Ethics and Professional Deontology in Socio-educational Youth Work. Ethical limits of socio-educational work with young people in Europe and Latin America

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> We know, then, that social action can no longer be solitary, and that the management of complexity requires, more than ever, cooperation. But cooperation only makes sense between free and determined subjects. It is certainly not a soft association in which each individual may dispense with being coherent with himself under the pretext of being in harmony with the group […] Too many teams are so constituted in complicity in order to hide what they are not very proud of together or simply to allow some to hide in the set.

> Meirieu, Ph. *La opción de educar*

> Humanism is the striving for the human: to be more aware of our being, to form for ourselves an idea of our world, to know how to choose and model our action, to prepare ourselves to cooperate with others, and also to be compassionate. In this way, humanists do not or should not distinguish themselves from scientists, and vice versa.

Bilbeny, N. & Guàrdia, J. *Humanidades e investigación científica*

Summary

In recent years, the socio-educational professions have experienced a qualitative leap in the development of their epistemological, scientific and technical foundations. One of the aspects currently in full development is reflection on the ethical dimension of its activities. The publication of the Convention on the Rights of the Child has brought with it a new approach that must necessarily be grounded in the ideas of complexity and ethical commitment. The first part of the present text considers the linkage between the Convention, ethics and social education. The second explores the difficulties encountered by professionals when it comes to incorporating their ethical commitment in their working practice, and seeks to show that while the proliferation of declarative documents in the form of deontological codes may be of value in defining a unitary position, these documents do not constitute an effective approach, from the complexity and ethics of caring, to the real situations of moral conflict in which socio-educational professionals find themselves in their day-to-day practice. Finally, the text puts forward a number of operational criteria and training proposals with a view to constructing an applied ethics in the work with adolescents and young people.

Keywords:

Moral responsibility, professional ethics, complexity, ethical conflict

<1> Introduction

Every engagement with the needs of children and young people from a pedagogical and educational perspective is determined by the political-ideological premises and assumptions of its time, in some cases masked by technical models and arguments in order to justify a specific type of socio-educational action. At the same time, every political assumption implies a particular ethical positioning.[i]

The classic models, with their charitable health and welfare orientation accompanied by a penchant for repression and control, reflect the directive and paternalistic ethical point of view, which places the professional (in this case, the social educator or social worker[ii]) in a privileged position from which to decide what is best for the person receiving attention, the client, who is effectively nullified, and from whom only obedience and submission are expected. This is a "no rights" model in which the young person is no more than a passive subject incapable of making decisions about the meaning and direction she wants to give to her life.

The next step up, which adopts a perspective of fundamental rights proper to a democratic society, represents a decisive change both in the political premises and in the ethical assumptions underpinning the approach to the treatment of children and young people. This model views the young person as a citizen, the development of whose rights the state must ensure through the provision of those basic resources that have been previously defined in a portfolio of services.

This technocratic perspective conceives the socio-educational action in terms of problem solving because it is concerned almost entirely with tangible issues. For example, the incorporation of the young person into society is conceived in terms of the right to a job and a house, thus making it relatively easy to find a solution to the problem, which is tangible and material. The response to these needs is addressed from a technocratic perspective in which the various services have been atomized and each service is staffed by specialists who are assigned very specific tasks (for example, the protection of young people, the monitoring of juvenile justice, day centers for careers guidance in the transition from school to work, support for mental health, and so on). There is an underlying assumption that reality can be described in its entirety and broken down into smaller units (the whole is the sum of the parts), so that if each service carries out its task

correctly, the problem is solved. This is a model that gives every individual the same attention by focusing on the logic of professionals and services: the individual adapts to an organigram rather than the other way around. In this case, it is fair or legitimate to expect what the law has provided in the way of services.

The moral duty in this model is that the professional should exercise in a satisfactory manner the specific responsibility he or she is assigned, so the model places a corresponding emphasis on clearly defining roles and tasks and describing the services to be provided. Anything not included within the functional remit of a given service is perceived as falling outside the responsibility of that service. Thus, if someone poses a problem that goes beyond what has been provided for in the circuit, that problem is very likely to be left unattended. It may well end up being passed on from one service or resource to another down the line towards some "ideal resource" which perhaps does not exist. In these circumstances it is likely that there will be overlaps, mutually contradictory actions or unattended areas, with the various professionals performing their own specific tasks but with no one being responsible for the case as such or for the consequences of fragmentary, piecemeal actions, since there is no holistic, integral overview or sense of responsibility for the case as a whole (Díaz, Civis, 2011: 417). Thus, when faced with a value conflict, the professional asks for instructions, because that conflict is also addressed from the perspective of problem / solution. In such cases, the highest level of engagement is that of multidisciplinary coordination, understood as the point at which a number of mutually independent provisions are informed of what each one is doing, but with no guarantee that they will decenter their perspective (Vilar, 2008). From the ethical point of view, this is conventional thinking focused on compliance with standard norms and procedures (Kohlberg, 1989).

The fundamental change appears when this perspective of basic rights goes beyond compartmentalized provision delivered by standardized services and engages holistically with the person within a complex framework in which reality is constructed as an interpretation of the facts in a scenario of systemic interactions. Here we can talk of a *socio-critical* model centered on the person.

From the ethical point of view, this interpretive perspective requires an awareness of the position from which reality is interpreted and the ideological and ethical framework that serves as a reference. The systemic interaction includes elements that will be intangible or, at least, not tractable from the problem / solution perspective. In contrast to the previous example, here the social inclusion of young people involves the construction of a network of links and support services with a view to achieving overall autonomy (occupational, financial, relational), and this calls for an action that goes far beyond the provision of standardized services. Here it is the services and the professionals that adapt to each concrete situation in order to put together the most appropriate response possible in a complex framework of interaction of variables that will not always be fully known: this being so, a closed model of predictable circuits is of no use; instead, it is a question of working from a network structure to create knowledge in the engagement with the new, unforeseen and singular character of each case, in a framework that does not seek to find "the solution" but to promote processes of change.

In the perspective of complexity, the promotion of rights calls for an ethical involvement by the professional that goes beyond mere compliance with the law, which is of course an indispensable requirement. As Cortina reminds us (2003: 16), "if the exercise of professional activity demands excellence, and it is not enough to avoid negligence, then the right is insufficient: it is necessary to forge the ethos, the character

of the activity, which is formed with values, principles and virtues, not with the mere observance of laws."

Here, the person is seen as someone to be respected on the basis of their dignity and who lives in a scenario of multiple reciprocal influences, the interaction of which has constructed that particular history. The moral responsibility consists in all of the agents involved creating the most favorable customized proposal. Consequently, the various professionals must work together, not now from multidisciplinary coordination but from the shared responsibility of a joint interdisciplinary construct (Ballester, Orte, Oliver, March, 2004: 3) and a post-conventional ethical perspective (Kohlberg, 1989) centered on the universal principles.

This perspective reveals two key elements that directly concern social education: the element of complexity, associated with uncertainty, unpredictability and knowledge creation, and the element of necessary ethical positioning, linked to the idea of constructing evaluative reference systems with which to orient action.

If we focus on the perspective of children's rights, the presentation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 1989) constituted a substantial change in the way socio-educational action is posited, as the culmination of a long tradition of proposals for universal rights for children and young people[iii]. The philosophy of the Convention goes far beyond the technocratic welfare-centered perspectives, in that it does not apply partial attention to alleviate a possible deficit but posits the need to promote integral development. It notes that the range of actions in pursuit of the rights of children and young people must be conceived and implemented on the basis of the *best interests of the child* and from a global perspective that addresses both material and non-material needs. It seeks to develop and promote both social rights and civil rights in all areas of work (Cots, 2015)[iv].

As can be seen, this formulation makes evident both the idea of complexity and the need to establish the ethical standard to interpret this idea of *best interests*.

<1> Social, political and ethical education

Social education is a disciplinary framework of critical reflection and production of pedagogical knowledge. It is also a professional practice, one that in the Spanish state takes the specific form of social education. With a remit that extends beyond schooling, it envisages educational phenomena from a broad, systemic and complex perspective. It builds action networks which encompass a range of agents (social educators), areas (free time, protection, juvenile justice, access to work, mental health), and resources (schools, day centers, school-workshops for entry to work, etc.) (Caride, Gradaílle, Varela, 2017), and is thus a fundamental theoretical-practical discipline from which to reflect on not only the technical but also the ethical and political implications of how to promote the rights of children and young people.

The current positioning of social pedagogy and social education points to the need to fashion approaches to the work that take into account the characteristics of each individual, their immediate environment and their community, rather than simply creating standardized services to which the young person is obliged to adapt in order for tangible needs to be dealt with from a problem / solution perspective. The epistemological implications of the perspective of complexity entail becoming aware of the intangible aspects that are implicit in the development of each individual, which implies moving from the multidisciplinary and multiprofessional to the interdisciplinary and interprofessional, in which the person is at the center and is treated as unique and unrepeatable. In this regard it is worth emphasizing that the three classic paradigms of

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social education – the technocratic perspective, the hermeneutic perspective and the critical perspective (Sáez, 1997, Caride, 2003, Úcar, 2016b) – are mutually complementary approaches whose interaction provides a stronger and more extensive foundation from which to address complexity. As Úcar observes, "it could be said that social education is a social, procedural or planning technology [...]; but it is also a social practice in which human beings interrelate, bringing into play in the interaction their interests, desires, expectations, dreams and problems; [...] If we characterize socio-educational interventions as a critical social practice, what we are emphasizing is the liberating and emancipatory role of these actions." (Úcar, 2016b: 75-76)

This view of complexity clears the way to creating new forms of action capable of removing the traditional segregation of social subsystems – school, primary care, protection, access to work, etc. – and the aggregation of unconnected intervention programs. It is important to build bridges between the disciplines and open up to transdisciplinarity (Nicolescu, 1996) or create a new and far more transversal *ecology of knowledges* (De Sousa, 2009). It is a question of shifting from approaches that are vertical and hierarchical to others that are horizontal and relational (Úcar, 2016a: 128). For this to be achieved, there is a need for more collaborative organizations which facilitate cooperation between professionals and institutions with responsibilities for socio-educational engagement with young people, oriented towards social innovation. We should also mention here the desirability of analyzing social phenomena from a multidimensional vision in which the apparently contradictory traits are seen as actually complementing each other in a network of interactions, while remaining mutually antagonistic (Morin, 2008).

The promotion of the fundamental rights of young people implies the construction of policies that convert ethical ideals into actions. Both the theory and the practice of

pedagogy aim to assist people to fashion and improve themselves in order to live more fully and satisfactorily in their world (Úcar, 2016c: 45); this being so, social education can help policy-makers think about how to foster the promotion of the rights of young people, from a triple perspective.

First, we have *the right to education* understood as access to educational resources and opportunities, such as basic education, learning support outside school, free time resources or the transition to the world of work. Secondly, and with a broader perspective, we have *rights in education*, or the exercise of rights as citizens in different educational contexts, such as the rights to freedom of opinion, non-discrimination, equality of opportunities and participation.

Thirdly, and closely connected to the idea of the best interests of the child, we have *the right through education*, or how education comes to constitute the platform from which to foster in young people the skills for a full social life and access to the exercise of citizenship rights (Liebel, 155: 2015).

As can be seen, this third dimension is the one that most clearly paves the way to the integral development of young people, given the political and ethical implications of attaining this objective by way of education.

From the ethical point of view, social education assumes its responsibilities on a post-conventional level (Kohlberg, 1989), at the point at which it constructs models for the analysis of reality and proposals for action based on universal principles and moves beyond the adoption of normative criteria derived from a given policy.

An education which has its basis in the rights of children and young people and at the same time takes these rights as an objective implies "committing the act of educating to values and ideals that demand a profound transformation of society; and, consequently, the denunciation of all those circumstances that violate, limit or restrict human dignity in

its inalienable aspiration to a freer, more equitable, more solidaristic, fairer, more democratic and more peaceful coexistence" (Caride, 2009: 56-57). The idea is that social education should go hand in hand with policy-making, the former guiding, accompanying and assisting people in their learning, development and growth, and the latter creating the spaces and frameworks that enable and reinforce those processes (Úcar 2016c, 92). Social education has the opportunity to create real and effective scenarios of integral education – not only to exercise them, but also to live them – because educating oneself in these scenarios paves the way to a socially inclusive well-being (Caride, Gradaílle, Varela, 2017: 90).

And how are we to live these scenarios? One of the perspectives of greatest interest today is that outlined and explored by Martha Nussbaum, which endows basic rights with meaning and content and shows how to avoid reducing them to mere signifiers or ideal but empty proposals.

According to Nussbaum, the development of rights is closely linked to the promotion of basic capabilities associated with the idea of a dignified life and the inviolability of this dignity. If these capabilities are not given, an optimal development of rights is not possible. The capabilities in question concern the fostering of life – not having to die prematurely; physical health – a healthy life from the point of view of food, housing and support for reproduction; physical integrity – living without aggression of any kind and with freedom of movement; the development of the senses, imagination and thought –which implies basic education, freedom of expression, stimulation of expressive capabilities; care of the emotions – emotional development linked to cultivation of affection, without fear or coercion; the fostering of practical reason – being able to make life plans and have freedom of conscience; affiliation – being able to live with and for others with self-respect, free from humiliation; a meaningful relationship with other

species – living in an ecological balance with nature; play – understanding recreational activity as a human need; and control over one's own environment – participation in political action, having property rights and equal access to decent employment (Nussbaum, 2012: 88-89).

In short: a post-conventional ethical perspective that is responsive to the demand for dignified treatment of all human beings on the basis of universal principles cannot be developed from a charitable or technocratic standpoint but must make the leap to the level of complex thinking. This implies the following changes in social education and social work professionals:

- Moving from a technocratic vision to a complex and systemic vision.

- Moving from multidisciplinarity to interdisciplinarity.

- Moving from a rigid tree-like structure of service provision to a flexible network structure.

- Moving from standardized responses in which the service provider assumes the central role to personalized responses centered on the person.

- Moving from the "problem / solution" scheme to the "change / progress" dynamic.

Ethics and complexity go hand in hand, and neither can be understood in isolation from the other. In a highly complex world, normative systems are bound to fall short, so the future lies in the direction of auto-ethics and self-regulation (Morin, 2006). This comes down to developing once again a sense of duty, understood as the moral obligation one imposes on oneself in order to achieve a common good, because, in short, ethics implies talking about the use of freedom. The treatment of ethical aspects thus requires a substantial change in the paradigms on which socio-educational action is based.

<1> Social education and applied ethics in professional practice

The issue to be addressed now is the extent to which the post-conventional ethical care position that serves as the basis for social pedagogy and social education actually translates into day-to-day professional actions, or whether in fact the multiple factors conditioning those actions reduce ethics to a declarative dimension of a symbolic nature with little or no impact on people's lives (Vilar, Riberas, 2017b).

The problem that arises here is how to move from the good intentions of an ideal generic political commitment to responsible actions that are consistent with those intentions and that can be held to account. Specifically, it is a question of professional practice being governed by the great principles of ethics (Observatori de Bioètica i Dret (1979): the great principles of autonomy (everyone must be considered to be a subject with criteria and opinions); of beneficence (faced with alternative options, the professional must choose the one that generates greater well-being or benefit); of justice (ensuring fairness and impartiality in the equal treatment of all persons), and of non-maleficence (avoiding the intentional use of knowledge and power for any purpose that contravenes the aforementioned principles).

It is also, from an operational point of view, a question of those principles being present in a transversal manner at every point in the pedagogical process: in the quality of the diagnoses, in the precision of the designs, in the prudence of their implementation, in the fairness possible conflicts of value are handled and in the generosity with which interdisciplinary work takes into account the interests of the person being worked with.

Finally, it is a question of there being real indicators of the attainability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability of rights to the circumstances of the person

(Caride, 2009: 63). Ultimately, and here we turn again to Kohlberg, it is a question of the extent to which there is a deviation from what, *a priori*, *it would be ideal to do* (post-conventionality) to what *it is obligatory to do* (conventionality) or even, in the worst cases, to what *it is most convenient to do* (pre-conventionality).

The studies consulted suggest that there is often a significant discrepancy between what would be desirable from the point of view of professional principles and aspirations and what ends up happening in actual fact (Ballesteros, Vizcarret, Úriz, 2011, 2012, 2013; Vilar, Riberas, 2017). One of the reasons for this is that professionals have received little or no ethical training[v], and there is considerable confusion about how to approach the presence of ethics in professional practice (Vilar, Riberas, Rosa, 2015). Possessing a moral conscience is necessary but not sufficient when it comes to addressing value conflicts. When social educators and social workers are sensitive to value issues but lack the means of dealing with them, they put themselves in a situation of *moral hazard* (Banks, 1977: 34) or damage to their *moral health* (Guisán, 1986: 47).

In light of the above, the following pages will be devoted to describing and identifying the key steps to connecting the ethical ideal with a professional practice in which principles and values are present in day-to-day activity through the construction of ethical infrastructures. We will also consider the main difficulties encountered in each of these situations and, as far as possible, sketch out criteria with which to address them.

<2> Defining a position

The first step in building an ethical infrastructure is to define a position. This definition comprises two aspects: the first aspect is the set of values and principles that serve as a reference in the exercise of professional practice and are enlisted in engaging

with the person being worked with; the other, and no less important, is the specific theoretical model from which these values and principles are brought into play.

In relation to the first aspect, this usually takes the form of a deontological code detailing the obligations and goals to which the profession or organization commits itself.

Here a first difficulty arises. A deontological code is designed to guide professional excellence and, at the same time, to limit the power of the professional practitioners and protect their clients, but not to resolve actual day-to-day problems, because it is essentially declarative: it defines ideals, but it cannot provide for situations in which its values contradict one another, nor can it resolve specific contextualized issues for which it has no answer (Banks, 1997).

The temptation in these cases is to take the deontological code as a kind of mandatory regulation. When this happens, the ethical position is devalued by converting it into a para-juridical structure and moving from a reflective and deliberative space for basing decision-making on the responsible use of freedom to the realm of imperatives. A deontological code, like a code values or best practices, is not legal but moral, and as such cannot be imposed by external coercion on the conscience of the individual who has to adhere to it because imposition removes it from the domain of ethics (Roman, 2009: 17; Rodríguez, 2017).

At the same time, if we accept that the work done in a complex situation is interprofessional, the response to a value conflict cannot be constructed unilaterally from the codes of the different professions involved in it. In the face of new problems for which there are no pre-established answers, the response lies in joint construction, dialogue, deliberation and a willingness to get to know the interlocutor, so that no deontological code is sufficient as a criterion of reference.

In relation to the second question, we must be aware of the implications of different ethical models (deductive, inductive, dialogical, of virtues or of care)[vi]. If we opt for a deductive Kantian model based on an obligation to comply at all times with those values (principlism), we gain some clarity but are faced with the devaluation of the ethical aspects that we mentioned earlier and we lose the capacity to respond to diversity. On the other hand, if we opt for an inductive model of a utilitarian or consequentialist nature focused on the care of the person being worked with, we risk falling into a relativism that leaves us without references as to how to apply our values and, consequently, how to behave in situations of injustice. A dialogical perspective may end up immersing itself in the form of the debate and lose sight of the case in point, and an ethic focused on the development of virtues and behaviors can stray from its guiding principles, while an ethic of caring whose priority is making the person being worked with feel they are treated with dignity in their vulnerability can end up neglecting the institutional obligations (Ferrer and Álvarez, 2005; Maliandi, 2006; Román, 2016).

We can see, then, that while it is important to know which theoretical model orients the use of values and, on the other hand, it is no less important to tend towards an approach to the ethics of complexity that, from the perspective of care of a vulnerable person, incorporates the best aspects of the various models.

<2> Possessing criteria with which to define the idea of good practice

The second aspect of defining a position concerns the operational criteria for determining what counts as *good practice*, given that this expression is open to a range of interpretations, which can essentially be assigned either to a teleological orientation, focused on objectives and outcomes, or to an axiological orientation centered on aspirations and values.

From a teleological perspective, socio-educational action includes the scientific dimension that defines the disciplinary framework for interpreting reality and constitutes the basis for subsequent action. It also has a technical dimension which is what establishes the mechanisms, procedures, steps and moments for the use of scientific knowledge. The axiological perspective presents us with a legal and administrative dimension which determines the mandatory regulatory framework in which the action will be carried out. It also incorporates the ethical dimension, which is what defines the values and principles that provide the framework for what is considered a fair action.

The idea of *good practice* as it is commonly used tends to be polarized between these two general perspectives.

From the teleological perspective, *good practice* is oriented towards the results, effects and consequences of the action, and as such it speaks in terms of successes and mistakes. An action qualifies as *good practice* to the extent that the method employed leads to success in the sense of the achievement of a predetermined result. An action that qualifies as bad practice is one that takes us farther away from the intended effect and, in extreme cases, amounts to failure. From this perspective, any action can be justified if the results are favorable and consistent with the previously assigned outcome.

From the axiological perspective, the assessment of *good practice* is centered on intentions, on the coherence with the ideological orientation or on the attitudes of the professional at the moment of implementing it, and as such it has a political and ethical component: what counts are the motives and the style of the action. Thus, *good practice* is motivated by the will to provide a service or to do good to the person being worked with and informed by attitudes consistent with the principles that guide the action. An instance of bad practice would be one that neglected these principles and might therefore lead to unfair and even negligent treatment. In this case, one could end up with a definition

of goodness centered solely on the intentions and attitudes of the professional, regardless of whether the results are satisfactory.

To get around this dichotomy, we hold the view that every instance of *good practice* will include the four elements of the two dimensions or perspectives:

• It is scientifically well-founded: it identifies without error the object of study and documents its nature with solid foundations.

• At the technical level, the entire process is well developed and implemented: the diagnosis is correct, the design derived from it is viable, the application of the actions is well-structured, and the monitoring and evaluation systems are precise and allow the action to be reoriented where necessary.

• The application of normative criteria and existing services to deliver the care and attention provided for by law is framed in a context that enhances the development of the rights of the people worked with: just laws, flexible services and sufficient resources to provide the most personalized attention possible.

• The action is governed by an idea of justice that is manifested in ethical behaviors which are oriented towards excellence: the definition of guiding values and principles that take into account the diversity of conflict situations and scenarios, attitudes or moral behaviors that make the practice a responsible and tangible exercise of care and enhancement of the person, and mechanisms or strategies for effectively addressing value conflicts.

The promotion of human rights is the factor that should guide the professional between these two extremes, avoiding negligence and aiming for excellence.

<2> Possessing an effective mechanism for managing conflicts of value

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Finally, the presence of ethics in the day-to-day practice of social pedagogy and social education also requires the creation of systematic spaces for dealing with value conflicts. In particular, it is necessary to have a separate space set aside for such issues in which they are not mixed up with other problems of an organizational or technical nature. In addition, it is necessary to be skilled in methods of systematic deliberation of the problematic with which to orient discussion in a direction that will consist not so much in finding a solution as in seeking the best possible option. In conclusion, it is essential that professionals have support materials or external experts who can provide legal, technical and ethical knowledge and arguments on the issues that have given rise to the conflict. Having a specific space for the construction of knowledge, a method of deliberation and materials and / or experts providing relevant criteria are important in incorporating ethics into the concrete moment of action.

We believe that the steps we have outlined here make it possible to coherently connect the ideal dimension with actual professional practice. To make this connection even closer, it is helpful to start from a structuring framework organized into four levels of analysis, which are developed simultaneously in professional activity: the first level is that of identity, and provides the deontological codes within which the profession is framed (this is the only framework element that is structured at the present time); the second and much less frequent level corresponds to the specific area of specialization and has to generate guidelines for *good practice*s that contextualize the major principles of the profession on the basis of specialized technical knowledge of each specific area – in this case, young people; the third level is that of team consciousness and it will be here that the day-to-day conflicts of the institution are dealt with and a cumulative experience of institutional character is built up; the fourth level has to do with personal awareness and self-reflective capacity (Vilar, 2013; Vilar, Riberas, 2017).

<1> Some remarks on training

We conclude this text with a few brief observations about the ethical training of professionals. The first idea here is that ethics cannot be simply another subject on the curriculum, added on to the many that are already there, because it implies adopting a new perspective in which it constitutes a transversal vector of training with a multifaceted perspective that, at the very least, includes the following dimensions:

• Ethics as a form of *philosophical training*, which comprises the reflective and conceptual substrate of an ethical-philosophical nature underpinning the ethical models that serve to define a position. It develops the consciousness of public responsibility and the moral sense of professional activity.

• Ethics as a *technical capability*, which implies the possession of a broad scientific-technical training with which to engage in a just manner, with solidity, rigorous coherence, efficacy and technical efficiency, in the treatment of highly complex situations.

• Ethics as a *strategic capacity*, which involves acquiring a method of deliberation and developing the discursive, communicative, relational and emotional self-regulation skills that are put into play in the process of jointly constructing a response to a value conflict.

By way of illustration we offer below some typical contents and the skills corresponding to them (Vilar, 2013; Riberas, Rosa, Vilar, 2015):

Contents	Skills
• Moral sensitivity, ethical commitment and the foundations of applied ethics.	• The development of the moral sense, awareness, moral sensitivity and

• A holistic and multifaceted view of the complex nature of educational and social phenomena.	ethical commitment acquired in professional practice. • The possession of basic theoretical knowledge of moral philosophy in order to actively participate in the construction of the applied ethics of the profession.
• The effective management of value conflicts.	• The possession of technical knowledge and responsible use of the set of instruments for the analysis of and engagement with moral dilemmas (deliberation procedure, strategy for decision making). • Demonstrating resolutive capacity to effectively manage and reflect on moral dilemmas. • Displaying a constructive attitude and cooperatively resolving value conflicts.
• Personal self-control, the use of freedom	• Awareness of one's capabilities and limitations in order to properly manage possible extreme experiences in professional practice. • Demonstrating maturity, self-regulation and resilience in coping

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	with adversity in professional practice without neglecting duty or renouncing moral sense.

Caring and giving support and guidance involves making an honest use of power and looking and listening on the basis of respect to create opportunities for development and growth. For this reason, it is essential that the skills referred to in the chart above should be accompanied by virtues and behaviors that reflect the moral predisposition of the professional.

The key educational texts are full of examples, so we will point out here only some of the most noteworthy: the classic requirements in the therapist-client relationship detailed by Rogers (1984) – unconditional acceptance, empathic understanding, authenticity and an environment free from external evaluation; the ideas put forward by Meirieu (2001) on the "educability principle" – believe in the possibilities of the other person's progress and create the conditions for them to progress through *safe spaces* in which the young person can risk making mistakes without suffering adverse consequences; the elements identified by Hansen (2002) with the idea of moral sensibility – positive spirit, moral presence, simplicity, and sincerity; and the attributes ascribed by Van Manen (1998, 2003) to *pedagogical tact* and *tone*: recognition, support, and understanding.

<1> In conclusion

In the work with young people, ethics is fundamental because it situates professionals in reflecting on how they use their power and their freedom in relation to the young person's needs, whose life project thus becomes the center that motivates the action.

It is important for social educators and social workers to be trained in ethical skills so that these are present in every moment of the action. Without such training it is very difficult to adequately insert the ethics of the profession on the different moments of the action. This issue is especially relevant when it comes to protecting the fundamental rights of children and young people promoted by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which implies an integral, holistic view from complex parameters.

It is necessary to emphasize that although there are clear normative systems and well-defined protocols, even to the point of converting educational practice into a technology, the ethical contradiction inherent in pedagogical practice cannot be entirely eliminated.

It is useful for professionals to have a shared reference system that serves as a starting position for addressing value conflicts in a systematic fashion, because in the professional field it is neither sufficient nor appropriate for conflict to be managed solely on the basis of personal ethics. Of course, the professional has a subjective experience of conflict, but it does not follow that a conflict should be managed as if it were private or personal. It is therefore necessary to establish a shared position and make explicit the model by reference to which values are implemented.

The definition of principles is meaningful in so far as the professional is able to translate them into tangible evidence and behavior, so it is vitally important to foster the development of attitudes or virtues of care for others.

On the other hand, a highly developed moral sensitivity does not necessarily imply the ability to manage value conflicts. It is also necessary to have an ethical infrastructure that makes it possible to come up with equitable responses through an exercise of joint construction of knowledge. This infrastructure should have a specific space of ethical reflection (an ethics committee, for example), a structured method of deliberation and a set of technical, legal and ethical guidance materials (or in its absence, a human advisory team) to guide decision-making.

The development of ethics in the professions that revolve around young people is not solely a question of the uses which individual professionals made of their freedom. It is essentially dependent of the participation of the employing bodies and organizations, the public authorities, professional associations and universities, each from their own area of responsibility, in creating the conditions that make it possible to carry out fair and respectful actions in which ethics are present at every point in the process of attending to people.

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[i] Translator's note: the literal equivalent of the terms "social education" and "social educator" are used in many European and Latin American countries for a form of social work and community education and its professional practitioners, and are used in the present text.

[ii] In this text the terms "ethical positioning" and "moral positioning" are treated as synonymous. In both cases, ethics is taken as being the human capacity to reflect from and on principles and values, and morality or "morals" as the specific positions that may be adopted by a given individual.

[iii] Notable earlier declarations of a more or less symbolic nature include (Cots, Lázaro, Vilar, 2014): José H. Figueira's 1912 *Decalogue of the Rights of the Child*; the Moscow Declaration of 1918; Eglantyne Jebb's Geneva Declaration of 1924; the 1927 lecture "The

Rights of the Child" by Gabriela Mistral, and Janusz Korczak's *The Child's Right to Respect*, published in 1929.

iv The main instrument for the implementation of the Convention and the construction of childhood policies are the General Observations documents, which develop detailed aspects of the Convention and have been issued by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child since 2000. Among these observations, we must highlight especially the No. 14 of 2013, dedicated specifically to developing the idea of the best interests of the child.

v The studies we have carried out indicate that those social education and social work professionals who have had some amount of ethical training have not found it to be useful. The curricula of the teaching centers reveal a great deal of dispersion between skills, expected learning outcomes, work methodologies and the type of learning activity provided to the students.

vi A proper study of the major ethical models would require more time and space than is available to us in this chapter. We suggest consulting the texts by Román (2016) and Ferrer and Álvarez (2005).