

Kind humor as part of education

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Abstract

Kind humor as part of education. – This article highlights a lost or forgotten, but in a certain tradition (spiritual) absolutely necessary dimension of education, kind educational humor. It shows its nature and distinguishes it from otherwise problematic forms: cynicism, irony or ridicule.

Keywords: kind humor, generosity, happiness, self-confidence, irony

Klíčová slova: laskavý humor, velkorysost, štěstí, sebevědomí, ironie

Today, the professionalism of a teacher is associated primarily with expertise, knowledge, personal maturity and the ability to take responsibility, be competent and apply didactic methods using the latest techniques. It is as if it has been forgotten that education is a living relationship, fragile and vulnerable, unnatural and places considerable demands on all those involved, but above all on educators. On their intellect, will, ethical reasoning and moral conduct, on their determination, ability to persevere and on their emotional balance – practical virtue (in Greek *Phronesis*) and also temperance (in Greek *Sophrosyne*), which should be inherent in any real educator, from antiquity up until today.¹ An important manifestation of this emotional balance is humor, the ability to see with distance, foresight and in the attitude of alleviated or disciplined emotions of thinking and the actions of oneself and others.

This also applies at a social level. Education is essentially based on the awareness of intergenerational solidarity. Jan Patočka writes about this: “When we conceive education as formation, as the formation of possibilities that are naturally given to man, education is given in three moments: primarily by the fact that in society there are adults, that is, already formed, and minors, not yet formed, together, that is, the necessary changing of generations; then by the fact that these new ones are not yet formed, and finally by the fact that members of these different generations belong together, that this sense of belonging gives them certain tasks. They have to care for each other...”²

Here, too, the emotional basis of education is formed, and natural relationships are built. The most important thing for a good education is the “sense of belonging” and solidarity, concern and care, love of a special kind. Love that does not bind, but that leaves the educated and the educator free. After all, the purpose of good education is that the one who is educated no longer needs the education, becomes free, independent, responsible and able to take care not only of themselves, but also of their descendants and ancestors. This difficult task seems to overwhelm us, and yet we are able to cope with it somehow, sometimes worse

¹ About this cf. FINK, Eugen. *Erziehungswissenschaft und Lebenslehre*. Freiburg: Rombach, 1978, p. 167.

² PATOČKA, Jan. *Filosofie výchovy*. Praha: Pedagogická fakulta UK, 1997, p. 22.

and sometimes better. Here, too, humor can emerge as an important, healing and compensatory force.

This idea entered the theory of pedagogy with spiritual concepts, especially in the first half of the 20th century, and specifically through the work of Herman Nohl, who describes generosity as one of the basic features of education. H. Nohl considers the educator's humor to be the most important manifestation of this generosity, perceived as the opposite of pedantry. He refers to Oskar Jäger, who once said: "Many have the pathos of their profession, few have its humor."³ This applies to all professions, but to educators and teachers especially. Nohl states that: "Humor is an element of the educator's essence; it belongs to the educator's personality."⁴

The criterion of successful pedagogical leadership is the happiness of all participants, the educator and especially the child. This also applies to the teacher and his inner freedom, which manifests itself externally as: "Humor, it rises above all obstacles and does not leave him sad and dissatisfied."⁵ Humor lightens educational situations, it is Nohl's recipe against the teacher "burning out" and against the child's suffering in education. "We have to take a child very seriously, but who can take a child only seriously?" asks Nohl.⁶

The source of pedagogical humor is love for children, interest in them, but also the predominance and superiority of the adult. Kind humor is the opposite of every ridicule, humiliation and irony, to which no real educator should ever lower himself, even if they have to prove their sense of humor when, for example, the wantonness and mischief of young people turn against them. Pedantic seriousness, forever scolding or Pharisaic criticism are the real illnesses of the educator. Where there is humor in the profession, the educator does not take himself too seriously. He knows there is a great disparity between what he says and how he acts in the interest of education, and who he really is.

However, there are also non-pedagogical forms of this insight, such as cynicism, irony with the intention of offending, harming and mocking. Humor is something else, it is a manifestation of freedom, because even with the highest seriousness and commitment of the teacher, the awareness of relativity, temporality and limitation of all our educational endeavors remains present. Nohl says that the friendly love, affection, openness towards the other who trusts him "a healing and solving power that is ultimately stronger than all other methods".⁷

"The most important task of education as the teaching of life is to pass on secrets that we do not know ourselves – the ability to release for others what is not in our power but what supports and determines us."⁸ The birth of humor, the sense of humor is such a secret.

³ NOHL, Herman. *Die pädagogische Bewegung in Deutschland und ihre Theorie*. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1988, p. 193.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

⁸ MICHÁLEK, Jiří. *Topologie výchovy*. Praha: OIKOMENH, 1996, p. 50.

True humor is above all an expression of joy and delight, or rather the enjoyment of life and interest in human things. It is not humor that can be expressed in language, but which is in the nature of language itself. Radim Palouš, a great philosopher of education, whose lectures were full of this subtle humor, recalls playing with language and the pleasure of how language can play with us:

“An idea struck me. I was struck by an idea; it is but one of many such. And it is where we would least expect it. Let us recall St. Augustine, who asked the intrusive question: What did God do before he created the world? He humorously replies, ‘He prepared hell for those who ask in this way’. Humor is full of spirit. Humor is an expression of respect and love for the known. Humor is not a joke; it is like opening up and relieving someone that is overly serious. Education is serious, it is almost all important, and that is why it is not possible at all without humor. Humor corrects, reconciles, forgives and heals.”

*“This house is my own and here I dwell,
I’ve never aped nothing from no one
and I laugh at each master, mark me well,
who at himself has not poked fun.”
ABOVE MY FRONT DOOR⁹*

⁹ NIETZSCHE, Friedrich. *Radostná věda: “la gaya scienza”*. Praha: Československý spisovatel, 1992, p. 7.

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