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Teacher responsibility in distance education

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Abstract

This paper is focused on characteristics of education, including distance education and comparison of the extent of teacher responsibility. We are researching whether, and if so, how the scope and the content of teacher responsibility change in connection with the implementation of ICT into the educational process. The question is whether teachers in distance education bear greater responsibility. The issue of teacher responsibility is often addressed in declarative documents, codes of ethics, and legal regulations. The aim of this paper is to capture different levels of responsibility and the tendencies in the perception of teacher responsibility in connection with the changing concept of education and with the use of ICT in distance education. The paper primarily uses hermeneutic approach, the interpretation being based on a frequency analysis of motifs from students' essays. Surveying teachers was used as a complementary method. Our results are based on a frequency analysis of motifs from essays written by students of pedagogical faculties in 2013 and 2015, and their interpretation. They are complemented with ideas which occurred in a survey carried out among teachers at the Pedagogical Faculty and the Faculty of Informatics and Management in 2013.

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Keywords: Teacher responsibility, ICT, distance education;

Motto

„If all responsibility is imposed on you, then you may want to exploit the moment and want to be overwhelmed by the responsibility; yet if you try, you will notice that nothing was imposed on you, but that you are yourself this responsibility.” Franz Kafka

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1. Responsibility and education

Responsibility is usually defined as a political, criminal, legal and ethical category which expresses complementary connection between a person's action, their consequences and his or her consciousness within the ethical system accepted by him/her. Within the context of a reflection on so-called global problems, the concept of responsibility does not only refer to a person's responsibility towards himself/herself, to responsibility of a person to another person, a group of people, a community, a nation, humankind, but also to responsibility for the whole biotic and abiotic environment, biosphere and ecosystem. The issue of responsibility is dealt with in one of the most significant books of the 20th century – „Das Prinzip Verantwortung. Versuch einer Ethik für die technologische Zivilisation“ by Hans Jonas. Although it was first published in 1979, it has not been exploited enough in the area of education. In addition to responsibility for human actions and responsibility for the past, Jonas also defines the need for responsibility for non-human life forms and inanimate nature, in the meaning of curator's / custodian's responsibility. With regard to responsibility defined in this way Jonas reformulated Kantian categorical imperative like this: "Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life". This Jonas' maxim is also referred to in a recent monograph „Morální odpovědnost a její aspekty“ (Vlastimil Hála et al., 2013), mainly in connection with social functioning and the authenticity of an acting human. The relation between this new "jonasian" ethics to the previous ethics is not a negative one, it is complementary. This imperative and concept of responsibility is becoming very up-to-date in connection with our civilization's considerable independence on ICT, which is also naturally reflected in education (Semradova, Hubackova 2013). Education, which is perceived as continuity, communication and differentiation, and the content of which is always closely related to the ability to understand one's period, one's world, its context and its value dominants, is currently more and more often realized not only through face-to-face forms, but also through distance forms using ICT.

2. Frequency analysis of motifs from student essays on the issue of teacher responsibility in distance education

In 2013 and 2015 the issue of teacher responsibility (especially moral responsibility) in distance education became the subject of reflection for students of the Pedagogical Faculty - future teachers. 100 essays were available for further analysis each year. A number of subjects for reflection and discussion were collected (students mentioned a number of relevant motifs in their works). The content of the essays was derived from the topic of the essay and from sub-questions which the students were supposed to concentrate on. Besides defining responsibility, its dimensions, manifestations and connections, the students were also asked to reflect upon the question whether teacher responsibility is the same in both face-to-face and distance education, or whether teacher responsibility in distance education is diminished or greater. Based on the frequency analysis of motifs contained in the essays, a typology of re-occurring statements was compiled.

Summary of the overall results of the frequency analysis of student essays

2.1. Concept of teacher responsibility

Table 1. Concept of teacher responsibility

	2013	2015
We distinguish between criminal, legal liability and professional, moral responsibility.	32	30
We are responsible for our actions, we bear the consequences.	24	28
We have to take responsibility for our decisions.	24	25
We bear responsibility even for unintended consequences of our actions.	24	25
Responsibility is a quality which allows a person to face problems and situations he /she encounters.	21	24
Responsibility is an ability, willingness to accept the consequences of one's own actions.	19	21

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