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PROFESSIONAL ETHICS CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR LATIN AMERICA

Rudolf von Sinner

Abstracto

Una educación significativa es, y de hecho debería ser: 1) *Transformadora,* buscando desarrollar la propia subjetividad de cada uno, en especial la de aquellos a quienes históricamente se les ha negado; 2) *Inclusiva*, capacitando para una participación efectiva en la sociedad con una ciudadanía adecuada; 3) *Provocadora de reflexión y creatividad*, en lugar de limitarse a dar respuestas pre-digeridas; 4) Promotora del *compromiso* de todos, con todos y para todos en el mundo concreto donde 5) no sólo hay que formular de nuevo las respuestas, sino que surgen *nuevas preguntas* que deben ser planteadas y respondidas[62]. El artículo destaca como elementos de una ética profesional fomentada por las instituciones de enseñanza superior: I) El aprendizaje es un proceso integral y holístico en diálogo, hablando con y desde el corazón, la mente y la mano - afecto, reflexión y acción;

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II) La educación superior consiste en *obtener* un título en primer lugar, no sólo en *tener* un título - tenemos que fomentar la verdadera autoría; y; III) El conocimiento es provisional, pero no arbitrario - tenemos que dar buenas razones, para rendir cuentas sobre bases razonablemente objetivas; y IV) La ciencia busca la verdad, siendo consciente de que la verdad está sujeta a una interpretación a veces muy diversa y, por lo tanto, tiene que someterse a la conversación y desarrollarse a través de una argumentación construida lógicamente.

Palabras clave: educación superior, ética profesional, reflexión, acción, dialogo, argumentación.

Abstract

Meaningful education is, and indeed should be: 1) *Transformative*, seeking to develop one's own subjectivity, especially that of those who have historically been denied; 2) *Inclusive*, training for effective participation in society with adequate citizenship; 3) Seeking to *capacitate persons to foster reflection and creativity*, instead of just giving pre-digested responses; 4) *Promoting the commitment of everyone*, with everyone and for everyone in the concrete world where 5) *not only do we have to formulate the answers again, but new questions arise* that must be asked and answered. The article highlights as elements of a professional ethic promoted by higher education institutions: I) *Learning* is an integral and holistic process in dialogue, speaking with and from the heart, mind and hand - affection, reflection and action; II) *Higher education is not just about having a degree* - we have to foster true authorship; and; III) *Knowledge is provisional, but not arbitrary* - we have to give good reasons, to render accounts on a reasonably objective basis; and IV) *Science seeks truth*, being aware that truth is subject to an interpretation that is sometimes very diverse and, therefore, has to undergo conversation and develop through logically constructed argumentation.

A meaningful education would seek to capacitate persons for living in today's world

Latin America has a long history of lacking, frail or failing education, but also of important initiatives to overcome analphabetism and to advance beyond a mere "banking" model of education that just seeks to "deposit" knowledge and to call it up when needed. The new concept was that learners, in partnership with educators, should be enabled to become subjects, fully exercising their freedom and autonomy in interaction with others. A meaningful education would seek to capacitate persons for living in today's world, understanding and being able to actively contribute, to recognize oneself fully as a citizen and be recognized by others as such. Citizenship, in Portuguese "cidadania" and in Spanish "ciudadania" is more than just being an national subject to national laws and policies: it is a way of being in the world, ethically conscious of one's rights, duties, solidarity and sense of fully belonging to society – something which is not just a given, but has to be conquered and developed.[63]

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1921-1997) has become well known worldwide for his alphabetization campaigns and his specific approach to what he called "pedagogy of the oppressed". For Freire, education must be transforming "in service of the permanent liberation of human beings"[64] that can make and have their voice heard. Another Brazilian educator, originally a theologian, Hugo Assmann (1933-2008), insisted that "over the background of the appearance of a learner society, with

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[63] On this see further Rudolf von Sinner, *The Churches and Democracy in Brazil.* Towards a Public Theology Focused on Citizenship (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2012).

[64] Paulo Freire, O papel educativo das Igrejas na América Latina, in *Ação cultural para a liberdade e outros escritos*, 14th revised edition (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 2011), 169-211, 204 [English version: *Cultural Action for Freedom* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard Educational Review, 2000)]. Translations from Brazilian Portuguese are my own throughout this text.

market economy and mutant forms of employability, there is no doubt that educating is to fight against exclusion. In this context, educating really means saving lives."[65] Values have to be conjugated with effective rights of citizenship. In the same line, Rubem Alves (1933-2014), also Brazilian and originally a theologian who became a very widely read and respected writer, therapist and educator, states that "the mission of the teacher is not to give ready answers. The answers are in the books, they are on the internet. The mission of teachers is to provoke intelligence, to provoke surprise, and curiosity".[66] As one of our more distant, but also very important ancestors let me recall Martin Luther (1483-1546), the first to defend – and to succeed in establishing – universal, free education in his context, for both girls and boys. While the specific background was to capacitate persons to be able to read the Bible and learn more about faith, it was for all (not only monks or nuns, as was the current understanding at the time) to live out their vocation (*Berufung*), in whatever profession (*Beruf*) they might be and wherever they might exercise it, which Luther understood as a way of serving.[67] Finally, Brazilian theologian Vítor Westhelle (1952-2018), who left us far too early, mentions an anecdote from the 1990s that suggests the perplexity that can overcome persons due to unexpected changes. A graffiti on the walls of the University of Bogotá read: "Cuando teniamos

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[65] Hugo Assmann, Teologia da Solidariedade e da Cidadania, ou seja: continuando a Teologia da Libertação, in: *Crítica à lógica da exclusão* São Paulo: Paulus, 1994, 3-36.

[66]Quotation borrowed from Ruben Alves Instituto's Facebook webpage https://www.facebook.com/rubemalvesoficial/posts/8842041783 76346/, (accessed December 20th 2019).

[67] See, for instance, Douglas J. Schuurman, "Vocation", in *Dictionary of Luther and the Lutheran Traditions,* edited by Timothy J. Wengert et al. (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Baker Academic, 2017, 769-773.

casi todas las respuestas, se nos cambiaron las preguntas" – "When we had almost all the answers, the questions were changed."[68]

These initial quotes indicate that meaningful education is, and indeed should be: 1) *transforming*, seeking to develop one's own subjectivity, especially those to whom it has been historically denied; 2) *inclusive*, capacitating for effective participation in society with proper citizenship; 3) *provoking reflection and creativity*, rather than just giving pre-digested answers; 4) fostering *commitment* of all, with all and for all in the concrete world where 5) not only answers have to be formulated afresh, but *new questions* come up and have to be asked and answered. In my own education, at a Humboldtian style university, we had lots of freedom and opportunities to develop and test our own position, but had little guidance as we listened to the masters' voice in their development of what was their own interest. This has certainly changed through the last decades, also by imposition of the Bologna university reform process. What I would like to emphasize here is the teacher as a maieutic fellow walker, on the way as is the student, certainly with some advantage of knowledge and experience, but constantly learning, not least with the student's perception and reflection.

My current workplace, the Pontifical Catholic University of Paraná at Curitiba, Brazil, according to its website (www.pucpr.br) has as its mission to "develop and spread knowledge and a culture of promoting integral and permanent formation of citizens and of professional committed to life and with the progress of society". It seeks not only to foster and further knowledge as such, but knowledge that has impact in society through formation and research, in order to contribute to fostering good and meaningful life. In its motto which is "scientia, vita et fides" (science, life and faith) it combines its central task, to do science, with impact on life and meaning through faith – meaning that

[68] Vítor Westhelle, Foreword. In: von Sinner, *The Churches and Democracy in Brazil*, pp. ix-xii, p. xi.

goes beyond mere production to apply values and respect for what is transcendence, or, as Paul Tillich (1886-1965), a theologian in intense dialogue with the sciences, would have said, our "ultimate concern". PUCPR seeks to promote dialogue between science, faith, culture, life and solidarity, forming professionals that are conscious of their human vocation in whatever they do, being guided by ethical principles.

In ending, I would, in the form of theses, highlight as elements of a professional ethics fostered by institutions of higher education that:

1. Learning is a comprehensive and holistic process in dialogue, speaking to and from the heart, the mind and the hand – affection, reflection and action. It is meaningful only when helping persons to situate themselves within a specific context which they seek to understand and to contribute to. The goal of higher education is to provide capacitation for both critical and constructive, autonomous and social, bold and humble persons.

2. Higher Education is about doing a degree in the first place, not just having a degree – we need to foster real authorship. This is why plagiarism, a very serious offense against academic ethics, has to be combatted with rigor and overcome, because it not only does not recognize somebody else's authorship by using text without giving credit, but also does not show nor develop one's own authorship. In the academic journey as well as in one's profession, honesty and trust are tantamount – a climate of respect and hospitality for diversity and discussion, the testing of arguments and solutions.

3. Knowledge is provisional, but not arbitrary – we have to give good reasons, to be accountable on reasonably objective grounds. While this relativizes all-compassing universal claims and claims a post- and decolonial critique of namely European scientific heritage, it seeks to communicate and find common

ground across contextual differences in order to foster co-operation and find solutions for global problems.

4. Science seeks truth, while being conscious that truth is subject to sometimes highly diverse interpretation, and has, therefore, to undergo conversation and be developed through logically constructed argumentation. While being, thus, always relative, truth is not a commodity to be traded. Quality must always come before quantity. This is especially important when there is a lot of pressure on universities and researchers to be "productive" by enhancing their output. While researchers certainly should account for their use of public and private funds, and communicate to society what they are doing, why and what for, science does not work like a business and has to be able to deal with issues that are not of instrumental use, but help to better understand life and its various implications – not least values and ethical principles that ask beyond technical utility to what is good, correct and meaningful to be done.