

Shaping of Morality under School Conditions : Herbart and Beyond

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Abstract: Shaping of morality has been a priority task of school education from ancient times. In the last decades carrying out this task has taken on the form of more and more autonomous “lessons in morality.” However, so far there has been no common agreement on the objectives and methods of teaching morality under school conditions. It is also not known yet, whether these lessons relieve other school subjects of the responsibility for shaping the morality of students. This paper consists of three sections. The purpose of the first one is to reconstruct the concept of education through instruction, which was the best-known and paramount part of Herbart’s theory of science of education. The second section contains an outline of the counselling concept, whose aim, according to Herbart, is to develop pupil’s or student’s ability to morally judge and act. The third and last section focuses on the model of a moral and ethical competence, developed on the basis of Herbart’s theories by a research team directed by Dietrich Benner. This model enables determining the responsibility of “lessons in morality” and other school subjects for shaping morality.

Keywords: moral education, competence, education through instruction, moral counselling, Herbart.

1 Introduction

A growing number of European countries includes moral education as an autonomous subject in their school systems. The names given to this subject vary depending on the country. For instance, in England it is called Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Education (Peterson et al., 2014; English, 2016, pp. 238–240), in Scotland – Religious and Moral Education (English, 2016, pp. 240–245), in the Czech Republic and Slovakia – Prosocial Education (Podmanický, 2012, pp. 34–38; Brestovanský 2016), in Austria, Germany and Poland – Ethics Classes (Benner, Nikolova, 2016; Ritzer et al., 2016; Stępkowski et al., 2016). The very names already show the heterogeneous expectations which this subject is supposed to meet. The urgent need to teach morality in the form of traditional lessons is often justified by such facts as: a spreading insensitivity to common good among the young generation, a drastically decreasing level of moral and ethical competence which may lead to a moral anomie among the young people and a discontinuity in the intergenerational transmission of values and moral norms (Benner, Nikolova, 2016, pp. 18–23). It is also

worth noticing that introducing “lessons in morality” often stems from ideological attempts to eliminate Religious Education from public schools; nota bene, a growing number of students give up attending these lessons (Ritzer et al., 2016, pp. 219–221; Stępkowski et al., 2016, pp. 204–207). As a result, the new subject is met with dramatically different attitudes: from an unconditional approval to an absolute negation. Undoubtedly, these circumstances do not facilitate an objective discussion on the possibilities and impediments of moral education under school conditions.

Shaping of morality is by no means a new phenomenon in the European school system. It dates back to ancient times, especially to the times of Aristotle, when school was believed to be the most appropriate place to mould young people (Marrou, 1964; Benner et al., 2015, pp. 40–56). Therefore, shaping of character and inculcating desirable moral virtues were undisputed tasks of education. Until the beginning of the 20th century this task was fulfilled, as it were, “by the way,” i.e. as influence exerted while teaching other subjects.¹ Within this context, it should be added that the form of interlinking instruction and education has always aroused many controversies, both in the past and now.

The change which we currently witness raises a great deal of questions: What are the reasons why shaping of morality in school takes a form which is typical for teaching other subjects? What opportunities does it offer and what are its limitations? Does introducing it in school curricula relieve other subjects and school of exerting educative-formative influence?

In the attempt to find answers to the above questions I refer to the theory of Johann F. Herbart, a 19th-century German theorist of the science of education. In spite of many stereotypes which have arisen around this theory and its author (Kim, 2015), I believe that it represents a breakthrough for the history of European education, after which the attitude towards education and instruction in schools may be considered fully modern. I retrieved this theory from the common oblivion mainly in order to show its conceptual potential. In my opinion, it enables us to understand the current situation in the European school system on the one hand and on the other to synthesize “lessons in morality” and other subjects around the shaping of morality.

This article consists of three sections. In the first one I reconstruct the concept of education through instruction, which is the crucial and most well-known part of Herbart’s theory of science of education. The second section presents the concept of counselling, which, according to Herbart, is meant to develop in pupils and students the ability to judge and act morally. This part of his theory of the science of education is the least-known and almost forgotten nowadays. The third and last section focuses on the model of moral-ethical competence, established on the basis of Herbart’s theory by Dietrich Benner. This model allows us to measure and synchronize the range of the influence of “lessons in morality” and other subjects with reference to shaping morality in students.

¹ An exception to this was establishing a separate position of educator, who was responsible exclusively for moral formation of students. This solution was introduced in the second half of the 18th century by Bernhard Basedow in his experimental school in Dessau (Benner, Kemper, 2003, pp. 87–136).

2 New Old Education through Instruction

The very name of Herbart's concept of "education through instruction" is the reason for the majority of misunderstandings. Admittedly, it emphasizes the correlation between education and instruction, but there is still no precise definition how they interact. Very often the attempts to interpret this interaction have nothing to do with Herbart's original intention (Stępkowski, 2018). In order to explain this issue, one should, in my opinion, distinguish two types of pedagogical activities: the first being an *extrinsic* pedagogical interaction, the other – *intrinsic* educative-formative training. The first type of activity occurs between two subjects (teacher or educator and student or pupil) and takes form of "a practice, in which teachers and educators influence the developmental processes of young people" (Benner, 2017, p. 266). The second type of activity can be carried out exclusively by the learning party and nobody is able to relieve them of it. This is "a process of growth, that occurs by way of the interaction between the individual learner and the world" (ibidem).

Based on the above distinction, it may be stated that the term "education through instruction" does not denote a new method of a pedagogical activity in school, nor a hybrid resulting from an intuitive amalgam of education and instruction. On the contrary, it is a purposefully prepared and professionally conducted combination of *extrinsic* pedagogical interaction and *intrinsic* educative-formative training. It aims at such instruction which is not only a transmission of knowledge but will also have an educative-formative effect. According to Herbart, education through instruction takes place during school teaching and learning and not outside of it or as a supplement to that process. Its educative-formative effect is not restricted to the sphere of morality but encompasses all the aspects of what was traditionally understood as "liberal education" (Masschelein, Simons, 2013).

Unfortunately, Herbart's idea of education through instruction is constantly trivialised and treated as something obvious. This is how Adam Fijałkowski views it; in his opinion Herbart "did not say anything new, but rather followed an already existing practice and only gave it a new name. Certainly, in ancient times it [the postulate to combine education with instruction – note by D.S] was not stated so conspicuously, but when Quintilian writes that even the proper physical appearance of a teacher of rhetoric (this included, among others, the body stature, so a lame or a stammering person was not in position to become one) should encourage pupils to act with dignity, it does not only concern the instruction, but also the educative-formative influence. This influence should be understood literally: students are supposed to emulate the teacher not only with respect to the subject he teaches, but also his behaviour and actions" (Fijałkowski, 2008, p. 395).

D. Benner has a completely different opinion on Herbart's concept of education through instruction; he believes that, as opposed to other trivial conceptualizations of this problem, his concept contains a premise which cannot be overlooked if we are to understand it correctly. According to D. Benner, such a way of teaching takes place only when "the process of learning occurs in isolation from the context of life and is conducted in schools, i.e.

institutions, which were specially established for that purpose. Teaching in schools does not have an educative-formative influence on students based on the rule of learning through one's own actions, but it should be organized in a completely different manner – namely, an artificial one” (Benner, 2008, p. 129).

The above quotation does not exclude the possibility of other concepts of education through instruction, but the one developed by Herbart is closely connected with education in school and thus with the problem of the different nature of acquiring knowledge under school conditions and outside of it, for example at home. D. Benner explains that what he means is that, in contrast to learning directly from life and through life, school learning must be transmitted by appropriately trained professionals and based on experiences purposely staged by them. In this regard school teaching is artificial. Its task is to combine the *extrinsic* pedagogical interaction, which consists of teaching and learning, with *intrinsic* educative-formative training. Here it is worthwhile quoting the words of D. Benner, who noticed that: *“In everyday life the educative-formative function of instruction is guaranteed to a great extent by the close correlation between learning and acting. By contrast, in the situation of artificial school learning there is no such certainty”* (ibidem). In other words, it should be continually controlled if school teaching brings double effects, i.e. whether it results in both learning and forming the student.

As results from the above, Herbart’s concept of education through instruction is by no means connected with the idea that students should emulate their teachers – their erect posture or moral views; it is about achieving such correlation of teacher’s and student’s activities which, in spite of being intrinsically artificial, will result in student’s development, also within the sphere of morality.

Herbart’s central work, a pedagogical treatise titled *General Principles of the Science of Education*, describes how to achieve the above stated aim. It juxtaposes education through instruction with breathing, which consists of two activities: concentration (Ger. *Vertiefung*) and reflection (Ger. *Besinnung*) (Herbart, 1897, p. 123). The figure below demonstrates it graphically.

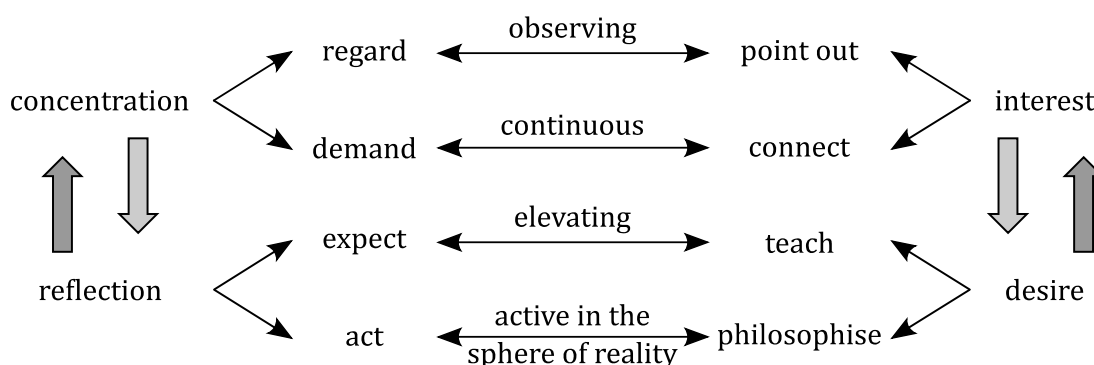


Figure 1: Teacher’s activities and student’s activities in correlation (Benner, 1993, pp. 109, 114).

The activities on the left side are the learning party’s response to the activities undertaken by the teaching party (shown on the right side of the figure). The arrows in the centre, bearing the captions: “observing,” “continuous,” “elevating,” and “active in the sphere of

reality” list four features which a teaching and learning process should have in order to meet the requirements of being a true education through instruction. The activities of the teacher, consisting in “pointing out” the elements of the teaching content should be met by a focused “regard” of the learning party. In order to correlate these two essentially independent things, the interaction between the teacher and the student should be of a visual character, as indicated by the word “observing.”

The activities of “connecting” different elements of the teaching material performed by teachers should be matched by a “demand” from the learning party. Herbart understands it as students’ abstaining from undertaking reactive activities as soon as they start to understand the teaching content explained by the teacher. Instead, they should patiently listen to what the teacher has to say. In order to harmonize both activities – “connecting” and “demanding,” teaching should be continuous, which can be interpreted as a deliberate and coherent presentation of teaching content.

The activity described in the above figure with the verb “teach” should be performed professionally. If this condition is met, the learning party will develop a state which is expressed by the verb “expect.” This term often refers to a postulate that the teaching content delivered by the teacher should really expand students’ knowledge and widen their horizons, rather than fruitlessly take up the time of lessons. If this postulate is achieved, teaching will become “elevating” and will deserve to be described as “education through instruction.”

School teaching cannot be limited to the school environment but should prepare students to undertake actions in real life circumstances. This aim is to be achieved by the fourth type of teacher’s activity – “philosophise,” to which the student’s response should be “to act,” or at least to design action plans. This requires from teaching to be active in the sphere of reality (Herbart, 1897, pp. 128–131; 142–147).

Two issues should be especially emphasized. Firstly, in the above described concept of education through instruction, education is not supplementary to instruction, but is its integral part. Secondly, teaching influences the student’s sphere of morality not through constant moral preaching or by means of an education specialist (e.g. a guidance counselor), who is responsible for inculcating virtues and desirable features in students, but through good teaching of a given subject. “Good” teaching should be understood as observing, continuous, elevating and active in the sphere of reality. These should also be the features of “lessons in morality” if we do not wish them to be limited to a formalistic teaching of ethical rules.

The morality of pupils is, in a more direct way, the subject of pedagogical intervention in Herbart’s concept of counselling. I present this concept in the following section.

3 Teaching morality through counselling

In Herbart’s theory of pedagogical activity counselling is a form of interaction between the teacher or educator and the student or pupil and is supposed to lead the latter step by step to achieve complete independence, especially in the sphere of morality. The German

term *Zucht* was intentionally translated by me as “counselling” rather than “discipline” – as did Henry and Emmie Felkin, who translated *General Principles of the Science of Education*. Herbart was aware that *Zucht* would become a source of misunderstandings and for that reason, in the first sentence of the chapter concerning this concept, explained how to understand it correctly. The English version of this sentence reads as follows: “From *Zucht* (*discipline*), from *Ziehen* (*drawing*), the term *Erziehung* (*education*) is derived” (Herbart, 1897, p. 227). It clearly shows that Herbart did not have in mind legalising punishments in schools (Ger. *Züchtigen* means “to punish”), which downgrades education to the level equal to breeding animals or cultivating plants (Ger. *Zucht* means also “cultivation,” “breeding”) and which was widely-spread and accepted in his times. The infamous practice of physical punishments in education dates back to Aristotle and until the 20th century was considered to be indisputable. Nevertheless, not only are punishments in conflict with the above described concept of education through instruction, but also with the sense of counselling, which was established by Herbart as the third and conclusive stage of pedagogical interactions

Offering advice to growing up people during the time of their transition from school learning to an independent and responsible life means that both parties are focused on the learner and his/her question how to act in order to lead a good – i.e. moral – life. However, counselling should not be treated as consultations, which are normal between equal parties, i.e. in relations between adult people. Counselling is an introductory stage to such consultations.² The main problem does not lie in forcing students to act according to their teachers’ and educators’ will, but in teaching them how to make independent moral judgments and informed decisions and how to act in accordance with these decisions.

Herbart described counselling education in four circular phases. According to Andrea R. English these phases are “forms of dialogue interaction that aim to cultivate moral learning by cultivating the learner’s ability to expand thought in such a way that the learner begins to question herself and thereby enter into a moral self-relation” (2013, p. 34). Herbart considers as a fact that teaching content should not be the subject of these dialogue interactions, as it occurs in education through instruction; the subject should be the learner’s experiences. In order to delve deeper into the connection between this stage of education and shaping of character and morality in general, the below figure organises the concepts and state of things described by Herbart in the fifth chapter of the third book of *General Principles of the Science of Education* (1897, pp. 227–250).

By the objective part of character Herbart understands such character which every person creates through their own actions, while the subjective part of character is, in his opinion, related to the sense of ethical taste (conscience), due to which the acting individuality is able to judge his/her own objective character. The structure of the objective part of character contains two elements: “memory of the will” and “choice.” The memory of the

² Regarding the necessity to distinguish in modern education the transitional stage, which is equated with young age (youth); see Benner, Stępkowski, 2012.

will stores the past acts of the will and the actions which followed them. Their traces indicate the direction of future decisions. By making choices between motives and forms of action, the objective part of character can be seen in its totality.

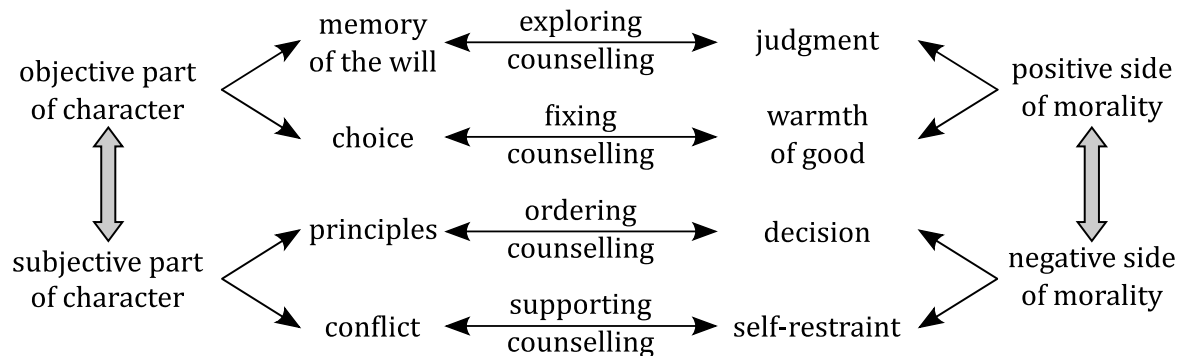


Figure 2: Teacher’s activities and student’s activities in correlation while moral counselling (Benner et al., 2015, p. 119).

However, in Herbart’s opinion, a person’s choice in a given situation does not result exclusively from the content of the objective part of character, but is dependent, in the same time, on the principles whose source is the subjective part of character. These principles determine the evaluation criterion for the content of the objective part of character and the form of future actions. If they advance contradictory claims, a conflict appears in the subjective part of character. On its result depends whether the objective part of character will remain unchanged or whether it will transform into morality, switching sides from left to right in the figure above.

The structure of morality is, according to Herbart, constructed in a manner analogous to character. The part of morality, in which the acts of will and the following actions are analysed and assessed in the light of elementary ethical ideas such as: inner freedom, completeness, benevolence, right and justice is called by Herbart “a positive side of morality.” Metaphorically speaking, in the positive side of morality the subject is brought before an internal court in order to carry out a self-evaluation. The positive judgement of this court, i.e. a confirmation that the subject acted in accordance with ethical ideas causes radiation of “warmth of good.” The subject in question is the main receiver of this radiation. Thanks to the warmth of good he/she feels motivated to continue acting in compliance with ethical ideas. In this moment, a transition to the negative side of morality takes place, because these ideas do not define what exactly should be decided, but only “make” the contemplative subject decide independently. The last stage of this process consists in “self-restraint,” i.e. in forcing oneself to carry out a given action. In the light of conflict, as described while discussing the subjective part of character, it means that in spite of having made a good decision, the subject might not have enough spiritual strength to complete certain actions. Staying true to ethical ideas sometimes involves forcing oneself to do so.

The processes within both of the above presented structures have also been discussed. There is a certain similarity between them. Negative side of morality influences the positive side in a similar way in which the subjective part of character influences the objective

part of character and forces it to obey the rules. However, the first case concerns the rules grounded in ethical ideas, whereas the second concerns only those resulting from previous actions. This clear analogy, however, should not eclipse the fact that between these two types of character – Herbart calls them “moral” and “whichever” – there is a great difference. In order to present it, we should refer to the essence of counselling education.

How is it possible to have a pedagogical impact on adolescents, if adults are forbidden to impose their will on them, since it paralyses the shaping of independence and the counselling education is meant to encourage and prepare to independent judgements, decisions and actions? Herbart’s response to this question can be expressed by means of the above figure: the structure of character was understood by him as stages of psychological development, while the structure of morality on the right – as stages of ethical development. The counselling education is placed between these two structures as a type of a bridge, which has its own dynamics. A. R. English interprets it as *“moral guidance that: (1) ‘gives pause’ (halten or anhalten) to the learner, so she does not act capriciously and so she remembers her past choices, good and bad, and remains consistent with past decisions insofar as these were representative of recognition of others; (2) helps the learner ‘determine’ (bestimmen) present choices compatible with a ‘warmth for the good;’ (3) requires that the learner ‘create rules’ (regeln) for future action on the basis of such choices; and (4) ‘supports’ (unterstützen) the learner’s actions that are based on a new understanding of the good or right thing to do”* (English, 2013, p. 34).

The system presented in the second figure may be interpreted as follows: pedagogical interventions regarding morality are not identical to a psychological or philosophical (ethical) point of view. Because of it, pedagogical activities concerning shaping of morality cannot be inferred from psychological or ethical theories, but they should be constructed in line with the four phases of Herbart’s counselling education.

4 Moral and Ethical Competence as a Proposition of Synthesis

The postulate at the end of the previous section proposes constructing in the science of education such projects of shaping of morality, which will not merely apply psychological theories of moral development or philosophical (ethical) theories. Within this context, Herbart’s theory of science of education, in spite of being 200 years old, may be considered to be one of very few propositions of devising a strictly pedagogical activity, i.e. such activity in which two types of actions meet: firstly, *extrinsic* pedagogical interaction and secondly, *intrinsic* educative-formative training. This theory served as a basis for a contemporary model of ethical and moral competence, which was empirically verified by a research team directed by D. Benner (Ivanov, 2016a). I believe that this model enables harmonizing various activities aimed at shaping of morality in school and determining what are the responsibilities of “lessons in morality” and other subjects in this area.

The above-mentioned model consists of three elements: (1) basic knowledge in the field of morality and ethics, (2) moral and ethical judgement competence, (3) competence of designing moral and ethical actions.

Table 1: Moral and ethical competence model (Benner, Nikolova, 2016, p. 32).

1. Basic knowledge of morality and ethics	
2. Moral and ethical judgement competence	3. Competence of designing moral and ethical actions

The principal author of this model explains its structure as follows: “... *the field of basic moral and ethical knowledge reflects the traditional attitude towards school instruction, which is focused on transmission of knowledge. Starting from the cognitive part of the teaching and learning process, we distinguished two other parts in the moral and ethical competence. These are: (sub)competence of moral and ethical judgement and (sub)competence of designing moral and ethical actions. The first one refers to a thoughtful consideration of moral problems and one’s own attitude towards them. The second means being able to design actions which are in compliance with one’s decisions*” (Benner, Nikolova, 2016, p. 31).

Even though there is a clear reference to “lessons in morality” in school, this model also proved useful while analysing moral and ethical competence of students who grew up without attending those lessons (Ivanow, 2016b; Stepkowski et al., 2016). This proves that this model can also be used to study a broadly understood shaping of morality under school conditions. (Anhalt, Rucker, 2016).

On the basis of field studies, D. Benner and his team developed scales for every element of the above model, which form, as it were, levels of the shaping of the morality process in school for given areas of competence. They are all encompassed in the below table.

It should be noticed that in the table above the scale regarding basic moral and ethical knowledge has only three levels, while the remaining two have four levels. This difference does not stem from a theoretical assumption, but results from empirical research (Benner et al., 2016, pp. 131–139).

While observing the order in each of the three areas of moral and ethical competence, it is relatively easy to notice a characteristic “mechanism.” It consists in – using Herbart’s terminology – a gradual broadening of learners’ mental horizons. The starting point in the basic moral and ethical knowledge are observations from everyday experience and contacts with other people, which during the “lessons in morality” are confronted with general terms (II level) and problems concerning various spheres of human activities (III level). In the area of moral and ethical judgement competence the process of learning starts with an analysis and assessment of state of matters which are known to the learners directly from life experience (I level); the next stage aims at becoming familiar with experiences of other people (II level); next, there is a comparison between these two sources of moral and ethical knowledge and the general rules of human relations (III level) and, finally, learners themselves assess the validity of the latter in difficult and ambiguous situations (IV level). Regarding the last area of moral and ethical competence, the designing process begins with the narrow personal horizon (I level), then this horizon is compared with other people’s opinions and the reference to the public sphere is worth noticing here (II level), next, a design of action is made, in which the point of view of other people, not

only the learner's, is taken into consideration (III level); finally, it ends with tasks which require self-restraint from learners (IV level).

Table 2: Areas and levels of moral and ethical competence (Benner et al., 2016, pp. 140–146).

area level	Basic moral and ethical knowledge	Moral and ethical judgement competence	Competence of designing moral and ethical actions
I	Students have basic knowledge of the moral state of things which they know from daily experience and contacts with other people (e.g. egoism, cowardice, courage).	Students can judge from the moral point of view a given state of matters, referring to the criterion of their own moral horizon and the already acquired conventional models of thinking and acting.	Students can design moral actions using their own moral experience as criterion.
II	Students are familiar with general notions, whose meaning exceeds state of matters known to them from their daily experience and can use these options to thoughtfully solve a given moral problem (e.g. equality of men and women, tolerance, discrimination, self-determination, identity, dignity, personal courage).	Students can reflect on a given moral problem, which exceeds the scope of their personal experience.	In a conflict of interest situation students can put forward an action which takes into account diverse moral viewpoints.
III	Students have basic knowledge and are familiar with proper notions regarding the state of matters in the area of tensions between ethics, law and politics (e.g. anthropological equality, human rights, moral guilt, conscience, equality before the law, moral freedom, social rules and norms).	Students can thoughtfully consider and assess moral problems and questions from the point of view of different ethical rules.	Students can design an action not only regarding the persons directly involved in it, but also regarding third parties and develop models which take into consideration various points of view.
IV		Students are able to reflect on the significance of general rules and values applicable in society.	Students can devise action plans for existential and problematic situations, when it is necessary to determine the limits of other people's and one's own will.

Subsequent studies, which used this model of moral and ethical competence, confirmed not only the fact that it is a great tool for measuring and assessing actions undertaken in

schools and explicitly aimed at the shaping of morality, regardless of their being “lessons in morality” or other subjects, but also that it can be used to conceive modifications of these actions (English, 2016; Peng, Peng, 2016; Peng, 2018). On this basis it can be stated that the discussed model of moral and ethical competence has both diagnostic and prognostic functions.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, it is worth asking: what kind of morality should nowadays be shaped in schools? The answer, somewhat provocatively, could be: none in particular! It certainly does not mean being indifferent or uncommitted to the modern moral challenges. On the contrary, similarly to Herbart we should expect – or even demand – that school accept the challenge of shaping morality in students. Nevertheless, moral education cannot be reduced to the function of only implementing psychological and/or philosophical (ethical) theories but should be aware of its own autonomy and seek methods of developing moral and ethical competence through both “lessons in morality” and the educative-formative impact of other school subjects.

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