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Ethics lessons: A school subject in the making

Abstract: This article discusses the teaching of ethics in the educational system in Poland as a separate subject. The first part describes the historical process that brought ethics into the school curriculum. The second part provides knowledge about the legal status of ethics instruction and the prevalence of participation in ethical education. In the third part, the authors analyse the guidelines on teaching ethics for primary and secondary schools contained in the Core curriculum of general education.

Keywords: ethics, ethics teaching, education, educational system

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Introduction

One of the changes that occurred in the school curriculum after the collapse of the communist system in Poland in 1989 was the emergence of ethics as a subject. It is true that schools offered moral education, but it only became a “normal” school subject in the last two centuries.¹ The teaching of moral ethics in the Polish educational system was linked to two processes. The first was the political transformation and the second was secularisation. Both these processes still leave a significant mark on the discussion on the objectives of school ethical instruction in Poland.²

The analyses presented below relate to teaching ethics in the educational system in Poland after the political breakthrough in 1989. The first part describes the historical process that brought ethics into the school curriculum as a separate subject. The second part provides knowledge about the legal status of ethics instruction and the prevalence of children’s and youth’s participation at ethics classes. In the third part, the authors analyse the guidelines on teaching ethics for primary and secondary schools contained in the *Core curriculum of general education*.

1. History of ethics as a school subject

In Poland, ethics lessons were introduced to public schools in 1990 due to the restoration of religious education. The latter was removed from public education in 1961 during the first reform of the school system after World War II, which was carried out by the “people’s authorities”.³ Former realities could not be recreated until after the socio-political-cultural breakthrough in 1989. However, this was not a return to the *status quo* almost three decades ago. Both historical moments are distinguished by the appearance of ethics in the school curriculum⁴. 1 September 1990 was the date not only of the return of religious education to the Polish public education system, but also the beginning of teaching ethics as a separate subject.

¹ D. Stępkowski, *School Moral Education: Does Scholastic Ethical Instruction Need Its Own ‘Morality’?*, [in:] B. Kudláčová, A. Rajský (eds.), *Education and “Pädagogik” – Philosophical and Historical Reflection*, Berlin 2019, pp. 147–155; D. Benner, R. Nikolova, *Stan umiędzynarodowienia badania ETiK i jego koncepcja teoretyczno-empiryczna*, “Forum Pedagogiczne”, 2019, 2 (1), pp. 22–25.

² J.M. Madalińska-Michalak, A.J. Jeżowski, *Etyka i religia jako przedmioty nauczania: konkurencyjność czy komplementarność?*, “Forum Oświatowe”, 2018, 30 (2), pp. 219–241. Retrieved March 1, 2020, from: <http://forumoswiatowe.pl/index.php/czasopismo/article/view/655/416>.

³ T. Hejnicka-Bezwińska, *Praktyka edukacyjna w warunkach zmiany kulturowej (w poszukiwaniu logiki zmian)*, Warszawa 2015, pp. 292–296.

⁴ In the past, representatives of the socialist theory of education promoted the project of instilling secular materialistic morality for children and youth. This was to be done not in the form of school lessons, but in moral education, which would cover all spheres of individual and social life. Cf. B. Suchodolski, *O program świeckiego wychowania moralnego*, Warszawa 1961; H. Muszyński, *Wychowanie moralne w zespole*, Warszawa 1974.

The conditions and manner of organizing ethics instruction were set out in the regulation of the Ministry of National Education (hereafter MEN) in 1992, which still applies with only minor amendments.⁵ Ethical education is presented as a substitute for religious education. This means that parents who do not wish to raise their children religiously at school, or pupils themselves when they reach the age of majority, can report to the school authorities the desire to receive ethics instruction. The headmaster is responsible for organizing these classes on the spot, i.e. in a given school if the number of pupils is at least seven, or in inter-school groups if there are less than seven pupils but not less than three.

The actual practice of organizing ethics classes in the first two decades was poor and did not adhere to regulations. Leading school authorities responded sluggishly to parents and pupils demands for ethics classes. This led to a case at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg – *Grzelak v. Poland*.⁶ The trial ended in 2010. The subject of the trial was the complaint of Czesław and Urszula Grzelak, who demanded from the Polish State that they would realistically guarantee their son Mateusz the opportunity to attend ethics classes after they had discharged him from religious education at school. The headmasters of several public schools which their son attended refused to organize such classes only for him, on the grounds that there were not enough applicants – at least three pupils were required.

The ECHR judges found that the lack of access to ethical education in Polish public schools is a violation of the freedom of religion and the prohibition of discrimination. On this basis, they obliged the Government of Poland to introduce changes that will effectively contribute to respecting the indicated prerogatives. In this context, it is worth noting that the ECHR's decision on teaching ethics in Polish schools referred to anti-discrimination standards. The consequences this will be discussed below.

Corrective actions were implemented after the ECHR's verdict. In connection with this, the MEN issued an amendment to the regulation of 1992 in 2014.⁷ In principle, the changes concerned two matters: firstly, the abolition of the criterion making the formation of an inter-school group dependent on at least three pupils enrolled and, secondly, clarifying the form of making a wish regarding participation in religion or ethics classes – instead of the statement expressed “in simplest form”, “a written statement” has been introduced, while maintaining the possibility of changing it at any time.

⁵ *Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 14 kwietnia 1992 r. w sprawie warunków i sposobu organizowania nauki religii w szkołach publicznych*, Dz.U. z 1992 r. Nr 36, poz. 155.

⁶ *Sprawa Grzelak przeciwko Polsce (skarga nr 7710/02)*. Retrieved March 1, 2020, from: <http://trybunal.gov.pl/polskie-akcenty-w-orzecznictwie-miedzynarodowym/rada-europy-europejski-trybunal-praw-czlowieka/w-sprawach-polskich/art/8251-sprawa-grzelak-przeciwko-polsce-skarga-nr-7710-02-wyrok-z-15-czerwca-2010-r/>.

⁷ *Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 25 marca 2014 r. zmieniające rozporządzenie w sprawie warunków i sposobu organizowania nauki religii w publicznych przedszkolach i szkołach*, Dz.U. z 2014 r., poz. 478.

One of the most important consequences of the translocation of ethical education in Poland into the sphere of equality (anti-discrimination) policy initiated by the ECHR's judgment was the inclusion of this issue by the Ombudsman in the scope of his competence. Adam Bodnar, who was in office at the time, commissioned a study on the availability of minority religion classes and ethics classes in Poland. In the published report, the Ombudsman formulated a number of postulates regarding ethical education. He demanded, among others:

- keeping statistics by the MEN on the basis of which it would be possible to estimate actual access to ethics classes in Polish schools and monitor its dynamics;
- conducting a campaign directed at parents to inform them of their children's right to ethics classes at school;
- imposing the obligation to organize ethics instruction by law, and not only by regulation of the MEN;
- formal commitment of headmasters to inform all parents and pupils at the beginning of the school year about the possibilities and principles of organizing ethical education;
- introducing ethical education in nursery schools on the same principles as religious education;
- recognition of all barriers to access to ethics instruction as a manifestation of discrimination.⁸

The above postulates were repeated by Bodnar in his communications with the MEN. He called for compliance with the principles of equality in the field of ethical education in public schools.⁹ The replies of the MEN have consistently emphasized that the existing provisions of educational law sufficiently counteract discrimination in schools regarding ethics instruction. In this way, opposition to principles from outside educational law was opposed.

The intentions behind the aspirations to reclassify ethics education to the competence scope of equality (anti-discrimination) policy are revealed by the statement contained in the Ombudsman report. It is true that it primarily refers to religious education, but by analogy it also concerns ethical education. "Discrimination on the grounds of religion in the field of education should be considered [...] prohibited under the provisions of the Constitution and international law in force in Poland, however, victims of discrimination cannot benefit from the measures provided for in the Act of December 3, 2010 on the implementation of certain European Union rules on

⁸ A. Bodnar, *Dostępność lekcji religii wyznań mniejszościowych i lekcji etyki w ramach systemu edukacji szkolnej. Analiza i zalecenia*, "Biuletyn Rzecznika Praw Obywatelskich", 2015, 6, pp. 51–55. Retrieved March 1, 2020, from: https://www.rpo.gov.pl/sites/default/files/BIULETYN_RZECZNIKA_PRAW_OBYWATELSKICH_2015_nr_6.pdf.

⁹ A. Bodnar, *RPO w sprawie szkół, uczniów, rodziców i nauczycieli. Przykłady spraw z kadencji 2015–2019*, 2019. Retrieved March 1, 2020, from: https://www.rpo.gov.pl/sites/default/files/RPO_w_sprawie_szkol.pdf.

equal treatment and seeking compensation on this basis.”¹⁰ Reclassifying the problem of ethics and religion instruction in schools would provide tools to bring financial claims before the courts for “moral harm”.

In view of the above, it is not surprising that the topic of ethical education in Polish schools is characterized by a strong ideological tinge. It certainly does not positively influence the essential discussion on moral and ethical education in the contemporary school system.¹¹

2. Dissemination of ethical education

In the previous section, the legal status and organization of ethics instruction in public schools in Poland have been explained in part. Further elaboration is provided below. The authors also present available statistical data on the participation of children and young people in ethical education.

Pursuant to the applicable provisions of Polish educational law, ethical education – like religious education – is not compulsory, but optional. The pupils have the right to participate in classes in religion, ethics, both subjects, and may not choose any of them. Participation is decided by parents or senior pupils by submitting a written statement. After submitting the statement, participation becomes mandatory. Headmasters have the responsibility to organize ethics teaching for each pupil, even if there is only one. If, in a given school, some pupils express their wish to attend classes in both religion and ethics, the school authority is obliged to enable them to participate in both subjects, placing them without collision in the school timetable. If pupils do not attend religion or ethics classes at school, they should be provided with care activities for the duration of these classes.

In Poland, the practice is widespread, whereby pupils dropping out of religion classes do not report willingness to learn ethics and are directed to a common room or school library, where they spend their time more or less idle.

Ethics instruction can be held at all types of public schools. However, there is no provision for teaching ethics in nursery, although religious education can be provided there at the parents’ request. Weekly ethics teaching hours are set by the school head. Usually it is 45-minute lesson a week.

An ethics teacher can be a person who has achieved the level of education required for a given type of school, finishing accordingly: (1) higher education (bachelor’s or master’s) degree in philosophy or ethics and a pedagogical qualification course or (2) higher education (bachelor’s or master’s) degree in a field of study whose pro-

¹⁰ A. Bodnar, *Dostępność...*, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

¹¹ D. Stępkowski, *Kształcenie religijne w publicznym interesie. Perspektywa pedagogiki ogólnej*, “Przegląd Pedagogiczny”, 2018, 2, pp. 103–119; J.M. Madalińska-Michalak, A.J. Jeżowski, *Etyka i religia...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 219–241.

gram covered the content of the ethics or philosophy, e.g. in humanities, including theology, and pedagogical qualification course, or (3) higher education (bachelor's or master's) degree in a different field than the ones mentioned above, and also completed post-graduate studies in philosophy or ethics and a pedagogical qualification course.¹²

At the first educational stage, i.e. in grades 1–3 of primary school, an early school education teacher can also conduct ethics instruction.

The ethics grade is placed on the certificate and is included in the average. However, it does not affect the promotion to the next school level.

Objectives, teaching content, recommended conditions and method of conducting classes in ethical education are specified in the national *Core curriculum of general education*, the latest amendment of which entered into force in 2017. They will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

In accordance with the requirements of educational law, an ethics teacher presents the school headmaster with his/her curriculum. The headmaster, after consulting the teaching council, approves the program proposed by the teacher for use and enters it into the school's set of curricula. When preparing his/her curriculum, a teacher can use programs that have been recommended by the MEN as suitable for school use. It should be emphasized that these programs are not obligatory.

Ethics textbooks require approval from the MEN. Most textbooks were created for teaching ethics in upper secondary school (*liceum ogólnokształcące*). Most of them are certified by the MEN.

The above-mentioned Ombudsman report states that: "The statistical data collected by the MEN do not contain information about which denominations of religion are instructed at school, or how many pupils attend minority religion classes or ethics classes. Currently, data are aggregated in one general position: *teaching ethics and religion at school*."¹³ This undoubtedly makes it difficult to estimate the prevalence of participation of children and youth in ethical education in public schools. Citing data obtained from the MEN, the same report presents data for the 2014/2015 school year. They will be used below to outline the prevalence of ethics instruction in Poland.

The table below summarizes the number of nursery schools and public schools where ethical education was held and in which there were no such classes, with the total number of educational institutions of a given type in the 2014/2015 school year.

¹² Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 1 sierpnia 2017 r. w sprawie szczególnych kwalifikacji wymaganych od nauczycieli, Dz.U. z 2017 r., poz. 1575.

¹³ A. Bodnar, *Dostępność...*, op.cit., p. 51.

**Table 1. Teaching ethics in nursery schools and public schools
in the 2014/2015 school year**

Type of educational institution	Number of educational institutions with ethics education	Number of educational establishments without ethics education	Total number of educational institutions
Nursery school	27 (0.85%)	3,133 (99.15%)	3,160
primary school	1,119 (9.1%)	11,231 (90.9%)	12,350
junior high school	815 (12.4%)	5,758 (87.6%)	6,573
basic vocational school	89 (5.7%)	1,468 (94.3%)	1,557
upper secondary school	448 (24.4%)	1,385 (75.6%)	1,833
total (100%)	2,498 (9.77%)	22,975 (90.23%)	25,473

Source: Based on A. Bodnar, *Dostępność...*, *op.cit.*, p. 34.

In the 2014/2015 school year, there were a total of 25,473 nursery school and public schools of various levels in Poland (primary, junior high and secondary schools: vocational schools and general secondary schools). Ethics instruction were conducted in every tenth of them, with the exception of nursery, the smallest percentage was recorded in basic vocational schools (5.7%), and the largest in upper secondary schools (24.4%).

The next chart presents data illustrating the dynamics of growth that has occurred in relation to the dissemination of ethical education in public schools over the past two decades. The function of the measuring tool is played by conversion of the amount of public schools with ethics education and full-time ethics teachers' jobs. The data was obtained from the research study on teaching ethics in the Polish educational system¹⁴ and the website "Etyka w szkole"¹⁵.

¹⁴ J.M. Madalińska-Michalak, A.J. Jeżowski, Sz. Więśław, *Etyka w systemie edukacji w Polsce*. Warszawa 2017, pp. 40–41.

¹⁵ <https://www.etykawszkole.pl/>.

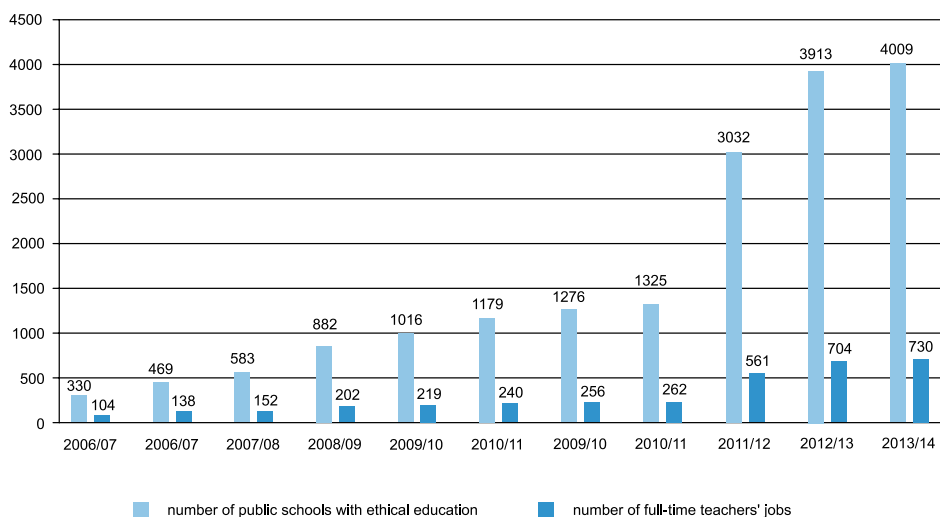


Chart 1. Juxtaposition of the number of public schools with ethical education and the number of full-time ethics teachers' jobs

Source: Own elaboration.

The chart above shows a rapid increase in the number of public schools with ethics instruction occurred in the 2014/2015 school year. There were 128.8% more such a school than a year previous. The situation was similar with the number of ethics teachers' jobs, where they increased by 114.1% compared to the previous year. When comparing the numbers of both measures with the 2006/2007 school year, it turns out that the increase in public schools with ethical education was nine-fold, while the number of full-time ethics teachers' jobs increased fivefold. It is true that the upward trend in both ranges continued even in the 2015/2016 school year, but the resulting increases were not so spectacular. The number of public schools with ethics instruction and the full-time ethics teachers' jobs increased by 29% and 25.5% respectively compared to the previous year. This process slowed down in 2016/2017 school year, when 96 public schools with ethics classes arrived, which means an increase of only 2.5% compared to the previous year, and 26 full-time ethics teachers' jobs, i.e. 3.7% more than a year earlier.

Of course, based on the data presented so far, it is difficult to make reasonable assumptions about the future of ethical education. As it was written in the Ombudsman report: "Ethics is slowly ceasing to be treated as [...] opposition to religion."¹⁶ On the other hand, the crisis of religious education is clearly outlined in public education. The phenomenon is indicated quite clearly by the results of research conducted since 1991 by the Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej (Public Opinion Research Center, hereafter CBOS) on the subject of youth religiosity, i.e. high school pupils. The chart

¹⁶ A. Bodnar, *Dostępność...*, *op.cit.*, p. 6.

below presents the percentage proportions of pupils participating in and not participating in religious education at school in subsequent editions of the study.

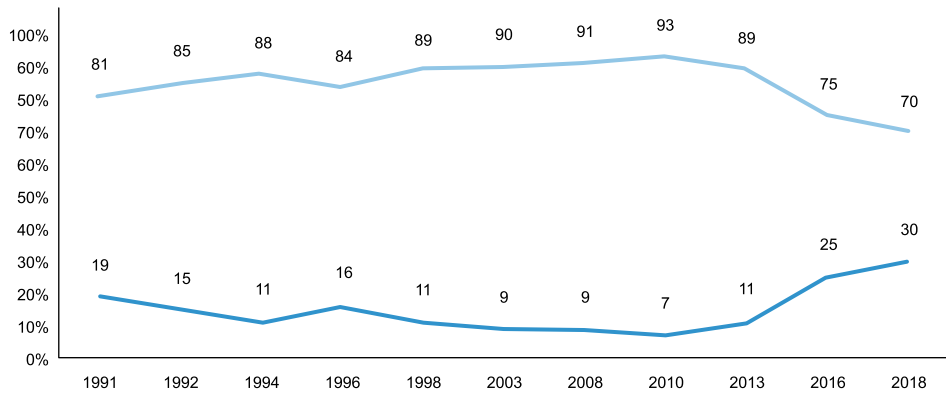


Chart 2. Participation of upper secondary school pupils in religious education at school

Source: CBOS, *Młodzież 2018*, eds. by M. Grabowska, M. Gwiazda. Warszawa 2019, p. 16.

A systematic decrease in the percentage of pupils participating in religious education at school has been observed since 2010. In a sense, this is a reversal of the trend recorded in the earlier period, when these percentages increased, reaching a maximum value of 93% in 2010. Starting from the measurement carried out in 2013, this indicator is drastically falling down. In 2018, only 70% of pupils declared participation in religious education at school, i.e. the least in the history of research conducted by CBOS.

Of course, the decline of religious education in public schools cannot be interpreted as an announcement of a further increase in the demand for ethical education. To justify this, it is enough to recall the practice indicated above, according to which pupils having a choice of religion classes or ethics classes do not choose any of the possible options. This state of affairs must raise general concern – both among those preferring the teaching of religion at school and those preferring the teaching of ethics. Nobody should imagine winning in this situation. And the biggest loser will definitely be the young generation.

3. Curriculum for ethical instruction

As indicated above, the objectives, content, effects (achievements), recommended conditions and method of implementing ethics as a school subject are included in the *Core curriculum of general education*. This is the document of the MEN which contains directives for public schools of all levels and types regarding general education and subjects falling within its scope. The ministerial guidelines on teaching ethics in primary and secondary school will be analysed below.

3.1. Primary school

Education in primary school in Poland lasts 8 years and is divided into two stages: the first includes classes 1–3, the second classes 4–8. In the first stage, teaching takes the form of integrated education. This means that there is no division into subjects yet, and the contents falling within the scope of early school education are divided into thematic areas, e.g. Polish language, mathematics, social education, nature education. In total, 13 such areas have been identified in the core curriculum. Ethical education is one of them.

The second educational stage characterizes subject teaching. The list contained in the core curriculum includes 21 subjects, including ethical education.

Based on the Regulation of the MEN of February 14, 2017, in primary school, there are 13 goals to achieve. From the perspective of moral and ethical education, it is worth paying attention to the following:

- 1) introducing pupils to the world of values, including cooperation, solidarity, altruism, patriotism and respect for tradition, showing best practices and building social relations conducive to the safe development of the pupil (family, friends);
- 2) strengthening the sense of individual, cultural, national, regional and ethnic identity;
- 3) forming pupils' sense of dignity and respect for the dignity of others; [...]
- 5) developing the skills of critical and logical thinking, reasoning and argumentation; [...]
- 8) equipping pupils with such information and shaping such skills that allow them to understand the world in a more mature and orderly way; [...]
- 11) shaping an open attitude towards the world and other people, activity in social life and responsibility for the community; [...]
- 13) orienting the pupil towards values.¹⁷

Due to the division of primary school education into two stages, program assumptions related to ethical education will be discussed separately for each of them.

The overall goal of early school education is to support the integral development of a child in all areas (they will be discussed below). It is worth pointing to one of the recommendations addressed to early school education. The organization of classes is to enable pupils to “learn about social values and norms which source is family, local and regional community, nation, and to develop behaviours resulting from these values and which the child can understand at a given stage of development.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 14 lutego 2017 r. w sprawie podstawy programowej wychowania przedszkolnego oraz podstawy programowej kształcenia ogólnego dla szkoły podstawowej, w tym dla uczniów z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną w stopniu umiarkowanym lub znacznym, kształcenia ogólnego dla branżowej szkoły I stopnia, kształcenia ogólnego dla szkoły specjalnej przysposabiającej do pracy oraz kształcenia ogólnego dla szkoły policealnej, Dz.U. z 2017 r., poz. 356, p. 11.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

In the document analysed, all attention is directed to the effects (achievements) that the pupil should display thanks to ethical education. These effects (achievements) have been described in the curriculum up to two times. First, in assigning to four areas of pupil development, namely: physical, emotional, social and cognitive. In the formulations referring to each of these areas, one can see effects (achievements) which are influenced by teaching ethics, e.g. “the ability to respect the rules of games, team play and rules of moving in public places” (physical development) or “awareness of values recognized by the home, school, local and national environment; the need for social activity based on these values” (social development).

The second, much more detailed description of the effects (achievements) of ethical education as one of the thematic areas is included in the core curriculum in the part titled “Teaching contents”. Contrary to expectations, there are no recommendations as to the topics or material suggestions that can be used during classes with pupils, but a list of expected effects (achievements). It was divided into two parts: “Achievements in understanding basic principles and concepts of ethics” and “Achievements in the application of known principles”.¹⁹ In the first part of the list with the help of the so-called operational verbs have been described the understanding of the following ethical concepts: “dignity”, “freedom”, “good”, “choice”, “responsibility”, “happiness”, “community”, “respect”, and moral principles: determining what is good and what is wrong, distinguishing happiness from temporary pleasure and establishing by the community of people their rules and norms.

The second part of the discussed list of effects (achievements) of ethical education can be considered a practical application of the principles presented in the first part. Also here, operational terminology is used, i.e. verbs such as “A pupil respects...”, “A pupil expresses...”, “A pupil takes into account...”, “A pupil enters into relationships...”, “A pupil names...”, “A pupil mimics...”, “A pupil observes...”.

As already mentioned above, ethical education at the second stage of primary school, i.e. in the classes 4–8, takes the form of regular subject teaching. Therefore, the classes are conducted in 45-minute units, whose participants are usually pupils from different classes and even schools.

The goals of teaching ethics are grouped in the core curriculum in four areas, namely: (1) axiological sensitivity and reflectivity, (2) moral reasoning, (3) moral attitudes and (4) self-education. Regarding the criterion of this division, it is worth noting that: “Ethics as a school subject taught in primary school is to achieve primarily practical and educational goals.”²⁰ On this basis, it can be assumed that it is less a matter of theoretical inquiry, but rather practical skills resulting from reflection on moral and ethical problems. Confirmation of this assumption are the objectives contained in these four areas. For example, the last one (self-education) mentions

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 52–53.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 207.

the following: “1. Developing the skills of independent search for information, their valuation and reliable and responsible use of knowledge. 2. Recognizing and solving moral problems. 3. Identifying and eliminating factors limiting agency. 4. Developing moral self-awareness.”²¹

It is noteworthy that the authors of the core curriculum are fully aware that: “The expression of the sphere of moral autonomy of the pupil is expanding by his/her gradual internalisation of moral values and norms and a deepening understanding of himself as a moral subject,” however, “teaching ethics can only assist the pupil in actually accomplishing this key task; its effective implementation requires [...] the decision of the pupil him/herself, complementarity of educational interactions and many years of the pupil’s work on him/herself.”²²

Unlike most subjects, the content of ethical education was not assigned in the core curriculum to separate degrees of school learning and teaching, but was grouped into eight thematic sections. It seems that the reason for this decision is the fact that ethics classes usually take place in inter-departmental and inter-school groups, which practically prevents the teacher from working with a homogeneous pupil group. In other words, pupils with diverse knowledge and level of moral development participate in these classes. Consequently, it requires the teacher to skilfully select the content of ethical education.

At the core of these eight thematic sections, to which the teaching content has been sorted, lies the logic characteristic of school education. It is characterized by a gradual transition from theoretical knowledge through skills to practical application.

The first section indicates key issues in general ethics that relate to the cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspect of morality. The emphasis was on educating “linguistic thinking”.²³ Thus, the creators of the core curriculum define the focus of teaching ethics on concepts and activities that enable dealing with moral phenomena. These are the following groups of concepts and activities:

- 1) the cognitive aspect: “decision, deed, agency, conflict, problem, subject of the action (author, perpetrator), recipient of the action, intention of action, motive of action, contentiousness, effect (consequence), circumstances of action”²⁴; “Good, evil, value, criterion, principle (norm, rule), attitude, virtue, defect, duty, sanction, conscience, model, authority, responsibility, natural law, constitutional law, dignity, human rights, human nature, truth, happiness”²⁵; “prescribed, prohibited, permitted, optional (supererogation)”²⁶;

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 202.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 207.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 208.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 202.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 203.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

- 2) the emotional aspect: “joy, sadness, fear, disgust, surprise, anger, acceptance, pride, love, hatred, pleasure, annoyance, happiness, shame, guilt, jealousy”²⁷;
- 3) behavioural aspect: naming, describing, explaining, discussing, distinguishing and analysing.

Sections from two to six contain directives as to the objectives (achievements) that the pupil should achieve after analysing the possible relationships in which (s)he experiences the world in and around him/herself and can act in it. The titles of these sections are “Man to other people”, “Man to himself”, “Man and the world of human products”, “Man to nature”, and finally “Man to God (Sacrum)”.

The contents of teaching in the seventh and eighth sections are optional. It is expected that thanks to the seventh section, the pupil will acquire the ability to systematically consider moral problems. This skill consists in particular in (1) identifying and classifying a given problem, (2) x-raying it through the prism of one’s own experience, (3) precisely formulating a moral problem in the form of a question, (4) analysing it by using the concepts of ethical discourse, and finally (5) discussing with other pupils.

The eighth section includes selected representatives of the history of philosophical ethics and their theories, namely Socrates, Aristotle, Kant, Mill, Scheler, Kotarbiński and Wojtyła. As explained in the core curriculum: “The selection of authors and suggested issues that are worth discussing with pupils are explained as follows:

- 1) these issues are a good illustration for many important ethical issues that find expression in the core curriculum;
- 2) becoming acquainted with the selected views of great thinkers, the pupil realizes that many momentous moral problems have already been the subject of thorough reflection and one can use this extremely valuable cultural heritage nowadays;
- 3) knowledge of historically important ethical ideas is an inalienable component of comprehensive education”²⁸.

The above-mentioned optional character of the last two sections of the core curriculum for senior grades of primary school means that the teacher should each year complete with pupils at least three selected moral problems of the seventh chapter and at least three elements of ethics history, introducing this content from the sixth grade of primary school. It is recommended that the teacher introducing selected elements of ethics history use short fragments of classical texts.

3.2. Secondary school

In the Regulation of the MEN of January 30, 2018 for secondary schools, as for primary schools at the second stage, ethical education is mainly assigned practical sig-

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 202.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 208.

nificance.²⁹ Nevertheless, the content of ethical instruction is further advanced. It manifests itself in a clear emphasis on the theoretical and philosophical specificity of ethical education. According to the creators of the mentioned document, thanks to the combination of both these dimensions, i.e. practical-educational and theoretical-philosophical, teaching ethics is to contribute to the development of students in the skills of moral and ethical thinking, “whose essence is the constant interaction between theorizing and practical performance.”³⁰ It is worth noting that due to the theoretical emphasis of the ethical education, two aspects were distinguished: hermeneutic and emancipatory. The first is about achieving goals related to understanding the pupil him/herself and the world, while the second is about strengthening his/her autonomy.³¹

Regarding the organizational side, ethics as teaching subject is offered in secondary schools only in the basic range. This regulation probably results from a limited number of hours that the headmasters dispose in relation to the optional school subject.

As at the second stage of primary school, the learning objectives have been grouped into four areas. They are described by the following titles: “Identity, subjectivity and moral development”, “Ethical knowledge”, “Discussing moral views” and “Self-education”.³² Along with the core curriculum for primary school, instead of the expected dispositions regarding the issue of ethics classes in the section entitled “Course content”, the effects (achievements) that are expected from pupils are presented. This part has been divided into two sections: (1) elements of general ethics and (2) selected issues of applied ethics.

The first section contains two subdivisions entitled: “Basic ethical knowledge” and “Analysis of human action under the moral aspect”, for which a total of 18 learning outcomes were scored.³³ The second section lists six specific areas, which are labelled as follows: “Ethics of personal (individual) life”, “Bioethics”, “Social and political ethics”, “Ethics – science – technology”, “Ethics and environment” and “Ethics of different professions”. For each area, 3 to 18 learning outcomes have been verbalized. The presentation closes with a list of readings recommended for use in discussing selected ethical issues. This list includes only 8 items that deserve to be called classic.³⁴

In the “Basic ethical knowledge” subsection, it is expected that the pupil can explain what ethics does as a science and what types of ethical reflection are. (S)He should also be able to analyse and explain the relationship between ethics, morality,

²⁹ *Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 30 stycznia 2018 r. w sprawie podstawy programowej kształcenia ogólnego dla liceum ogólnokształcącego, technikum oraz branżowej szkoły II stopnia*, Dz.U. z 2018 r., poz. 467.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 22.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

³² *Ibidem*, pp. 324–325.

³³ *Ibidem*, pp. 325–326.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 326–328.

customs, law and religion. In addition, (s)he should be able to explain the concept of moral norm and present the origin of selected moral norms. The range of skills expected from him/her also includes explaining the concept of a person, the relationship between anthropological and ethical decisions, defining terms specific to different ethical positions, identifying the main types of ethical reflection and applying the selected ethical theory to analyse a given moral issue. The level of expectations regarding effects (achievements) in this part of the core curriculum is very high. This raises the rhetorical question: is it possible and to what extent it can be realized at all if one takes into account the organizational conditions of the ethics teaching in public education?

Conclusion

In the Polish educational system, ethics as a separate subject entered schools only at the beginning of the 90s of the last century. However, an increasing number of primary and secondary school pupils are not attending either ethics classes or religion classes. It must be stated that this creates an increasing gap in their preparation for life in a democratic community what is the task of public education system. Ethics instruction takes three forms in the Polish educational system: (1) one of the thematic areas of integrated early education, (2) a separate learning and teaching subject in older classes of primary school and (3) introductory course on philosophical ethics in secondary schools.

It seems that ethics as a subject of school education lacks grounding from the side of educational science(s). Such grounding means developing strictly pedagogical arguments justifying the need for ethical education and its task in the public education system in Poland.

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