476

More classes in subject didactics would certainly facilitate teachers' work. However, we obtain more information from the field of philosophy rather than ethics. Of course, philosophy is very important – you can't discuss ethical issues without philosophy, but it would be a good idea to reverse these proportions.

E1-1251

According to the participants, the specificity of ethics as a subject taught at various educational stages and directed to different – in terms of age and development – students requires teacher education to be multidimensional and to include knowledge from many fields such as philosophy, developmental psychology, religious studies, culture, law, etc. Ethics teachers should not confine themselves to the classroom – they should have a broad view of the world and they should be able to understand it. It is important that their education helps them develop their sensitivity, emotional competences and communication skills by participation in classes which have the form of seminars, not lectures, and in practical classes where they can discuss various subjects and issues important for ethics teachers.

As a school subject, ethics differs from philosophy. Philosophical content is important, but it can be introduced when students are 12-13 years old. When teaching younger children, it is necessary to rely on the knowledge from the field of psychology, science, cultural education, media education, social education, religious studies, law, literature [...] and philosophical tales. It is also necessary to set content in children and adolescents' everyday life situations, discuss threats, consequences, prospects, responsibilities but also respect, love, self-development and dialogue. The teacher must be prepared in a multidisciplinary way. They should have a solid philosophical foundation and, at the same time, be aware of what is happening around them - recognise cultural changes, dangers as well as opportunities and prospects. One should not approach the teaching of ethics in a stereotypical way [...].

E1-1157

My suggestions result from many years of observation. Namely, the education of teachers should:

- *pay more attention to the role of empathy and understanding towards students in the course of educating ethics teachers and their subsequent successes in didactic work;*
- *emphasize the credibility and moral attitude of ethics teachers;*
- *and use different and modern methods of education, including projects and multimedia boards.*

E1-1174

A teacher should be emphatic and understanding towards their students. They should never criticise them but help them understand a given issue. They should not judge students' behaviour from a moral point of view – ethic classes should have the form of discussions, not lectures.

E1-1031

The teachers very aptly emphasized the importance of dialogue in their daily work, as well as the skills necessary for holding conversations with students. Being an ethics teacher requires not only the ability to conduct discussions on often difficult subjects, but also shaping one's specific attributes, including, among others, their authenticity, credibility and responsibility, listening skills and openness to different points of view.

More emphasis should be put on preparing teachers for this role. It is important to be able to deliver difficult content concerning morality and the system of values in today's world, where values essential for shaping future generations are actually disappearing.

E1-0272

To put emphasis on practice, to equip teachers with psychological knowledge to a much greater extent than it is currently done, to teach them creative methods of work, but above all – to show how much can be achieved through conversation.

E1-0891

To prepare teachers for analysing and discussing problems that affect children and teenagers nowadays. They should be prepared for dialogue with them.

E1-0939

I think there should be a great deal of emphasis put on the ability to work with adolescents and practical skills.

E1-0937

There should be more classes shaping skills in discussing difficult and controversial subjects.

E1-0576

One should pay more attention to teacher's personality – their ability to listen and react to views which are different from their own. Teachers tend to think they are omniscient, which makes teaching more difficult or even discourages students. It is necessary to prepare a clear layout of the content used during classes, which can be expanded or narrowed depending on students' perceptions and abilities.

E1-0523

While sharing their thoughts, the participants wrote that it would be good to develop a curriculum which would not only focus on acquiring theoretical knowledge of philosophy and ethics, but which would have a more practical dimension (in total, 54 respondents pointed to this need in terms of changes in the education of ethics teachers). They claimed that during their education, "ethics teachers should be shown how to move from theory to practice. They

should also know that ethics should be practical and vivid, not theoretical and boring.”

Education should focus mainly on developing practical skills which can be used in students' everyday lives.

E1-0386

To provide them with practical skills, to show them methods and activities that they can do with students, to teach them to deliver ethical content instead of giving lectures on the views of philosophers, which is of little use when teaching ethics in younger age groups.

E1-0163

To increase the number of classes enabling the practical use of theory – the vastness of knowledge in the field of philosophy is overwhelming. Without any guidance, it is hard to reach for the most useful content, helpful in achieving specific educational goals of the ethics curriculum.

E1-0159

The participants considered workshops and discussions to be the most preferred forms of their education. They believed that they could successfully use them in their later work with students.

In the currently proposed model of education, the main focus is on gaining theoretical knowledge of both philosophy and ethics (as a philosophical science). There are definitely too few practical classes and workshops that would later become models of activities performed with children or adolescents.

E1-0124

Writing about the need for a more practical dimension of their education, participants emphasized that ethics teachers do have large resources of theoretical knowledge, but they lack practical solutions, lesson plans, and ways of conducting lessons, that is, a methodological approach.

A more practical approach, presentation of various didactic aids, exchange of experiences.

E1-0996

To provide them with more practical skills during their academic education, to present philosophical and ethical views in relation to problems of the modern world. Less theory, more practice. To develop textbooks and a methodological approach for ethics at the first, second and third educational stage.

E1-0970

To educate them so that they are able to talk to rebellious young people. To present to them methods and ways of teaching, not just the knowledge. Young people do want to talk, but they do not always want to obtain the knowledge. For them, the theory of ethics is too difficult – they prefer something practical, discussions about what is good and what is bad, how to behave, criteria for making decisions and how to make the right choice. Evaluation of human behaviour and discrepancies between what adults say and do are also important. Young people are very judgmental and that is why they do not attend religion lessons. And still they do not know what to expect from ethics classes.

E1-0571

I can only speak for myself. My postgraduate course provided me with a lot of general information. However, there were no classes preparing us for conducting lessons which would be attractive, and which would allow us to pass the necessary knowledge to our students.

E1-0177

During university education, one should pay more attention to practical skills and activities, and less to theoretical knowledge. I do not think that a teacher is able to prepare themselves for teaching this subject during a postgraduate course which lasts 2 or 3 semesters, anyway.

E1-1003

The survey shows that changes in the education of ethics teachers should manifest themselves in a greater focus on teaching methodology, working on the core curriculum and working with existing curricula and ethics textbooks. All this must be done in relation to conducting ethics lessons at a specific educational stage, because depending on this, students' needs vary, and the subject matter and goals become different. It is also necessary to consider the specificity of organising ethics lessons in Polish schools, that is, in mixed-age classrooms.

Orientating the preparation of ethics teachers towards these issues is extremely important and should not be ignored in the course of their education. Therefore, during their studies, apart from developing theoretical knowledge, it is necessary to teach them proper methods of conducting ethics lessons, provide them with practical ways of working with students, equip them with interesting teaching materials, and show them the methodologies of teaching this subject used in other countries. These solutions are clearly mentioned in the quotes presented below:

To adapt the education of teachers to their work at specific educational stages.
E1-1120

Better preparation for working with younger children who do not yet read and write.
E1-0638

Being prepared in terms of factual knowledge for conducting lessons at specific educational stages.
E1-0760

Methods of communication with various age groups of children.
E1-1061

Ethics teachers should be better prepared in terms of didactics, they should learn valuable methodological solutions and discuss ethics curricula and textbooks.
E1-0308

To develop a unified curriculum for specific educational stages. To highlight the important didactic areas to be discussed with students depending on their age.
E1-0144

To prepare teachers for teaching ethics in classes of early school education. Searching for solutions/inspiration, avoiding preaching in favour of teaching ethical attitudes through games and play. Searching and skilful use of valuable materials and inspiration might be difficult for someone who does not work with

such young children on a daily basis. The lack of textbooks or even a solid factual base promotes unserious attitudes towards this school subject.

E1-1242

To prepare appropriate paths during studies or a postgraduate course in philosophy, focusing on the methodology of ethics teaching and contemporary ethical problems.

E1-0248

A well-developed core curriculum for a specific educational stage, examples of lesson plans. In addition, a conference on methodology at least twice a year.

E1-0480

Courses in the field of ethics contain very little subject matter meant for younger children and do not show how to pass the knowledge to younger children in a competent and interesting way. Most of the lesson plans and lectures are intended for high school students.

E1-1192

The ability to choose methods and content for specific educational stages.

E1-0518

To find out about different methods and forms of classes depending on the age of students.

E1-0241

Therefore, the teachers expect to be equipped with practical tools. A solid methodological base, materials needed during lessons, worksheets, lesson plans, help in creating curricula, and above all, good textbooks are some of the suggestions which the participants have given.

There are no curricula, no textbooks and no help for teachers. There is no information on what ethics is and what purpose it serves.

E1-0580

To give teachers more tools and more ways of curriculum implementation. To help to create proprietary curricula.

E1-0708

First of all, teachers of ethics should be educated in the same way as teachers of other school subjects. In my opinion, ethics is taught by random teachers.

E1-0286

In-service education

The participants emphasized that it is crucial to ensure continuous professional development of ethics teachers, and not to confine their education to training and obtaining the qualifications necessary for teaching the subject in schools. In their opinion, the support that ethics teachers receive during their work is an extremely important issue. Therefore, it is important to plan and implement a proper number of courses, trainings, workshops and conferences, and to make them more accessible (the term was not defined).

I am an early childhood education teacher. We do not have any opportunities for in-service education. I rely on the core curriculum for younger students and the “Human Paths” programme. I look for materials on my own. I would be happy to use some form of in-service education.

E1-0744

It is just the beginning of ethics in schools. There aren't any offers of courses or trainings at the II and III educational stage.

E1-0099

The participants think that with the increase of the number and accessibility of trainings, it would be necessary to improve teachers' skills and tools for conducting ethics lessons using various methods and forms of work with children from different age groups, working with mixed-age classes and teaching ethics to younger students.

Additional trainings on teaching ethics to the youngest students (Grades 1 to 3), additional materials, worksheets for Grade 1 students who are not able to read yet.

E1-1180

In-service courses in the teaching of ethics. While working with students, you need didactic materials (textbooks, exercise books, films, charts, etc.).

E1-0284

Courses for teachers who teach ethics and who have degrees in humanities (not philosophy) should be introduced. Such courses could be aimed at refreshing the main issues of ethics.

E1-0803

Organizing courses and trainings aimed at demonstrating different forms and methods of teaching this subject.

E1-0561

The participants also suggested:

Organising in-service training courses every five years; carrying out tests to minimize the number of biased persons!

E1-1051

Bringing back qualification courses conducted at the In-service Teacher Training Centre. Postgraduate courses are too expensive and bothersome (many hours of practical classes, whereas we are already teachers – we do not lack skills or tools, possibly some knowledge). I have been taking part in very good seminars conducted by a methodologist for years and that is enough for me. It is a pity that it does not give me full eligibility to teach ethics.

E1-0196

Ensuring the possibility of online training and consultation with experienced teacher-educators. Creating a platform for discussions and developing more programmes.

E1-0380

Summary

The presented findings induce reflections on the pre-service and in-service education of ethics teachers and support in their pedagogical work, so that the subject does not only fill in a lesson schedule but becomes a significant element of the education and social system in Poland. The findings showed that the position of an ethics teacher should definitely be strengthened by avoiding random

selection when entrusting ethics classes to teachers and placing emphasis on shaping high standards in the requirements that such a teacher should fulfil.

There is no doubt that the education of teachers of this new and niche subject, one which they did not learn as students themselves, is quite a challenge. The teachers emphasized that what they need is knowledge at the university level – in-service education, regardless of its form, does not guarantee full-time employment. At the same time, they expect systematic, planned and effective support, and above all, methodological support (courses, guides, textbooks), which will be really helpful in conducting ethics lessons in the best possible way.

The teaching profession places specific demands on each of its representatives, not only ethics teachers, in terms of professionalism, education, ethics of profession, in-depth ethical reflection and sensitivity (Madalińska-Michalak, 2016). Among numerous issues concerning teachers, regardless of the subject they teach, one should not forget about those connected with their professional preparation, life-long learning and ethical dimension of their work. This aspect is very important, especially in relation to teachers dealing with the subject whose history is relatively short in comparison with other subjects taught in Polish schools.

Abstract: This paper reports on a nationwide mixed methods study that investigated the challenges faced by teachers who teach ethics at schools in Poland. Several challenges affecting teachers in Poland were identified. These challenges included: qualifications of teachers; teacher education; didactics (teaching and learning); teaching materials and teaching aids; attractiveness of ethics as the subject at school; organization of work for delivering lessons of ethics; pupil traits and teaching programs; stereotypes related to the perception of ethics as the school subject. In the paper the special attention is paid to the challenges related to qualifications of teachers of ethics and their teacher education. The findings suggest that support provided for teachers of ethics must be aligned to local and school educational policies and educational conditions as well as strategies at national level. This paper contributes to understanding the complexities of the work of teachers who teach ethics at schools in Poland.

Keywords: ethics as a curriculum subject, place and role of ethics in school education in Poland, teachers of ethics as a school subject, challenges in teaching, teacher education

Streszczenie: W artykule przedstawiono wyniki ogólnopolskich badań z zastosowaniem podejścia ilościowego i jakościowego, w których poddano analizie wyzwania stojące przed nauczycielami uczącymi etyki w szkołach. Analiza wyników badań pozwoliła na identyfikację szeregu wyzwań, z którymi mierzą się nauczyciele etyki. Wyzwania te obejmowały: kwalifikacje nauczycieli; kształcenie nauczycieli; dydaktykę (nauczanie i uczenie się); materiały dydaktyczne i pomoce naukowe; atrakcyjność etyki jako przedmiotu w szkole; organizację pracy w celu realizacji lekcji etyki; cechy ucznia i programy nauczania; stereotypy związane z postrzeganiem etyki jako przedmiotu szkolnego. W artykule zwrócono szczególną uwagę na wyzwania związane z kwalifikacjami nauczycieli etyki i ich całościowej edukacji. Wyniki sugerują, że wsparcie nauczycieli etyki jest uzależnione od polityki edukacyjnej na poziomie kraju, regionu i szkoły oraz od warunków, jakie są tworzone nauczycielom etyki. Artykuł wnosi wkład w zrozumienie złożoności pracy nauczycieli, którzy uczą etyki w szkołach w Polsce.

Słowa kluczowe: etyka jako przedmiot nauczania, miejsce i rola etyki w edukacja szkolna w Polsce, nauczyciele etyki, wyzwania w pracy nauczyciela, edukacja nauczyciela

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