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*Source / Izvornik:* **Jahr : Europski časopis za bioetiku, 2011, 2, 407 - 414**

**Journal article, Published version**

**Rad u časopisu, Objavljena verzija rada (izdavačev PDF)**

*Permanent link / Trajna poveznica:* <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:184:453864>

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*Download date / Datum preuzimanja:* **2025-01-07**



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## The actuality of thoughts of Fritz Jahr in bioethics education or why Fritz Jahr advocates character education

### ABSTRACT

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This title is set to achieve two goals. Firstly, to explain reasons and motives for character education, secondly, to actualise the approach of Fritz Jahr in the conception of contents, methodology of implementation and methods of evaluation in bioethics education of future medical and health service providers. The realisation of the first goal leads to an explanation of institutional and non-institutional influence on the understanding of ethics and morality, nature and methods of ethical decision-making and behaviour of students.

The second goal has the intention to show how pluralism of values, ideas, scientific and non-scientific initiatives, as well as forms of ethical behaviour and application of ethical standards, rules and principles – component parts of Jahr's decorum - help students with critical consideration and with their relationship to the profession they will practice in the future.

### Introduction

This work presents a continuation of research on character education published in the creation of doctoral thesis titled "Bioethics Education: Contents, Methods and Models", published in the book titled *Bioethics Education*<sup>1</sup>. This book presents thoughts on the course contents that can help to obtain status of subject and programme of character education<sup>2</sup>. Today, owing to Professor Hans-Martin Sass's re-

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<sup>1</sup> More in: Gosić, N. *Bioetička edukacija (Bioethics Education)*, Pergamena Press, Zagreb, 2005, p. 50-57.

<sup>2</sup> Lickona, Th. (1996). "Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education", *Journal of Moral Education*, 1, 93-100.

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search on Fritz Jahr, we can actualise Fritz Jahr's standpoints on character education, compare them to contemporary standpoints and determine Fritz Jahr's contribution to the creation of a concept of the European model of bioethics education.

## Jahr's decorum in character education

In 1930s Fritz Jahr defined ten ways to influence moral reasoning of young people<sup>3</sup>. The aim of this work has been based on this idea and it tends to test the application of Jahr's approaches to moral education in medical-ethical and bioethical course contents of medical schools students. On the theoretical level we have decided to state Jahr's method, or (even better) the educational principles and explanation of their educational importance. On the practical level we consider the implementation of each of these principles in the concrete bioethics course content. This means that the application refers to consideration and analysis of concrete medical-ethical issues and bioethical problem situations that physicians confront. We cannot form the complete assessment of evaluation on the actualisation of Jahr's educational principles in this article. This can be done after their application in pre-clinical and clinical bioethics courses. As we, for the time being, realise bioethics courses in pre-clinical teaching, the application of Jahr's educational principles in this article is focused on the adoption of basic knowledge of medical ethics and bioethics, on bioethical theories and principles, paternalistic relationship to patients and on informed consent, as well as privacy and confidentiality.

According to pedagogical-methodical demand, we have divided educational principles inside Jahr's decorum into those which represent the condition of the character education in general (the first three principles), those which implement the collaborative teaching and learning as conditions for the character education (principles 4, 5, 6 and 7) and finally those which form the teacher's character characteristics (principles 8, 9 and 10).

## Analytical review of Jahr's educational principles

**Principle no.1** *Do not teach predetermined subjective disposition.*

This principle refers to indoctrination with teaching contents. It serves as a warning for teachers not to be partial in presenting and explaining of bioethical problems. Disrespect of this principle leads to indoctrination of students and make them form

<sup>3</sup> Jahr, F. "Character Dictate or Freedom of Thought", in: Sass, H-M (2010): *Selected Essays in Bioethics 1927-1934 Fritz Jahr*, Zentrum für Medizinische Ethik, Bochum, Germany.

opinions which are the result of influence and personal preference of the teachers. The more complex the case dilemma is, the higher the degree of indoctrination.

Messages from this principle are:

- The teachers indoctrinate students with teaching contents in all cases in which they choose only one content and make it crucial in deciding.
- Without taking into consideration and observing the professional, scientific, personal, familial, social and other contents which influence the person who must make the decision, the teacher directs students to a solution produced by the dominance of one bioethical content.
- Students have no possibilities to choose bioethical contents within bioethical problem situation.

Our suggestion is to test this affirmation on the problem of abortion. Making a decision *For* or *Against* abortion is not simple nowadays. The decision should take into consideration the dilemma about the real beginning of human life, medical conditions, rights of a mother and rights of an unborn child, psychological factors which accompany the process of decision making and administrative-legal, political influences, as well as the influences of media.

For instance, the teacher's intention may be to present only harmful medical consequences of abortion like sterility, body injuries, bleeding, infections etc. In that case these problems become the main contents in deciding and indoctrinate students. If the teacher presents abortion only from theological perspective, God's commandments, especially the commandment *Don't kill!* can create the sense of guilt and the guilt will become the main content in deciding. It is similar if the teacher presents only psychological perspective. Depression, fear, loss of self respect can be the contents that the teacher will point out in the presentation.

**Principle no. 2.** *Strictly avoid the cover-up of a predetermined opinion with so-called objectivity and with wrongly called interactive teaching.*

This principle refers to indoctrination with teaching method.

Messages from this principle are :

- The methodological indoctrination presumes the intrusion of one methodology to the student.
- This indoctrination promotes the standpoints and the importance of conclusion of only one methodology or science while other ones are ignored.
- The sum of scientific methodologies alone without their mutual interaction is not a true interaction.

Opposite to this, Jahr points out that each science has different methodological approaches and that each science itself can offer different solutions. Thus the teacher should refer the students to an interaction of the methodological approaches which are necessary in solving of bioethical problems. This must be presented in the teaching concepts. With the application of different scientific methodologies students are in the position to find and emphasize the similarities and differences and their contribution to achieving solutions. The component part of this principle is also the application of the same methodology to different problems and the observation of consequences of solutions obtained in both ways. The message is that intention of interactivity in teaching itself is not sufficient and teaching really becomes interactive when we include those methodological approaches which contribute to the solution of the problem.

We can show this through the example of Euthanasia. God's commandments or some other methodologies of theological ethics have both meaning and importance in the explanation of the problem of euthanasia. In a concrete case in which a person does not express his/her religious beliefs, these methodologies get different meaning. It is just the opposite in the cases of blood transfusion refusal of Jehovah's Witnesses. In the first case the religious belief of a patient does not influence the decision and the standpoints about euthanasia. In the second case religious belief defines the patient's decision which can lead to euthanasia. Inclusion of the legal perspective which permits or prohibits euthanasia or determines patients' rights can help in both cases. The students also need to know that such decision can be made under the influence of family values, as well as of community values and cultural conditions that the question about death and dying is considered in. Therefore the definition of interactivity in teaching directs to the inclusion of those methodological approaches which are necessary for the solution of a certain problem. It does not direct them to stating and listing all scientific disciplines. Interactivity tends to help students with orientation and open-mindedness to different approaches and to responsibility for consequences of their application.

**Principle no. 3** *It can methodologically not be accepted to present only what is suitable and to suppress unsuitable facts, to deny or to manipulate them at will.*

This principle demands methodological originality of the teacher.

Messages from this principle are :

- Teaching content can be approached in different ways.
- Bioethical problem situation demands an approach which expresses the total fate of a person affected by a specific situation.

- In the solving of the problem we include science and professions of the same nature as the corresponding problem.
- Pluriperspectivity is a necessary methodological approach in the understanding of bioethical problem situations.

It is recognized that, if a combination of approaches is used to interpret the problem and state the situation, the students will, while listening to the teachers' lectures, acquire an insight into pluriperspectivity as a necessary methodological approach to the understanding of the bioethical problem situation. We showed this during the course *Life and culture of dialogue in medicine*. In the age of highly developed techniques and technology, life and its characteristics gain technological meaning and are interpreted by some scientists with the help of numbers, percentages, diagrams and other statistical indicators in medicine. Opposite to them, humanistic science and scientists who belong to those scientific branches, find out dangers of technological approach to life, illness and health. The first ones equalise the approach to the problem and its solution, the others show that cases from medical practice must not be solved by using a technical and routine approach. They demand an approach which expresses the total fate of the person affected by a specific situation. If we include both viewpoints we will send the message to the students that this teaching concept can be approached in different ways and that they are free to choose approaches to solve a certain problem. They must also accept professional and ethical responsibility for their choice.

**Principles:** no. 4 (*Always consider different character attitudes*), no. 5 (*The benefits and shortcomings of different opinions and attitudes must be discussed*), no. 6 (*When you present your personal opinion, it must be done in an impartial form. Also, one should forget to discuss problems associated with one's own position*) and no.7 (*Instead of presenting biased character formation students should be given the opportunity to form their own opinion, respectively objective information should be given, so they may form their own character at a later date*) within Jahr's strategy of education refer to the character of the teaching process. With these principles Fritz Jahr formed the second phase of the teaching process.

Messages from these principles are :

- By applying these principles the teachers can create the climate of a dialogue.
- They can motivate the students for active presentation and advocacy of their standpoints.
- They can define students' relationship towards the presented ideas.
- They point out to the students that a problem can be solved with knowledge, professional experience and contains cultural perspective, familial values and media and political influence.

The issue of organ and tissue transplantation is a teaching content that is used to test the application of this principle. It is very important to emphasize that this problem is used to point out that critical relation and critical opinion contain a personal attitude that arises from the knowledge of the problem, the consideration of standpoints different from our own and respect of different, often opposed standpoints. This is an opportunity for students to defend their personal opinion and to realise that standpoints of other participants in teaching are important, too. They also realise that their personal opinion can be changed if the change has followed new learnings and facts. In relation to this, the teacher's task is to point out to the students that the change of opinion is a product of the critical exchange of standpoints and as such is legitimate.

**Principles no. 8** (*Reason and science, people's highest authority never shall be missed in the formation or review of an already existing character*), no. 9 (*One should not claim that the youth is only ready for authoritarian methods, not for methods of freedom, a position which might be contradicted by some. But let it be. Seeding is always earlier than harvesting*) and no. 10 (*And if a new expected character is not developing, we should not forget that had happened under the old method even more often*), relate to the teachers' character characteristics. According to them the teachers are character persons if they satisfy the following requirements of the following messages :

- It is important for the students to understand interpretations.
- The teachers use practical examples related to the future professions of the students.
- The teachers listen to the students carefully.
- The teachers are open for all students' questions and commentaries.
- The teachers respect initiatives and attitudes of the students.
- The teachers show the understanding for the mistakes.
- The teachers create the positive emotional climate for the students' standpoints.
- The teachers are ready for changing the parts of the curriculum the students have argued for.

All the teachers also need pedagogical knowledge. We can also claim that the teachers, while teaching the students, notice that they necessarily need to learn more and improve their knowledge in all aspects.

## **Conclusion**

Jahr's decorum directs all three segments of the educational process of bioethics teaching, the teacher and the student towards character education. The arguments that follow prove the pronounced statement.

1. Social changes influence the teaching and the teaching of bioethics must satisfy social and individual components of upbringing and education.
2. The teaching of bioethics is a didactical-methodical, but also a social-cultural and communicational process. Its task is to stimulate the adoption of knowledge and to emphasize that legitimate argumentation can be done only with knowledge and information of the problem. It is directed to critical opinion based on knowledge and on the interaction of different and opposed standpoints.
3. The orientational knowledge is methodologically based on foundations of integrative pluralism of perspectives (pluriperspectivism).
4. The University is an institution which provides the orientation in social life.
5. During the teaching process the students adopt competences for ethical decision making and solving of ethical dilemmas. That is why the solution of ethical problems is not the question of personal talent, but rather a constructive acquirement of knowledge necessary for the forming of arguments.
6. Bioethics teaching motivates understanding of intercultural observation of bioethics problems.
7. The bioethics teacher has clearly distinguished traditional and new didactical-methodological roles. In his/her traditional role he/she defines teaching goals; he/she is a source of information, an interpreter of knowledge and organiser of teaching.
8. According to contemporary pedagogical demands he is a professional who plans teaching course strategies, motivates the students for collaboration and self-instruction and forms an evaluation of the achieved work together with the students after the coursework.
9. In his/her contemporary role he/she is an enthusiastic person with developed communicational skills and ability to solve problems.
10. He/she is an authority to the students. He/she has built his authority in a partnership relationship with the students, with respect to the students' personalities, through the creative application of methodological approaches, in motivation for



work and learning and critical valuation of both students' and his/her own standpoints.

11. During bioethics courses the students acquire knowledge and skills for ethical analysis and solution of bioethical dilemmas.
12. They unite knowledge and make effort to adopt it.
13. They recognize and respect different standpoints and decisions based on them.
14. They show solidarity and sensitivity for problems affronting a sick person.
15. They are open to other cultures and efforts in the repression of stereotypes and discrimination arising from the ignorance of and disregard for different cultural forms.

Everything stated here refers to the fact that Fritz Jahr advocates character education not with the intention to change the character of the students, but to make them open and tolerant to different and various ideas and standpoints.

Finally, according to Jahr's decorum, bioethics courses have the role of improving, and not changing the character of the students. During the courses the students are respected persons who express the need to widen their knowledge and adopt skills for the solution of problems. Owing to the collaborative relationship with the teacher they build an internal motivation for the realisation of the tasks determined by their future profession. To this cognition and message arising from it, the teachers of bioethics must not remain indifferent.

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