

LA EDUCACIÓN DE LAS VIRTUDES HUMANAS

CLAVES PARA LA PRÁCTICA EDUCATIVA



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Dykinson, S.L.

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Índice

PRÓLOGO	11
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CAPÍTULO 1. TEACHING TO TRANSMIT VALUES THROUGH LITERATURE	15
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Jorge López González

1. Introduction.....	15
2. Theoretical background	16
3. Research methodology	17
4. Results of teaching methodologies (LBL questionnaire).....	20
5. Discussion and foresight.....	21
6. Conclusions	23
7. References	23

CAPÍTULO 2. LA VIRTUD DE LA PRUDENCIA (PHRŌNESIS) O LA SABIDURÍA PRÁCTICA	27
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Vianney Domingo

1. Caracterizando la phrōnesis (prudencia) o sabiduría práctica.....	27
2. Componentes o funciones de la phrōnesis y la regulación emocional	30
3. La educación de la phrōnesis.....	32
4. La medición de la phrōnesis.....	41

CAPÍTULO 3. LA FORMACIÓN EN LA VIRTUD DE LA TEMPLANZA	43
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Miguel Rumayor

1. Estado de la cuestión: ¿Qué es la templanza y cómo se vive?	43
2. La templanza como estilo de vida.....	45
3. ¿Cómo se puede evaluar esta virtud?	48
4. Preguntas de autoexamen sobre la virtud de la templanza	49
5. Fomentar el trato con personas que viven la virtud de la templanza.....	50

CAPÍTULO 4. LA EDUCACIÓN DE LA HUMILDAD.....51

Alicia Encío y Carmen Caro

1. Estado de la cuestión de la virtud51
2. Propuesta educativa53
3. Evaluación.....56

CAPÍTULO 5. LA FORTALEZA: UNA GRAN ALIADA PARA MADURAR.....59

Belén Poveda García-Noblejas

1. Estado de la cuestión: ¿Qué es y qué no es ser fuerte?.....59
2. Fortaleza y personalidad madura62
3. ¿Cómo se puede evaluar esta virtud?64

CAPÍTULO 6. LA VIRTUD DE LA SOBRIEDAD69

Zaida Espinosa

1. Estado de la cuestión69
2. Propuesta educativa72
3. La evaluación de la sobriedad76

CAPÍTULO 7. LA EDUCACIÓN DE LA OBEDIENCIA.....79

Elda Millán-Ghisleri

1. Introducción79
2. Dimensiones de la obediencia81
3. ¿Cómo evaluar la obediencia?84

CAPÍTULO 8. EL ORDEN87

Carmen María Martínez Conde

1. La virtud del orden87
2. ¿Cómo animar a realizar los actos de esta virtud?.....88
3. La práctica del orden91
 - 3.1. La distribución del tiempo.....93
 - 3.2. La organización de las cosas.....94
 - 3.3. La realización de actividades.....95

CAPÍTULO 9. EDUCAR EN LA VIRTUD DE LA GENEROSIDAD99

Verónica Fernández

1. Introducción	99
2. ¿Qué es la generosidad?.....	100
3. La generosidad y su relación con otras virtudes	101
4. La dinámica de la generosidad.....	102
5. Desafíos de la generosidad hoy	103
6. Posibilitadores de la generosidad.....	104
7. Algunos conceptos clave para la educación en generosidad	106
8. Algunas formas de expresión de la generosidad.....	107
9. Escala de generosidad.....	107

CAPÍTULO 10. LA EDUCACIÓN EN EL AGRADECIMIENTO109

Ana Rodríguez Soto

1. La virtud del agradecimiento	109
2. El agradecimiento y sus afectos.....	110
3. Cómo educar la dimensión comportamental del agradecimiento.....	112
4. Autoevaluación.....	115

CAPÍTULO 11. LA VIRTUD DE LA ALEGRÍA117

Pía Valenzuela

1. “To be or not to be”: Ser o estar alegres.....	117
2. ¿Se puede ser más alegres?.....	120
3. ¿Cómo evaluar la alegría?	125
4. Conclusión	127

CAPÍTULO 12. LAS LUCES DE EDISON O LA VIRTUD DE LA PERSEVERANCIA EN EL DESARROLLO DEL CARÁCTER129

Alejandro Ramón-Reboloso y Juan Luis Fuentes

1. El humus sociocultural en el que nace la perseverancia.....	129
2. La perseverancia, sus límites y su integración en la formación del carácter ético de la persona	131
3. Dimensiones de la perseverancia para su promoción educativa	135
4. A modo de conclusión.....	139

CAPÍTULO 13. EDUCAR PARA EMPRENDER EN FAMILIA141

Arantxa Azqueta

1. Introducción141
2. Propuesta educativa144
3. ¿Cómo podemos evaluar la capacidad emprendedora?149

CAPÍTULO 14. JUSTICIA Y EDUCACIÓN151

Yaiza Sánchez y Josu Ahedo

1. La importancia de educar en el afán por la justicia151
2. La educación social de la justicia: ventajas de una sociedad para vivir la justicia153
3. ¿Cómo educar en la justicia atendiendo a las dimensiones afectiva, cognitiva y comportamental en relación con la persona?154
4. Algunas consideraciones finales sobre la evaluación de la justicia157

CAPÍTULO 15. LA VIRTUD DE LA SOLIDARIDAD161

Jesús Plaza de la Hoz y Pilar Plaza de la Hoz

1. ¿Por qué deberíamos preocuparnos por educar en la solidaridad a nuestros hijos y alumnos?161
2. Educación de la solidaridad.....164
3. La evaluación de la solidaridad166

CAPÍTULO 16. CONSTRUYENDO RELACIONES SIGNIFICATIVAS Y VERDADERAS: CLAVES PARA EDUCAR EN LA AMISTAD173

Ana Romero-Iribas y Fátima Ruiz-Fuster

1. Descripción y estado de la cuestión173
2. Propuesta educativa176
3. ¿Cómo “evaluar” la amistad?180

Capítulo 1

Teaching to transmit values through literature

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1. Introduction

How to train teachers to educate virtues and values through literature? This paper presents an educational experience of teaching virtues and values through the subject “Literature and Values”, taught in the third year of the degree of Early Childhood Education at Francisco de Vitoria University.

The intervention took place during the 2020-21 academic year, with subsequent adjustments made during the 2022-2023 academic year. The objectives set for this educational intervention are as follows:

1. To redefine the purpose and learning objectives of the subject: the central aim is to discover the teaching vocation as both an artistic act and an intrinsically moral praxis that conveys values and transforms those who practice it. The teaching guide was revised to include this objective. The specific education of students in certain virtues or values is seen as an intermediate goal and an indirect effect that is achieved as a fruit of the search of a good for others (Spaemann, 2003).
2. To renew teaching methodologies for education in virtues and values: to create purposeful and experiential learning experiences, to educate in virtues and values through beauty. The teaching methodologies, following this same guideline, were revised to favor the experience of beauty, truth and goodness. We consider, as a didactic approach, “infecting” the virus of literature in the student’s aesthetic unconscious (Altamirano 2013).

2. Theoretical background

1. Literature itself has an openness to moral values since it is closely related to beauty; beauty is a kind of good that moves desire and produces love (Maritain 1930; 1962). The literary experience is an opportunity to generate an affective awakening of students towards a beautiful object that provokes elevation (Algoe and Haidt 2009; Paris 2019), enabling them to recognize an object as intelligent - the truth that “underlies” this good - and to decide to reach for it, to help students to make an experience of truth, an encounter that perfects them.
2. Traditionally, the subject “Literature and Values” has focused on teaching literature through the theoretical analysis of major literary works. Our proposal consists of affectively and intellectually awake students’ wonder (González Iglesias and Agejas, 2019) through experiential learning (Kolb 2015), so that they have a satisfying ethical and aesthetic experience that will help them discover that their future as teaching professionals is a performative artistic exercise, as well as an intrinsically moral praxis. The idea is for them to experience the educational act of teaching a class as a work of art and as a moral act that benefits their students, and at the same time happens to shape their identity as better persons and teachers.

Teaching methodologies, in concordance with the previous objective, were revised to favor the experience of beauty, truth and goodness. Theoretical or master classes were not eliminated but were enriched with activities in which the student participated as an “actor” and not only as a “spectator”.

The following are some of the activities carried out with the pupils:

- c. “My grandfather told me”. This activity involves each student asking one of their grandparents (or older relatives) to share a story, which is then discussed with the objective of educating them in gratitude and teaching them to value the family bond with their elders,
- a. “Let’s have a party”. This consists of a theatrical performance in teams for children from 3 to 6 years old -applying a project-based learning methodology- in order to experience the joy of communicating values as part of the teaching profession, while learning to work collaboratively in teams. The activity also promotes the development of virtues such as patience, initiative, and generosity.
- b. “The three little pigs”. In this activity, each student rewrites and records a video of the classic story of “The Three Little Pigs”. Popular children’s stories offer relevant moral teachings and wisdom (educating in prudence, justice, temperance, fortitude).

- c. “The story of my life”. It consists of each student writing in a personal diary, for fifteen minutes during six class sessions, about his or her personal life. In this way, students not only practice literature but also reflect on their own life as a narrative of which they are the authors. It encourages the development of virtues like freedom and responsibility, and its meaning is better interpreted through the support of others (transcendence), who are silently present throughout the process.
- d. “Advance”. This activity involves inviting a group of students with cognitive disabilities to participate in a class session where they provide feedback on the students in the rehearsal of the theatrical performances. In doing so, students will experience moral emotions and discover virtues in people with disabilities that move them to be better. Children’s literature is particularly suitable as a way of inclusion and encounter between all individuals, regardless of their (dis)abilities (Pulido-Mantas and Ruiz-Seisdedos 2018).

3. Research methodology

In order to measure the results of the innovation, several quantitative and qualitative applications have been carried out by:

1. A quantitative (Likert-type scale) and qualitative evaluation of teaching practice measured by a questionnaire (CEDA) during the years in which the pedagogical innovation has been applied (2020-2021 and 2022-23 academic years), These results were then compared with the evaluation of teaching practice in prior years. The total sample size of students who responded to the questionnaire was in total 137. Responses were surveyed and exported from JotForm in an Excel spreadsheet. Subsequently, the data was exported to SPSS version 22 for the subsequent analysis.

The CEDA questionnaire measures students’ perception of teaching practice. This questionnaire was designed and validated by García Ramos (1997; 1999), with subsequent adjustments being made later. At the end of the questionnaire the student is allowed to include qualitative comments on teaching practice. It is used as a tool for the evaluation of teaching practice for all teachers at Francisco de Vitoria University. The questionnaire has 18 items organized by cores or competences: course planning, teaching mastery, teaching innovation-motivation, relationship and interaction with the student, teacher assessment, learning outcomes and commitment of the teacher to the student. By way of example, item CT4 - linked to teaching mastery - is “The doubts raised are resolved for me” and item CT15 - linked to commitment of the teacher to the student - is “The teacher is punctual in his/her commitments (class attendance...)”.

2. A quantitative (Likert-type scale) and qualitative evaluation of the teaching methodology was conducted using a non-validated questionnaire (LBL) in December 2020, following the initial phase of the innovation. The questionnaire was administered to a sample of 18 students. It was developed by the teacher as an action research tool. The questionnaire included a series of items that, using a Likert-type scale with six response options, provided us information on the perception of learning outcomes, educational purpose and methodologies used. The responses were surveyed and exported from Jotform into an Excel spreadsheet. The data were subsequently transferred to SPSS version 22 for analysis.

The LBL questionnaire included three open-ended questions: 1) To what degree do you consider that the training you have received has enriched your personal values? 2) To what degree do you consider that the training you have received has enabled you to contribute values to your personal environment? 3) What were your three main learning outcomes in the subject Literature and Values?

Results of teaching practice evaluation (CEDA questionnaire).

Table 1 shows the results obtained in the evaluation of teaching practice using the CEDA questionnaire. The average increases in the school year 2020-21 and subsequently in the school year 2022-23, in which the educational intervention was carried out.

Table 1
Descriptives of “teaching practice evaluation” (CEDA) by academic year.

	N	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
2019-2020	35	55,54	22,62	18	84
2020-2021	59	63,78	16,82	21	84
2021-2022	30	59,83	17,94	28	84
2022-2023	13	72,77	10,58	56	84

The assumption of normality is not met for the total score (neither is it met at the item level nor at the level of the questionnaire cores). However, the results obtained using the non-parametric alternative (Kruskal-Wallis) lead to the same conclusion (there is an effect of academic year). Furthermore, when analyzing the Q-Q plot, it can be observed that the discrepancy between the data and what is for a normal variable is minimal. The assumption of heteroscedasticity is not met, which will lead us to use the Games-Howell statistic for post-hoc multiple comparisons. Upon analyzing these multiple comparisons to assess which academic years show differences, we find that in the 2022-23 academic year, there is an upward trend compared to the previous

year ($p = 0.053$). Students' mean total subject scores vary significantly by academic year, with an effect size ($\eta^2 = 0.121$).

Comparing the year 2022-2023 with the immediately preceding year (2021-2022), a significant increase (with $p < 0.05$) can be observed in 5 of the 18 items (CT4, CT9, CT10, CT15 and CT16), in particular the items CT9 "I feel respected in my opinions" ($p = 0.004$), CT10 "I feel accompanied by the teacher" ($p = 0.049$) and CT16 "The teacher is accessible in his attention to the student" ($p = 0.016$). The items showing a significant increase are not directly related to methodological innovation or the assessment of the subject, but rather to aspects of relationship and interaction with the student (CT9 y CT10) and commitment of the teacher to the student.

The quantitative results obtained through the application of Anova statistic (Cf. Table 2) show that the students' average assessment of the subject has improved significantly in the 20-21 and, specially, in the 22-23 academic year, in which the educational intervention was carried out.

Table 2
One- way ANOVA (total score) of "teaching practice evaluation" (CEDA).

	Sum of squares	Gl	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between groups	7409,642	5	1481,928	5,324	<,001
Within groups	53995,430	194	278,327		
Total	61405,073	199			

The qualitative feedback gathered from learners through the CEDA assessment over the years was generally positive, though limited and not fully representative. The report indicates that students consistently recognize the professionalism, passion and involvement of the teachers, as well as their approachability, empathy, and interest in the students. Students also expressed a favorable view of the narrative pedagogy particularly the concept of seeing their own lives as a story to be written. They mention that the classes were enjoyable and clear in their teaching as well as linked to their life and future professional practice. In terms of elements to improve, students suggested that the evaluation system should be more clearly communicated, with greater advance notice provided to allow for better preparation.

4. Results of teaching methodologies (LBL questionnaire)

The results from the application for the LBL ("Learning to be Literate") questionnaire - applied to 18 of the 40 students in the group - are shown below (Cf.

Table 3). First, the averages (with a maximum score of 6 points) on certain items related to the learning objectives and methodologies are indicated. This is followed by a summary of the answers to the open-ended questions.

Table 3

Table with results to the LBL learning assessment questionnaire

Item	Mean (N=18)
To what extent has the subject helped you in these areas?	
Understanding how literature helps to transmit values	5,50
Appreciating literature as an art	5,39
Storytelling	5,28
Reflecting on my personal and professional values	5,11
Developing speaking skills	5,00
Developing my creativity	4,94
Develop my teamwork skills	4,94
Learn how to apply evaluation rubrics	4,94
Appreciating the wisdom of older people	4,94
Develop as a literary artist	4,83
Enjoying doing the tasks of the subject	4,83
Getting to know my grandparents	4,50
To what extent have they helped you learn...?	
Face-to-face classes	5,59
The text commentary on a literary work	5,39
The video telling the story of The Three Little Pigs	5,11
The final performance of the literary work	4,94
The quizzes for each topic	4,82
The story my grandfather told me	4,47
The remote classes	3,82
Discussion forums	3,75
To what extent do you consider the training received...	
It has helped you to develop as a professional	5,29

It has helped you develop as a person	5,12
Enables you to contribute values to your environment	5,12
Has enriched your personal values	5,12

The questionnaire included three open-ended questions: 1) To what degree do you consider that the training you have received has enriched your personal values? 2) To what degree do you consider that the training you have received has enabled you to contribute values to your personal environment? 3) What were your three main learning outcomes in the subject Literature and Values?

The answers to the open-ended questions indicate that the course significantly enriched the students' personal values, teaching vocation, and appreciation for literature. Many students expressed that they have discovered the potential of literature to transmit values. Some responses valued the wisdom of the teachers emphasized their belief that teaching is inherently a moral endeavor. Additionally, the feedback suggests that students faced considerable challenges in adapting required by the course, particularly due to the impact of the pandemic.

5. Discussion and foresight

It is worth mentioning that measuring the impact on the teaching-learning process is inevitably limited by the challenges of adequately inferring internal changes, which are not always immediately or perceptibly reflected in behavior. Nevertheless, we have sought to identify these changes through qualitative and quantitative methodologies that help us to infer what has occurred. The sample size is certainly limited.

Educational intervention, for its part, has been affected by some conjunctural factors related to the pandemic during the 2020-21 academic year.

1. Evidence indicates that students are highly receptive to education in virtues and values. They consider their future teaching job as an intrinsically moral praxis. The results from the qualitative questionnaire support this finding. Students express that their primary motivation as future educators is to impart values to their students and to contribute to their holistic development. It is important that the teaching guide explicitly incorporates this objective as a central aim (*telos*) that organizes and integrates other goals: to discover the teaching vocation as an artistic action and an intrinsically moral praxis that communicate values and transforms the practitioner.
2. The students practiced the virtues and embodied values through the teaching-learning activities conducted throughout the course. Virtues and values are

most effectively cultivated when they are the fruit or indirect effect of seeking good for others. For instance, in the “Let’s Have a Party” project, the students worked on preparing plays for preschool children, aiming not only to provide them with an enjoyable experience but also to impart important values. They were not directly seeking to cultivate their patience, generosity, or initiative but a good for the children for whom the play was intended. Similarly, in the “My Grandparents Told Me” activity, gratitude was an incidental result of the students’ interactions with their grandparents, who were asked to share their favorite stories.

3. It is relevant that, while students express positive feedback about the active methodologies employed, they do not single out any particular teaching method as especially valuable. Some qualitative comments suggest the importance of the relationship between teacher and learner. In this sense, the teacher becomes the central “method”. When there is a (good) relationship of encounter, learning becomes meaningful in a double sense: didactic (related to what they already know (Ausubel 1983; 2000) and existential, linked to their life (González Iglesias and Sastre Jiménez, 2016; Fernández and López 2023). These meaningful encounters and interactions occur not only between the teacher and the students but also among students themselves and, in our case, between the two teachers who taught the subject, as well as with guest lecturers.
4. The results also indicate that narrative pedagogy seems to be suitable for students’ flourishing (Kristjánsson 2016). Narrative is crucial in early childhood education, to understand one’s own identity and tradition (MacIntyre 2015). Future teachers must recognize the value of literature, as it allows them to view both their lives, and the teaching profession as works of art. The stories - also fairy tales - allow us to order and give meaning to experience (Bruner 1981) and to our lives (Schiff et al. 2017).
5. The appreciation of moral beauty leads to the moral emotion of elevation (Haidt 2002; Algoe and Haidt 2009) and encourages moral practice. It is desirable to incorporate the experience of beauty (as the splendor of the truth and goodness) into education in virtues and values. The path of beauty (*via pulchritudinis*) should be harmonised with the path of knowledge and decision making in practice the virtues. The teaching of literature is particularly suited to facilitate this integration through active methods that involve students in the practice of literature itself.
6. A future innovation is the implementation of a peer-to-peer methodology for virtue education. Specifically, it is proposed that students establish a pact to support one another in practicing three fundamental virtues: respect, gratitude, and forgiveness. Through this pact, each student takes

responsibility not only for embodying these virtues themselves, but also for encouraging and helping their peers to cultivate them within the university environment.

7. Empirical studies on beauty and its effect on moral education are scarce (Diessner et al. 2006). These studies should be promoted in an anthropological model that adequately integrates intelligence, will and affectivity.

6. Conclusions

The revision of the purpose, objectives, and teaching methodology of the subject “Literature and Values” has been an effective proposal for educating in virtues and values through the teaching and practice of literature. The first and most important step in this process is to redefine the overall aim of the subject. The teaching guide must link the purpose with the didactic and evaluative means or the competences to be achieved in each subject. The specific education of students in certain virtues or values is an intermediate goal and an indirect effect that is achieved as a fruit of the search for a good for others.

However, the main finding is that the most significant impact on student learning does not come from the adoption of a particular methodology, but from two main factors: a) connecting with the moral motivation of students as future teachers and b) establishing a relationship of encounter between teachers and students and between students and each other. A student’s learning experience is enriched when they establish a strong pedagogical bond with their teacher (Gallardo and Reyes 2010). The pedagogical approach of the subject and the teacher-student relationship model are closely intertwined.

Through this connection, students are better able to integrate what they are learning into both their professional vocation and their current experiences.

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La educación humana es, por definición, educación en las virtudes, es decir, educación de rasgos del carácter que consideramos positivos o buenos. Estos se refieren a distintas dimensiones humanas: intelectual, moral, cívica y performativa. Algunos de estos rasgos del carácter son considerados como buenos de manera transcultural y, por tanto, pueden entenderse como valores universales, cualidades personales objetivamente deseables que toda buena educación debe aspirar a forjar en los educandos para que estos se desarrollen de manera integral.

El presente libro ofrece unas claves de cómo llevar a cabo esta tarea educativa con el propósito de dotar a docentes y familias de herramientas que les ayuden a mejorar el carácter de sus estudiantes e hijos como vía para su florecimiento personal y el avance de nuestras sociedades. En efecto, no cabe duda de que una buena sociedad es aquella que está compuesta por ciudadanos virtuosos, conscientes de la necesidad de mejorar su carácter y comprometidos en esta tarea inagotable de desarrollo personal.

A través de estrategias y herramientas prácticas fácilmente aplicables en el día a día del aula y de la familia, este libro no olvida que la educación es una tarea prudencial y, por tanto, no técnica. Por ello, no hay recetas ni procedimientos que, seguidos al pie de la letra, produzcan resultados predeterminados. Más bien, son los docentes y padres quienes, en atención a las circunstancias singulares que afectan la vida de cada estudiante, deben adaptar la aplicación de estas pautas para que la libertad de los estudiantes se desarrolle en un sentido que contribuya a su crecimiento personal.

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