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Ethical Orientations and Sex in Teachers with Varied Educational Strategies

Abstract

The authors present the results of empirical research that tested a hypothesis concerning the relationship between ethical orientations and teachers' educational strategies. The study was planned as a quantitative strategy as theoretical-verified, in a quasi-experimental scheme with random sampling. Data was gathered with the help of tests, and the hypotheses were verified using two-way ANOVA.

Keywords: *educational strategies, ethical orientations: justice and care, sex, teachers*

Hypothesis

The analysis of educational practices carried out in schools provokes serious questions more often than contributing knowledge about the effective practices of teachers. The latter aspect hinges on the interaction of so many factors that potential clarifications cannot make any claim to universality. We should rather formulate them in concrete theoretical perspectives through which we can analyze and interpret educational practices, or otherwise extract their pedagogical and ethical contexts. Firstly, these will be theories of moral development based on two types of ethic: justice and care. Such a conceptualization will allow us to diagnose two ethical orientations in educational practices. Secondly, we will want to see in what way these ethical orientations modify teachers' practices, which will be described using the dimensions of heteronomy - autonomy. Planned in this way, the study is simultaneously an attempt to empirically verify the concept of educational

strategies using Kohlberg and Gilligan's theories of moral development, which are well established in the social sciences. The analysis of these three concepts will allow us to formulate the hypothesis presented in this study.

An *educational strategy* is conceptualized as an informed plan of action made present in the decisional-executive processes of the teacher. The ideational and operational aspects of strategies concern many facets of educational work. This is why we can speak of strategies that refer to different educational disciplines. For analytical purposes we have isolated four types of strategy: reinforcement strategies, development strategies, adaptation strategies, and ideological strategies. *Reinforcement strategies* serve to stimulate and uphold the motivational processes responsible for the manifestation of the desired, and the extinguishing of the undesired, actions of male and female pupils. These strategies map out two polarized extremities: collective and individualistic, which are derivatives of the teacher's understanding of effective means for occasioning desired changes in behavior. The left end of the measure – collective – symbolizes an individual pupil's perception as but one element of a larger whole that makes up the school class/group. As the oppositional term to collectivism – the individualistic reinforcement strategy is based on the recognition that the condition of effective educational influence takes into account individual differences. The *development strategy* is operationalized as teaching concepts and actions, which lead to the pupil's attaining standards of behavior characterized by a higher level of quality than the standards noted at the starting point. This strategy locates itself on the dimension: conformist – self-driven. The *conformist strategy* relies on the adaptive model of development, while the self-drive strategy is based on the emancipation of the development model.

Adaptation strategies consist of concepts and actions which allow the teacher to control pupils' observance of social norms, as well as restore balance to the educational process. They designate two opposing ends of a scope: outer-directedness and inner-directedness.

Outer-directed strategies imply teachers' taking on an authoritative role as authors of and watchmen over the social order. The opposite is the case with regards to the use of *inner-directed adaptation strategies*. Here, teachers expect from pupils that they rely on their own judgments and independent decision-making. By *ideological strategies* we understand such concepts and actions that allow teachers to tie their own orientations regarding all elements of the educational process (goals, methods, content, relationship with pupils) to general political, world-view, and ethical orientations (cf., Chomczyńska-Rubacha, Rubacha 2007, p. 46). This definition of ideological strategies points to the cultural basis for ideologies and their interaction with individual professional experiences. We are describing these

strategies on the spectrum conservatism -liberalism, basing our assessment on W.F. O'Neill's (1981) typology of educational ideologies. The *conservative ideological strategy* is based on respect for the past and tradition, a reserved attitude toward change and acceptance of the extant social order. The liberal educational ideology, in turn, refers to democratic values, is open to the future, orientated towards the pupil's individualization and creativity, and also the transcendence of the cultural status quo.

In the literature on the subject, ethical orientations are treated as variables, whose indices are disclosed in studies in the way of solving moral dilemmas. These dilemmas form the content of tests which are based on L. Kohlberg's theory of moral development, diagnosing affective and cognitive dimensions of moral decision-making. Similarly, the 'Moral Judgment Test', as the 'Moral judgment Interview' or 'Defining Issues Test' were received with criticism from many authors, among which is the criticism of C. Gilligan (1979, 2003). Gilligan has pointed out that the content of dilemmas found in these tests decidedly favors solutions based on the ethic of justice, which, moreover, is consistent with the "ethical profile" presented in Kohlberg's theory (1984). The ethic of justice, however, is not the only ethic regulating ways of solving moral dilemmas, though it is nearly universal among men. Women, on the other hand, prefer an ethic of care and responsibility, concentrated on dialectical thinking. While solving dilemmas, they focus on responsibility for others and maintaining good interpersonal relationships, because they feel that the essence of the dilemma lies in a conflict of responsibility and not, as typical of the ethic of justice, in a conflict of law and principle. In contrast, men base their moral decisions on formal thinking, treating the dilemma in question as an abstract game with a limited set of solutions. Gilligan defines the ethic of care and responsibility as an expression of the female 'concept of self', which organizes actions in the realm of morality in the way different from the male 'concept of self' (Gilligan 2003, pp. 5–20 and 2013, p. 147). Therefore, what we have here is a contradistinction between a morality regulated by the principle of justice and, on the other hand, a morality regulated by the principle of responsibility. If women score lower than men on Kohlberg's tests, it is precisely because of the favored content of the dilemmas contained in them, and not because of inferior moral competency and capability. We can also tie moral education or the ethical conceptualization of education with Gilligan's feminist criticism (1998, pp. 130–135). One of the more advanced theoreticians and practitioners of moral education is the German psychologist G. Lind, who – as Brugman writes – emphasizes the necessity of developing competencies for adopting the views of others engaged in moral situations, and deliberating over those situations from their argumentative

standpoint. What is crucial, then, is the ability of appreciating and understanding counter arguments. Out of the three above-mentioned moral judgment tests, only MJT yields to such decentralization (2003, p. 195). We should notice that Gilligan's ethic of care and responsibility is more attuned than the ethic of justice, whose aim is a simple way to objectively settle the conflict, to Lind's expectations. It is not certain, however, whether Gilligan's position, which ascribes to sex the power of differentiation adopted by the studied moral orientations (justice vs. care), can withstand empirical verification. For instance, intercultural research in Norway and Brazil shows that the effect of cultural specificity is stronger than the effect of gender (Vikan, Camino, Biaggio 2005, pp. 107–111). There are also studies which do not reveal the effect of gender, but rather an effect for dilemma type. In studies conducted by S. Haviv and P.J. Leman (2002, pp. 129–130) three types of dilemma: pro-social, antisocial, and impersonal, were introduced as grouping variables for the orientation of justice and care. Each type of dilemma attracted, with different strength, each ethical orientation. Pro-social dilemmas strongly occasioned orientations toward care, antisocial dilemmas occasioned orientations toward justice, while impersonal-anonymous dilemmas had a tendency to occasion results locating subjects between both orientations. As with analogous results, these findings point out the effects of dilemma types (Jujarvi, Myyry, Pessa 2009, pp. 483–489) and confirm Gilligan's concerns that Kohlbergian tests, presenting a specific type of dilemma, attract solutions based on justice. They do not, however, strengthen the thesis that gender determines moral orientation. Nonetheless, the presence of two ethical orientations in solving moral dilemmas is a fact, which shows that competencies and predispositions lying behind them project onto the behavior of people in situations engaging interpersonal relations, including, in particular, educational situations to which the earlier cited Lind turns. Because the theories and studies discussed above concern ethical orientations that are well grounded in scientific literature and were repeatedly empirically verified, they also form an interesting space for the problematization of educational practices. And this is especially the case when we consider them from the perspective of educational strategies. We could suppose that a portion of their variance is accounted for by teachers' ethical orientations, and, perhaps linked to this, their gender in addition. Having planned research which was geared toward verification and guided by the earlier analyzed theoretical premises, we anticipate that orientations toward care and responsibility will be more accountable for autonomous strategies than orientations toward justice. Not expecting the presence of the effect of gender, we do not believe that an effect for interaction with the ethical orientation will appear. Beyond the verification context of our research, the distribution of teachers in

terms of ethical orientation, which in local studies has not yet been analyzed, seems to be a particularly interesting issue.

Method

Data was collected with the use of two standardized tests developed by the authors. The first of them, the Test of Ethical Orientations (Test Orientacji Etycznych) (TOE), consists of five stories of ethical conflict situations in which their protagonists are engaged. The subjects have the choice of several solutions consisting of indicators of the ethic of care and justice as a criterion for decision-making. The situations are constructed in such a way that the subject's decisions decide about the fate of the protagonists. The stories are not abstract in themselves, as for instance in Rest's Defining Issues Test (DIT), but typical of the professional experience of the private individuals studied. Their content was verified in terms of the likelihood that they would appear in teachers' everyday lives. This tool is not entirely verified, although a portion of the psychometric parameters has already been developed. The indicators of discriminatory power (four-point scale) were calculated for each story and ranged between 0.57 and 0.81, and they differentiate the standardization sample (N=370) quite well. The reliability of the entry is also satisfactory, as it oscillates between 0.82–0.93 (Cronbach's Alpha). Unfortunately, we can say the least about the theoretical accuracy, which until now has been assessed with the help of competent judges, with the result of satisfactory indicators. However, this is the weakest of the possible criteria for assessing the parameter of the test. For the purposes of the presented study we also tentatively set the empirical range of the results which evidenced the presence of the orientation toward care and justice in the solutions generated by the respondents.

The measurement of the random variable was made using the Educational Strategies (Strategie Wychowawcze) Test, developed by the authors. This is a tool which is normalized and fully standardized, with well-known indicators of discriminatory power, reliability, and validity.¹ It allows us to diagnose reinforcement, developmental, adaptation and ideological strategies on the heteronomy-autonomy spectrum. Subjects respond on a four-point scale to the stories describing typical, everyday, educational class situations, constructing their own acts of intervention.

¹ Cf., M. Chomczyńska-Rubacha, K. Rubacha (2007), *Płeć kulturowa nauczycieli. Funkcjonowanie w roli zawodowej*. Impuls Kraków, pp. 73–80; M. Chomczyńska-Rubacha, K. Rubacha (2013) Educational Strategies of Teachers with Various Senses of Efficacy, *The New Educational Review 1 2013*, p. 110.

The empirical research was carried out on a random sample of teachers from the Kujawsko – Pomorskie region (N=282), which reflects the demographic structure of Poland. Both tools made measurements on the interval level. The data was analyzed using the two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), along with its main interaction and simple effects.

Analysis and Interpretation of Results

Judging by the estimators, one can conclude that deviations from the normal distributions are not significant. The standard deviations, however, give credibility to the averages, which do not seem to be highly fragmented internally. The analyzed measures show a small advantage for autonomous strategies, except for the advantage of the development strategies and the advantage of the orientation toward justice. This latter result is particularly interesting, because it places the teachers studied in a group which reveals a tendency toward being more directed by rules, legal and school standards, than by concern for the quality of interpersonal relationships with pupils. This could mean that school life, in terms of the ethical, categorical distinctions Gilligan makes, is created by teachers in accordance with male, and not female, rationality. And this creates a certain problem for interpretation, since in previous studies primary school was seen as feminine, geared more toward care for interpersonal relationships, whereas lower secondary school, especially high school, had a decidedly strong focus on academic success and competition.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of model variables

| Variable | Range | Mean | Standard Deviation | Skewness |
|---------------------|-------|------|--------------------|----------|
| Reinforcement s. | 1–4 | 2.17 | 1.02 | 0.56 |
| Adaptation s. | 1–4 | 2.75 | 0.85 | -0.2 |
| Development s. | 1–4 | 1.93 | 0.99 | 0.89 |
| Ideological s. | 1–4 | 2.81 | 1.11 | -0.36 |
| General s. | 1–4 | 2.24 | 0.56 | 0.07 |
| Ethical orientation | 1–2 | 1.44 | 0.49 | 0.23 |

Source: own analysis – SPSS 20

However, our study sample was proportionally divided into three levels of education (primary, secondary, and upper-secondary), which means that a portion of the variance in ethical orientation is also explained by the results from the

teachers of primary school. This signifies a tendency toward the justice, and not care, ethic. Less surprising are the results regarding educational strategies, which quite systematically place themselves a bit higher than heteronomy, which, however, is not a decisive trend. Can we explain this by the difficulties arising from the freedom of autonomy in pupils who place high demands on teachers and test their openness and their tendency to negotiate the shape of the reality of the classroom with their pupils? Perhaps this is a probable hypothesis, especially if we consider that development strategies, which interpret autonomy as self-directed, break from the described tendency. The second issue related to the tendency toward justice orientation is the part played by women in the studied sample, which – if we think in the categories Gilligan presents – should weaken it. We will return to this issue, however, in the analysis of mean squares.

Table 2. Main and interaction effects of two-way ANOVA: sex x strategies; ethical orientations x strategies; sex x ethical orientations x strategies

| Source | Dependent Variable | df | Mean Square | F | Significance | Partial Eta Squared |
|----------------|--------------------|----|-------------|----------|--------------|---------------------|
| Adjusted Model | GS | 3 | 8.616 | 38.441 | .000 | .293 |
| | RS | 3 | 15.631 | 17.365 | .000 | .158 |
| | AS | 3 | 9.379 | 14.816 | .000 | .138 |
| | DS | 3 | 10.152 | 11.495 | .000 | .110 |
| | SI | 3 | 30.695 | 32.873 | .000 | .262 |
| Constant | GS | 1 | 820.340 | 3659.987 | .000 | .929 |
| | RS | 1 | 748.228 | 831.228 | .000 | .749 |
| | AS | 1 | 907.523 | 1433.639 | .000 | .838 |
| | DS | 1 | 650.823 | 736.921 | .000 | .726 |
| | SI | 1 | 1012.997 | 1084.899 | .000 | .796 |
| OT | GS | 1 | 20.299 | 90.564 | .000 | .246 |
| | RS | 1 | 42.015 | 46.676 | .000 | .144 |
| | AS | 1 | 5.844 | 9.231 | .003 | .032 |
| | DS | 1 | 11.022 | 12.480 | .000 | .043 |
| | SI | 1 | 32.458 | 34.762 | .000 | .111 |
| Sex | GS | 1 | 1.507 | 6.725 | .010 | .024 |
| | RS | 1 | 11.358 | 12.618 | .000 | .043 |
| | AS | 1 | 4.039 | 6.381 | .012 | .022 |
| | DS | 1 | 25.129 | 28.453 | .000 | .093 |
| | SI | 1 | 2.937 | 3.145 | .077 | .011 |

| Source | Dependent Variable | df | Mean Square | F | Significance | Partial Eta Squared |
|---------|--------------------|-----|-------------|--------|--------------|---------------------|
| EO* Sex | GS | 1 | 18.049 | 80.527 | .000 | .225 |
| | RS | 1 | 10.140 | 11.265 | .001 | .039 |
| | AS | 1 | 7.780 | 12.290 | .001 | .042 |
| | DS | 1 | 20.491 | 23.202 | .000 | .077 |
| | SI | 1 | 43.543 | 46.633 | .000 | .144 |
| Error | GS | 278 | .224 | | | |
| | RS | 278 | .900 | | | |
| | AS | 278 | .633 | | | |
| | DS | 278 | .883 | | | |
| | SI | 278 | .934 | | | |

GS – general strategy; RS – reinforcement strategy
AS – adaptation Strategy; DS – development strategy
EO – ethical orientation

Source: Own analysis – SPSS 20

Table 2 shows that every two-way ANOVA effect is statistically significant, which is to say, the ethical orientation, sex, as well as the interaction between them, alike. This state, however, does not confirm the direction of the analyzed dependency as our hypothesis foresaw. It is an orientation toward justice, rather than care, which explains the variance of all the educational strategies, i.e., links with the autonomous version. This is not too strong an effect, because the mean values for strategies, despite being from the autonomous pool, are in fact low. Notwithstanding, this weak tendency points to the fact that the teachers studied are passing into the direction of autonomous strategies, solving daily classroom dilemmas on the basis of the instrumentation of justice ethics. Perhaps, being based on clear criteria, it discloses itself more unequivocally than the orientation toward care, which is strongly contextualized. Operating with abstract criteria possibly agreed upon earlier with their pupils, probably gives the teachers a feeling of security, which to them seems necessary when moving within, or on the boundary of, autonomous strategies. If, for instance, teachers use development strategies based more on the self-direction of pupils, rather than on conformism, then by not contextualizing conflicts (orientation toward care) they use readily established rules which direct their solutions in similar ways. And this gives them the feeling of stability and security, also protecting their own personal resources, which – as other studies have shown – are vulnerable to bearing psychic costs and a heavy load when teachers act heuristically and give pupils autonomy (Rubacha, 2000). Furthermore, the requirements of the teachers' roles are inherently contradictory. On the one hand, one expects from them that they will appreciate and accentuate in their own actions the individuality of pupils,

and on the other hand, that they will assess all pupils fairly. Furthermore, the context of performance assessment, which takes place in class, and thus publicly, carries with it the need to use more uniform rules for all pupils and not varied forms of care for each individual. It seems that the requirements of the professional role may participate as criteria for teachers to build their own ethical orientation, and these criteria may involve the ethic of justice, which our results also show.

From the point of view of our hypothesis, what is also interesting is the interaction effect of sex and ethical orientation with respect to each of the educational strategies. Given the theoretical premises we did not expect this effect. What does its presence in the results signify? We should take into account the mean squares for the development strategy. Now, in the group of people that reveal an orientation toward care the means are not differentiated due to sex; however, they are in the studied group orientated toward justice. A higher average for reinforcement strategy appears in the group of women. In the case of adaptation strategies, the men achieved a higher mean in the group of teachers orientated toward care, while in the group orientated toward justice – the women had the advantage. This same situation was noted in relation to the ideological strategy. In the case of development strategies, there are no differences between the women and men in the ‘care group’; although, there is a difference in the ‘justice group’, with the women having the advantage. Treating strategies globally (average of all strategies), i.e., on the spectrum of heteronomy – autonomy, we obtain a higher average for the men in the group orientated toward care, and a higher average for the women in the group orientated toward justice. Thus, we can accept with some reserve that the women who attain autonomous strategies rely more on the ethic of justice, while the men rely more on the ethic of care. This is a rather interesting result, which paradoxically does not positively verify our hypothesis, yet at the same time, does not support Gilligan’s theory, even if it shows the interaction between sex and ethical orientation. This signifies, rather, that ethical orientations remain relatively independent from sex in the sense given to this relation by Gilligan. Against the background of the mean squares, it is also easier to understand the advantage the orientation toward justice has with the dominance of the women in the studied sample. Now, the mistake was assuming that if the women made up a part of the group, then assuredly they would strengthen the variance of the orientation toward care. That did not happen. However, if Gilligan is right in insisting on the ‘femininity’ of the ethic of care, and if our interpretation, which posits the teachers’ supportive use of the ethic of justice, was accurate, one could conjecture that we should perceive the studied female subjects more as teachers and less as women, and perhaps simply more as human beings, which is something Gilligan also wrote about (2013, p.147).

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