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Theoretical and Methodological Possibilities for the Development of Emotional Intelligence in the Context of Concentration between Ethics and Literature Teaching

Thesis of doctoral (Ph.D.) dissertation

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1. Purpose and structure of the dissertation

Since the end of the 20th century, with the broadening of the concept of intelligence (cf. *Gardner*, 1983), the research of emotional intelligence has become an interdisciplinary field, which is an inescapable question for educational science and pedagogical practice today. Supporting the emotional intelligence of students is a key area of many curriculum in schools today.

The main aim of my thesis is to theoretically and methodologically ground the possibilities of development based on the concentration of ethics and literature teaching in secondary schools. The theoretical and didactical foundations developed were put into practice in the empirical school research conducted in the school year 2020/21, during which I was able to implement the theoretical and methodological practices in the pedagogical activity with the students of the 11th grade participating in the research.

The structure of the dissertation follows the logical structure of the research process, which can be divided into three major blocks along the triad of theoretical foundations, methodological foundations and empirical research.

The first part is the introduction of the theoretical framework of the research, in which I will discuss the defining characteristics of education in the 21st century, paying special attention to the areas of development that are and may become important in the future, if we want to achieve development that is in relation to the opportunities and challenges of today. The focus on emotional intelligence is also confirmed by an examination of the concept of education, which can be defined primarily as a complex personal development in which the competences covered by the collective term emotional intelligence can play an important role. The development of these competences can be aligned with the views of constructivism and hermeneutics on education, so the main theoretical basis of my research is the basic views of these schools on education. Furthermore, in presenting the theoretical framework, I will examine how art – and especially literature – can contribute to the development of competences that are covered by the concept of emotional intelligence.

The methodological framework of my research is primarily based on student-activity methods. These methods aim at raising the activity of learners, creating intrinsic motivation for competence development (*Bonwell et al.*, 1991; *D. Molnár*, 2010). Increasing learner activity is key to both constructivism and hermeneutics' conceptions of education: the involvement, agency, cognitive and emotional activity of learners can be the key to successful competence development in practice.

I examined the implementation of the theoretical and methodological framework in my empirical research. From a didactical point of view, I considered it important to investigate the emergence of the possibility of concentration between the two subjects under study in the *National Curriculum* regulating education, and to research it in the textbooks used in the teaching of ethics. I used the experience gained from the documentary analysis in my empirical research in school, in which students participated in ethics lessons based on contemporary literary texts over the course of a school year. I was involved in the research as the teacher who planned and facilitated the lessons. In addition to testing the methods, my aim was to investigate the development of students' reading habits, subject attitudes and emotional intelligence over the course of the academic year.

2. The theoretical framework of the research

The theoretical framework of the research consisted of an interpretation of the most important basic concepts and an outline of the educational theories that can be linked to them. This section has therefore provided an interpretation of the key concepts of education today and an examination of the concept of emotional intelligence from an educational perspective. In order to respond to the developmental objectives identified, the theoretical framework for the research was constructivism and hermeneutics' views on education.

Interpretation of the concept of education in the 21st century, educational theoretical framework

The evolution of the concept of education in the 21st century can be summarized as a multidimensional, dynamically changing set of concepts aimed at developing the capacities of learners, their knowledge and their personalities. Another important aim is to support adaptive adjustment to rapid social change. In this context, education can be seen as a socialisation activity (cf. *Pukánszky*, 2013; *Ilyés*, 2001), in which schools have an important role to play.

The complexity of the concept of education is illustrated by *Bábosik*'s (2003) concept of education, who emphasises that in education the individual and the social dimensions are inextricably intertwined, the aim of education is to enrich the life of the individual and beyond that of society, and ultimately this can be summarised in the support of the individual's constructive life management (*Bábosik*, 2003). Both individual competences, such as the development of critical skills and thinking (cf. *Karikó*, 2019), and the support of social

competences, among which the development of emotional competences can be decisive (cf. *Réthy*, 2016), can play an important role in this.

In addition to interpreting the concepts of education, I also examined which skills and competences of the students need to develop in order to support their educational process in a harmonious way. This included a review of predictions of the school of the future (which become nowadays already), made at the beginning of the millennium (cf. *Passing*, 2001; *Schaffhauser*, 2003), and a citate *Csapó*'s 2019 study on the skills and competences students need to develop in order to adapt to the rapidly changing societal challenges. The research focused on areas such as non-routine interpersonal work and the future emergence of non-routine analytical work. In my view, the studies reviewed delineates the areas of competence development related to these areas that need to be focused on today, and thus we can conclude that the promotion of personal and social skills and competences should be a priority area in today's educational practice.

The possibility of developing these skills and competences in a complex way is at the center of constructivism and hermeneutics' understanding of education. The constructivist approach to learning can be extended to all aspects of education (cf. *Nahalka*, 2013). We can see that it builds on core elements that contribute to students' adaptive acquisition of real-world knowledge, capable of adapting to rapid change, and that it builds on their prior knowledge and experience, mobilising a wide range of personal and social competences. Hermeneutics' view of education also emphasises the active role of students by focusing on the pedagogical relevance of dialogue (cf. *Ballér*, 2002; *Orbán*, 2016). Dialogue, whether it takes place between student-student, student-teacher or student-curriculum, always implies activity, in which personal and social competences can develop and which can lead to adaptive knowledge in the educational process.

Interpretation of the concept of emotional intelligence in the light of educational science, possibilities for its development

The research on emotional intelligence is primarily a field of psychological research, but its interdisciplinary nature has become increasingly important, making it an interesting area for educational science, primarily in terms of development. However, the study of emotional intelligence in the context of educational science is far from being problem-free, since it is a complex of concepts that has several approaches, and both development and measurement and assessment raise questions. During my research, I examined the possibilities of developing

emotional intelligence from the perspective of educational science, considering the possibilities and limitations of educational science research.

In order to provide a clearer understanding of these problems, it was first important to define which approach to emotional intelligence is compatible with the limitations of educational research, thus delimiting the areas for development and the possible measurement possibilities. In defining the concept of emotional intelligence, we can distinguish between two major strands: 1. a capability model of emotional intelligence 2. a trait model of emotional intelligence.

The ability-based model of emotional intelligence understands emotional intelligence as a set of mental abilities only (cf. *Mayer - Salovey*, 1997). This conceptualisation basically understands emotional intelligence as a set of mental abilities that could be measured in a school setting only by professionals and the impact of development in the teaching-learning process is less clearly traceable. For this reason, among others, I considered it justified to commit myself in my research to a trait-based definition of emotional intelligence.

The trait-based definition of emotional intelligence basically defines emotional intelligence as a set of cognitive abilities and competences (cf. *Bar-On – Parker*, 2000). These competences can be basically divided into two large groups, the set of personal and the set of social competences (*Balázs*, 2014; *Goleman*, 2019). These two large sets of competences are also of particular interest in the work of educators and teachers, including the fact that many of the key competences defined in the *National Core Curriculum* overlap with a broad set of personal and social competences, which are considered as general development goals that transcend subject areas. Through the trait-based approach, pedagogical development can be objectively measured by teachers using available self-report questionnaires (e.g. the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale, also used in this research), which can be registered and evaluated by teachers.

The possibilities of developing emotional intelligence and emotional skills through literature

The positive, enriching effect of art on personality development has long been studied (cf. *Vigotsky*, 1968). Within the arts, the experience of literature can help students, through the presentation of a literary world, to articulate more accurately their relationship to themselves, to others and to the outside world in general (*Bagi*, 1998). Furthermore, the encounter with art and literature as aesthetics helps the development of creativity, critical thinking, etc. (cf. *Pap*, 2012). Even this brief summary shows that the experience of art and literature has the potential

to develop both personal and social competences. It is no coincidence that the experience of art is also crucial for development in many experiential pedagogies (cf. *Kiss*, 2017).

Due to the age specificity of the target group of the research, I focused primarily on contemporary, popular, (children's and) youth literature in my research on the involvement of the experience of literature in education. The focus on these areas is evidenced not only by the age specificity of the literature, but also by the reading habits of the students. If students read for pleasure, their reading tends to come from this area (cf. *Gombos*, 2013). Furthermore, works from these areas typically allow for an increase in students' self-realisation through the encounter of linguistic, poetic, temporal, spatial and personal dimensions. These aspects all contribute to the development of an active receptive attitude, which is typically expressed at the level of cognitive and emotional activity (cf. *Nagy*, 2002). At the same time, it is important from a didactic point of view to process these stories using methodological procedures that further support the development of an active receptive attitude.

3. Methodological framework of the research

Possibilities for development through student-activity methods: Socratic, Philosophy for Children traditions; drama games, dramatic exercises; creative writing exercises

Among the methods that build on learner activity, I primarily focused my research on methods that can be used independently of subjects, thus enhancing methodological dialogue and concentration between subjects. For this reason, and in view of the specificities of ethics and literature education, methods based on Socratic and Philosophy for Children traditions, dramatic exercises and creative writing tasks were given special priority in the didactic tools of my research. These methods allow students to gain realistic experiences in the literary theorised world of the literary works they learn about during the sessions (cf. *Tölgyessy*, 2018; *Bethlenfalvy*, 2020), while engaging in an active dialogue with the works. In alignment with the theories of education outlined earlier, the methods support the development of students' own meaning construction and the building of multiple possibilities of interpretation (cf. *Pethőné*, 2005). An important aspect in the compilation of the methodological toolkit was to maintain a balance between aesthetic and moral education, and to build both on practices that primarily develop personal competences (e.g. creative writing exercises) and practices that explicitly support social competences (e.g. child philosophy methods).

Methodological specificities of ethics teaching

The methodological specificities of the ethics subject were of particular importance, as the empirical research in the school was carried out within the framework of this subject. The short history of the subject has important lessons for the present educational organisation, which is why a historical overview of the development of the subject and an examination of the reading camps that preceded it were carried out (cf. *Kamarás*, 1984; 1990; 1991).

The examination of the subject's objectives and areas of development was also important for the construction of the research's methodological toolkit, which is why I consider it appropriate in this block to examine the subject's methodological features in the *National Core Curriculum* adopted in 2012 (the regulatory document of the research group that served as a model) and in the *National Core Curriculum* to be introduced in 2020.

4. Empirical stages of the research

Document analysis

The first stage of the empirical research was to conduct documentary analyses. In preparation for the empirical research in schools, I analysed the *National Core Curriculum* adopted in 2012. The investigation focused on the three major sections of the *National Curriculum* 2012: 1. Tasks and values of public education, 2. Hungarian language and literature, 3. Human and society.

In the tasks and values of public education section, I examined the educational objectives, methodological principles and the emergence of interdisciplinary dialogue as a way of organising education. I then examined the two subject areas under study, comparing how the possibility of interdisciplinary concentration can be realised in educational practice and how this concept relates to the theoretical and methodological assumptions presented above.

An important group of the documents analysed were the ethics textbooks for the 11th grade, based on the 2012 National Curriculum. I examined three textbooks (ed. *Fenyődi*, 2018; ed. *Homor - Kamarás*, 2013; ed. *Lányi - Jakab*, 2014) based on the following criteria: 1. Characteristics of the textbook, its philosophy of learning and education 2. Structure of the textbook's structure and thematic structure 3. The structure of the lessons. During the analyses, I made a special reference to the detailed examination of the collection of fiction texts of the textbook edited by *Fenyődi* (2018), during which the experiences gained largely determined the didactics of the design of the reading list I compiled.

Empirical research in schools

The aim of the empirical research in schools was to carry out an action research based on the theoretical and methodological foundations and preliminary documentary analyses, which gave me the opportunity, as a teacher, to test the practical implementation of the ethics lessons I developed based on contemporary popular literature texts.

Sample and specificities of empirical research in schools

The school empirical research was carried out in the school year 2020/21, with the involvement of students in the 11th grade of a secondary school in a town in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county. One class participated in the research (23 students, the actual number of questionnaire fillers N=20), the organization and structure of the research followed the structure of action research (cf. *Havas*, 2004; *Kemmis - McTaggart*, 1988).

The specificity of the research was that I was involved as a classroom teacher, I had the opportunity to give ethics lessons to students for 1 lesson a week. In structuring the lessons, I built on the theoretical and methodological foundations presented earlier. No textbooks were used in the lessons, but readings compiled by me - typically from contemporary, popular, youth registers - were the basic texts for the ethics lessons. The readings were processed primarily using student-activity methods (Socratic, Philosophy for Children methods; drama games; creative writing exercises), both in the context of present and digital teaching outside the classroom.¹

Objectives of the research

O₁ In accordance with theories of education in the 21st century, to develop students' competences, primarily some elements of emotional intelligence in the work of teachers.

O₂ To strengthen the curricular concentration between the subjects of ethics and literature in the ethics classroom through the inclusion of fiction texts in the teaching of ethics.

O₃ Aiming to achieve a balance between moral and aesthetic education in teaching practice.

O₄ To improve attitudes towards contemporary literature and reading.

O₅ To use teaching-learning strategies adapted to developmental objectives, with a focus on methods based on learner-activity.

¹ In the academic year 2020/21, due to the epidemiological risk, the education of secondary school students in Hungary was conducted in the framework of the digital work system outside the classroom between 11 November 2020 and 10 May 2021.

Measuring tools of the research

I used questionnaires to assess changes in three broad areas: reading habits, attitudes towards the subject and emotional intelligence. In order to monitor the changes, students filled out input questionnaires at the beginning of the research (September 2020), and at the end of the research, the questionnaires were repeated with the class (the output questionnaires were registered in June 2021). Students filled out the questionnaires anonymously, but with a sign to track the changes.

The reading habits were assessed using a self-structured questionnaire containing 11 questions, primarily aimed at exploring attitudes towards reading, the frequency of reading and their preferred authors.

Attitude towards the subject was assessed by means of a short written interview, adapted to the specificities of the subject, and focused mainly on the perception of the usefulness of the subject and the topics and types of tasks expected based on the preliminary predictions.

To investigate changes in emotional intelligence, I used the Hungarian version of the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS-HU), which is a self-report questionnaire and its assessment does not go beyond pedagogical practice.

Research hypotheses and their analysis

The initial hypotheses of the research were:

H₁ Ethics education based on contemporary literary texts contributes to changes in reading habits: students who participate in ethics education based on contemporary literary texts prefer to read books by the end of the school year.

H₂ Ethics education based on contemporary literary texts contributes to an improvement in the frequency of reading: the frequency of reading books changes in a positive direction by the end of the school year.

H₃ Attitudes towards the usefulness of ethics can be improved by teaching through contemporary literary texts: students' attitudes towards the usefulness of ethics will be more positive by the end of the school year.

H₄ Ethics education based on contemporary literary texts can be used to improve emotional intelligence: comparing the results of the input and output tests of emotional intelligence, the output tests are expected to show improved results.

Due to the small number of participants in the study, I decided not to test the statistical significance of the data related to the research hypotheses and to explore other correlations, as

the very low number of items could bias the results. Therefore, in the following, I will only describe descriptively the variation of the results obtained in relation to the hypotheses between input and output measurements.

 H_1 Ethics education based on contemporary literary texts contributes to changes in reading habits: students who participate in ethics education based on contemporary literary texts prefer to read books by the end of the school year.

Based on the data from the survey's input measures, 35% of students said they liked reading and 65% said they did not. By the end of the school year, the number of students with a positive attitude towards reading had increased slightly by 5%. It is interesting to note that, despite this, 80% of students in the survey's entrance survey considered reading books a useful activity. In terms of gender distribution, it is particularly interesting that the majority of boys (71%) said that they did not like reading, despite the fact that 86% of them considered reading to be a useful activity. The output measures showed an improving trend, with an increase in the already positive results on the usefulness of reading, with the vast majority of students, 95%, saying that they found reading useful, despite not liking to read books.

 H_2 Ethics education based on contemporary literary texts contributes to an improvement in the frequency of reading: the frequency of reading books changes in a positive direction by the end of the school year.

The frequency of reading books at baseline was as follows: more than half of the students, 70%, read a book less often than monthly. Only 10% read books monthly and 5% weekly. 10% read books more than once a week, while only 5% read books daily.

Comparing the output and input responses on the frequency of reading, we see an increase in the number of people who read daily (by 1 person, 5%) and several times a week (by 2 persons, 10%). The number of weekly readers has not changed, the number of monthly readers has increased by 3 persons (15%) and the proportion of readers who read less often than monthly has decreased (6 persons, 30%).

H₃ Attitudes towards the usefulness of ethics can be improved by teaching through contemporary literary texts: students' attitudes towards the usefulness of ethics will be more positive by the end of the school year.

In the survey's input measures, 45% of students rated ethics lessons as a useful subject, while 55% did not. For the outcome changes, we see a 5% positive change in the usefulness of the

subject. A typical motive in determining the reasons behind the answers was the optional nature of the subject, further the fact that no one in the class takes it as a final examination.

*H*⁴ Ethics education based on contemporary literary texts can be used to improve emotional intelligence: comparing the results of the input and output tests of emotional intelligence, the output tests are expected to show improved results.

When comparing the means on the WLEIS-HU emotional intelligence subscales of the input and output measures, we see that the means increased for all four subscales. The highest available score for the subscales of Self-Emotions Appraisal and Others-Emotion Appraisal was 15, while the highest score for the subscales of Regulation and Us of Emotions was 20. This shows that the students scored the highest average on the Use of Emotions subscale on the input measures (14.50), while the lowest average was achieved on the Regulation of Emotions subscale, with an average of 12.55 compared to the maximum score of 20. The average scores for the Self-Emotions Appraisal and Others-Emotion Appraisal were 10.75 and 10.90 respectively, compared to a maximum score of 15.

In the repeated outcome measures at the end of the school year, students achieved the following averages in each subscale: Self-Emotions Appraisal 11.05; Others-Emotion Appraisal 11.80; Use of Emotions 15.80; Regulation of Emotions 13.35. Comparing the averages of the input and output measures, we see that students continue to score proportionally highest on the Use of Emotions subscale and on the Self/Others-Emotions Appraisal, and lowest on the Regulation Emotions subscale. However, we also find that there is an increase in all four subscales when comparing means.

I rejected the verification or refutation of the hypotheses related to the small sample because of the sample size, as it is not suitable for drawing general conclusions. At the same time, recording and evaluating the questionnaires provided important feedback for both my teaching and research work.

5. Summary

In my research, three broad areas can be distinguished, which build on each other along the logic of the conceptual triad of theory, methodology and empirical research. The interpretation of the concept of education in the 21st century and the examination of the concept of emotional intelligence in the light of educational theory have enabled me to explore the methodological

possibilities for developing the competences covered by the umbrella term of emotional intelligence and to develop the didactic structure of my empirical research in schools, building on theory and methodology.

By looking at the specificities of the subjects of ethics and literature, we have seen that their developmental objectives and subject specificities can provide a space for concentration between subjects and can contribute effectively to the development of competences under the general concept of emotional intelligence. Ethics deals with issues concerning the dimensions of the self, the other person and society, which can be actively developed in both personal and social competences. Literature, through the experience of art and the arts, also makes a major contribution to the promotion of personal competences and, with appropriate didactics, social competences. These specificities can create the potential for subjects to make an enhanced contribution to the development of students' emotional intelligence.

In my view, the development of emotional intelligence in today's schools is vital if we are to support the development of competences that contribute to students' future success. My doctoral dissertation aimed to present theoretical and methodological options to support this area of development and the concentration of the subject between ethics and literature education.

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