

Narrative story in ethically oriented teacher training – the optics of teacher candidates**Zuzana Danišková¹ & Jana Majerčíková²****Abstract**

The aim of this empirical study is to reflect on the possibilities for using a narrative approach in university teacher education. In a course called ‘Ethics in the Teaching Profession’, this approach was applied to a group of students of preschool and elementary education. The treatment of ethical issues was conducted through selected works of art. In an interactive lecture, students were presented with two Classical myth stories depicted in works of art. They were then asked to reflect on this approach to reveal their views on the method and its effects on their perspective as teachers. Methodologically, the research was based on a thematic analysis of 152 student documents totaling 93,000 words. A content analysis of this material yielded four main themes: from distrust to acceptance, didactic inspiration, the timelessness of art, and lessons learned. The results suggest that a narrative approach can enrich future teachers’ professional thinking, enhance their awareness of teaching ethics, and foster their capacity for ethical judgment. According to its percipients, the narrative form, supported by embodied artistic artifacts, has great potential to develop teachers’ ethical competences during their teacher training.

Keywords: teacher ethics, university education, narrative form, art history

Introduction

Being a good teacher and having good teachers in schools are legitimate demands. However, the parameters for what constitutes a good teacher differ depending on the favored perspective. Such preferences are reflected by the education faculties that design teacher education programs. The study subjects in these programs mirrors these different requirements. Teacher education programs, understandably, include courses covering knowledge related to the field of education. Good teaching requires strong content knowledge and effective instructional methods, as these help students learn. The latter area is also covered, for example, by courses in classroom management, inclusive education, and education legislation and policy. This rough outline of typical courses in teacher education programs is not exhaustive. The content of different programs varies according to their respective requirements. A faculty may also focus on providing teachers with philosophical and ethical foundations of education and the teaching profession. However, Glanzer and Realm (2007) have argued that education students are generally not being adequately prepared to face the ethical challenges of teaching. One reason for this may be that ethical or philosophical dimensions are sidelined in teacher education and are not central to it. Several authors are trying to reintroduce these dimensions into teacher education (Higgins, 2001; Colgan, 2018; Colgan & Maxwell, 2017). Maxwell (2017, p. 324) has described the failure to provide teachers with any instruction in ethics as reflecting a ‘disdainful’ notion of what a teacher should be. In this view, teachers are supposed to just ‘passively adhere to curricular guidelines, unquestionably obey ever-shifting educational policy, and blithely work towards achieving performance targets they have little or no say in defining’. We need teachers to be experts in their content areas, to convey that content in ways that make it accessible to students, and to be of good disposition and moral character (Osguthorpe, 2008).

This empirical study seeks to contribute to the discourse advocating for the integration of philosophical-ethical dimensions in teacher education curricula. The analysis focuses specifically on the role of ethics within university-level teacher education, emphasizing the perspectives of aspiring pre-school teachers. Through engagement with selected narratives and artistic material, these students critically examined the implications of ethical teaching on the

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formation of their professional identities.

Theoretical background

The place of teacher ethics in teacher education programs

One concern with the ethical dimension of the teaching profession comes from a perspective that is equally legitimate as the others that shape the content of teacher education. Here, the term “ethical dimension” refers to the principles and standards guiding teachers’ professional conduct and decision-making. Campbell (2003) argues that teacher education programs often ignore the ethical dimensions of teaching. Instead, they overemphasize the pedagogical, social, and cultural aspects, thereby neglecting ethical and moral considerations. Students need to learn about the ethics of their chosen profession from multiple perspectives. First, they need to be aware of the ethical dimensions of a teacher’s everyday work in the classroom (Platková Olejárová, 2023). The moral implications of a teacher’s work are not limited to the occasional difficult situation but also arise in the daily routine of teaching (Campbell, 2003). Here, “unintended curriculum” refers to the informal lessons and values transmitted through teachers’ behaviors and interactions outside the formal curriculum. Moral influence occurs in many ways, often without anyone realizing it, through an unintended curriculum. Brezinka (1992) considers this a key argument for including teacher ethics. Teachers bring everything they have into their relationship with students and thus co-determine the outcome of the mutual ‘encounter’, a situation unique to each case.

Besides these subtle forms of influence, relational professions require educators to make professional judgments and to appreciate the moral responsibilities inherent in their decisions (Dorotíková, 2003). This consciousness is essential for fostering confidence, professional respect, and the entitlement to expect both individual and professional recognition (Gluchmanová, 2011).

Several researchers say that ethics and related topics are insufficiently represented in teacher education. Glanzer and Ream (2007) found that only 6 percent of teacher education programs surveyed offered a compulsory ethics course. Campbell (2008, 2011) and Boon (2011) found that students feel a need for ethics training. Students are very aware of the teacher as a role model of morality and responsible behavior. They generally accept that society expects higher moral standards of them. Courses devoted to ethics are rare; when ethics is part of an integrated curriculum, delivery is patchy and unequal across programs. Maxwell (2017) argues that it is difficult to evaluate because of the subject’s unsystematic labeling. He reports that the ethical dimension is less well represented in education than in medicine (over 50 percent), but higher than in engineering. Overall, 22 percent of academic units offering programs leading to teaching certification had at least one required ethics course. Twenty-four percent of programs surveyed included a mandatory ethics course (Davis, 1999).

How teaching ethics are taught in teacher education programs

Professionalizing teaching demands more than simply requiring ethics coursework. Although teaching may have missed the ‘ethics boom’ (Glanzer & Ream, 2007), Maxwell (2017) warns that it is more alarming that education graduates often lack clear guidance regarding the expectations of society, peers, and the teaching profession itself.

Theoretical knowledge has a fundamental place in university education. For teacher ethics, this mainly means learning about different ethical theories (Bilasová, 2014), which are tools for solving the ethical and moral questions teachers face (Gluchmanová, 2008). Understanding the implications of decisions requires knowledge of various ethical systems and the meaning of a code of ethics. Maxwell (2017) strongly supports adopting a code of ethics. Familiarizing students with the norms of the teaching profession is essential for adequate ethical education. But this should not be the only goal. To avoid excessive theorizing, many authors argue for

offering alternative approaches and engaging activities. For example, students might reflect on current ethical and moral issues in practice, identify ethical questions, analyze negative classroom examples, and engage in open, critical discussions (Clark, 1990). Seghedin (2014) favors a heuristic approach, which significantly develops students' reflective thinking. She illustrates reflective thinking through analyses of ethical dilemmas that prompt students to engage in moral reflection and to consider teachers' autonomy.

This idea is also criticized for the 'applied science' approach (Maxwell, 2017). Maxwell (2017) wants students to be more exposed to the profession's standards through codes of ethics. They impose an arbitrary ideal of 'professionalism' that must be adhered to by all members of the professional group, which can stifle independent, reflective, rights-respecting, and creative problem-solving on complex issues arising in the workplace (Cigman, 2000). In formulating ethical codes and regulations, professional ethics seek to establish a basic minimum that can be enforced through a system of external sanctions. All the approaches described above represent the paradigmatic mode, which views and explains the world through logic and science. It classifies, categorizes, and establishes connections between phenomena in the world. This mode allows us to think *about* something (Verducci, 2014). Ethics, however, is not about applying general rules to a particular situation.

But these general ethical standards and this understanding of ethical and moral systems and values are themselves no guarantee that the decisions a teacher makes will be in the student's best interest or improve the quality of life in the classroom. Understanding the ethical dimensions of the decisions I make means considering the assumptions, possibilities, implications, and consequences of everything I do as a teacher; it means considering the legitimacy of my actions. There should be a balance between being generally and individually binding and never being definitive, as it is always possible to act differently. Such ethics are formed in the living relationships between teachers and students, as well as in the relationships between teachers themselves (Pelcová & Semrádová, 2014). This includes the ability to learn from one's mistakes, not to give up, and to accept that even well-meaning actions may not yield the intended outcome. Therefore, professional teacher education should also cultivate humility, perseverance, and even courage, and thereby develop the teacher's character and virtues. The ability to understand the ethical language used in codes and to reasonably apply the abstract obligations set out in a code to concrete practical situations presupposes the exercise of what Warnick and Silverman (2011) call ethical judgment, or a certain degree of ethical sensitivity (Stengel, 2013). Platková Olejárová (2017) uses the term ethical competencies to refer to the ability to identify problematic ethical and moral aspects of teaching in teacher–student, student–student, and teacher–parent relationships, and to make sound decisions. To form ethical judgment, ethical sensitivity, or ethical competencies, we need more than a paradigmatic mode of knowing.

The narrative mode

It is not possible for people to develop professional thinking or ethical competencies just by being presented with concepts in a process governed by strict logical rules. Nor can they be acquired through 'indoctrination', in which the teacher, as the source of learning, funnels the right mindset into the student-receptacle. An authentic moment or opportunity to foster ethical competencies arises when a student feels a lack. This feeling of lack manifests as a sparked desire and urge to learn something new, to quench a thirst. Palouš (2004), in his essay on teacher ethics as *mos docendi*, uses metaphors and analogies to illustrate various philosophical concepts. One of them is Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*. He associates human existence with the human mode of being in the world, which is, however, not readily and perfectly done or accomplished. Humans must learn this Being-in-the-world; they must learn to dwell, to be at home somewhere, to habituate to this dwelling, and to apply habits and become at home with

customs. All these concepts have the same etymological basis in the Latin *mos* and the Greek *éthos*.

Teachers likewise seek such a ‘dwelling’, an ontological definition of their profession, the right mode of being in or inhabiting it. They wander on and off established paths, and the route they then forge is co-determined by the richness of the situations they experience (Palouš, 2004). This constant search for a good place and answers is the main theme of Comenius’ *Labyrinth of the World*. In it, the individual seeks a harmony between the world and the self by gradually overcoming ‘existing-just-for-the-self’. How this comes about is something that has been occurring in culture for thousands of years.

Comenius did not choose the traditional treatise format for the *Labyrinth* and instead of a theoretical discussion created ‘a narrative backdrop’ (Hábl, 2013, p. 10). He thus put forward a tool that is didactically, psychologically, and aesthetically powerful: the story. Analyzing his work, Hábl (2013) reveals the didactic function of the story (allegory) with the ambition to ‘bring this device back into play’.

As well as Hábl, Kratochvíl (1995) argues that the rationalist paradigm of modernism and the later utilitarian conception of education have pushed the story, allegory, or myth out of the sphere of education, treating it as mythical, untrue, and unhelpful. Ancient antiquity, however, educated individuals primarily by introducing them to the mythical-poetic experience. This ‘sharing in the effect of speech through a story’ was the cultural metamorphosis of the basic initiation into community (Kratochvíl, 1995, p. 89). Myth did not represent something untrue or allegorical; rather, it was a literary genre used to instruct people and shape their morality. However, Plato, in his *Republic*, expressed concerns about the power of poetry to circumvent reason and to affect people in ways that ‘corrupt’ understandings of the truth, and his book stands as one of the West’s most famous examples of a synergistic conversation between narrative and philosophy. Indeed, *The Republic* provides a powerful and complex prototype for contemporary uses of narrative in ethics’ (Verducci, 2014, p. 576). A philosophy represents here the paradigmatic mode, while histories, satires, documentaries, gossip, personal anecdotes, biography and autobiography, epics, plays, and films represent the narrative mode (Booth, 1988; Roberts, 2012). Neither mode can be reduced to the other, and they are seen as complementary ways of seeing and knowing. Narratives as a tool for using the narrative mode can be viewed from different theoretical positions, such as literature, aesthetics, and the social sciences (as objects and as processes), or through historical research and examination from a philosophical perspective (Verducci, 2014).

Why are narratives and narrative mode valuable in the field of the ethics of education as an expression of a holistic conception of a curriculum for teacher education (Beattie, 2000)? Verducci (2014) offers several arguments. Narratives depict development over time. One of the purposes of education is the development or growth of individuals; they grow and change over time, and therefore narratives can be excellent vehicles for examining the specific influence and outlines of their ethical development. Narratives, because they can depict a character’s action and interaction over time, can be a natural and powerful way to display virtues and vices (Roberts, 2012).

Narratives may direct perception and can direct attention to moral and educational issues. As representations, forms of art that present specific human experiences, they have the potential to assist in perceiving and understanding what is morally and educationally relevant in the ethics of education. They have the power to illustrate moral issues implicitly embedded in educational content, relationships, contexts, and structures; they can reveal hidden aspects and provide clues important for moral differentiation. Teachers and future teachers may also use narrative to clarify or illustrate ethical ideas, questions, problems, and theories (Nussbaum, 1990).

As was already mentioned, the narrative mode can extend philosophical ideas and bring a complementary mode of thinking to philosophical inquiry. Narrative mode offers an

opportunity not to think *about* narratives but to think *with* or *within* them. They propose a different view and an opportunity to notice things that we might miss when the paradigmatic mode (scientific experiments, philosophical argumentation) is being used. The difference between thinking *about* stories and thinking *with* stories is explained by Norris (2001) and Hník (2021). In the first case, the narrative is an examined object, separate from the examiner. By contrast, thinking with stories (narrative mode) is a process in which we as thinkers do not so much work on a narrative as take a radical step back, almost returning to childhood experience, and allow narrative to work on us (Norris, 2001).

Narratives help cultivate ‘critical readiness’, can help release our moral and social imaginations, or can exercise our moral responsiveness. According to Nussbaum (1990), moral attention may include the sort of intuitive perception and improvisatory response that reading novels provides. In some cases, ethical action may depend less on analytical reasoning than on responding as we might to a story (Nussbaum, 1990; Norris, 2001). Both cited authors work with literature as an exercise in moral attention.

It must be added that making productive use of narratives for the ethics of education depends upon the interaction with its audience. Plato’s fears, which signal the potential for audience manipulation, should be borne in mind. Ethicists may express concerns that a medium that manipulates the viewer, engages emotions, and elicits a personal connection to the characters is the best resource for ethical reflection (Marshall, 2003).

In the preceding sections, we attempted, first, to justify the significance of the ethical dimension in teacher education. We then took a closer look at the specific methods for developing ethical judgment. The cited authors attempted to rehabilitate this narrativity in the teacher education environment, specifically in relation to the formation of a student’s character (and through a narrow reduction of narrativity to lessons in ethics). Our efforts, however, are not just theoretical; we have been striving to apply this approach directly in teaching at the university level. We set out from the assumption that the potential of narrative to shape teachers’ ethical competences would be realized if they were taught not *about*, but *within*. Virtue is not taught as mathematics or biology are, but virtue is ‘caught’ or ‘picked up’ by interacting with others who seem to possess it through habituation (Osguthorpe, 2008). We wanted to reflect the applicability of theoretical judgments— we were interested in how this would be perceived and interpreted by those who were to be the targets of these efforts, namely, student teachers.

Research

We connected the aims of our research to our own pedagogical activities at the Faculty of Education of the University of Trnava, which offers teacher education in different areas of specialization. One of its study programs concentrates on teaching at the preschool and elementary level, and it includes a one-semester course titled ‘Ethics in the Teaching Profession’. Since the Education Faculty also has a Department of Art Education, it was possible, within the framework of this course, to organize a special lecture focused on a brief excursion into art history, presenting works of art thematically organized around selected stories. We were inspired to employ this combination of narrative form and an excursion into art history by Kot’a (2003), who used art history as an interesting example of a broader-based teacher education at the university level.

Fieldwork

We attempted to apply our belief in the appropriateness and productivity of narrative-oriented teacher training directly, in natura, through an interactive lecture. Our application of this approach became the foundation for our qualitatively oriented research.

The interactive art history lecture we organized was held in the middle of the autumn semester. Two stories from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* were selected, following an agreement

between the teachers and the researchers. *Metamorphoses* not only lends itself to an art-historical presentation but also has a level that relates to the education of future teachers and addresses themes specifically emphasized in professional ethics. This educational, ethical-moral dimension of instruction is also present in both selected stories.

Students had to prepare for the lecture in advance. First, they had to listen to a public radio program that introduced Ovid's work. In this recording, a historian discussed the meaning and intention of the work with a Classical philologist.³ The students were then asked to familiarize themselves with two stories, 'Daedalus and Icarus' and 'Daphne'. They received photocopies of both stories from a published book, while they were also able to listen to the stories in an audiobook format (Ovid, 2008). Having completed this preparation, the students were then expected to participate in an interactive lecture in which the instructor, an art historian, presented four works of art based on the themes of the selected stories (we invited students to 'open the package' and interact with the story as well as to discuss the teachers' interpretations as proposed by Marshall, 2003).

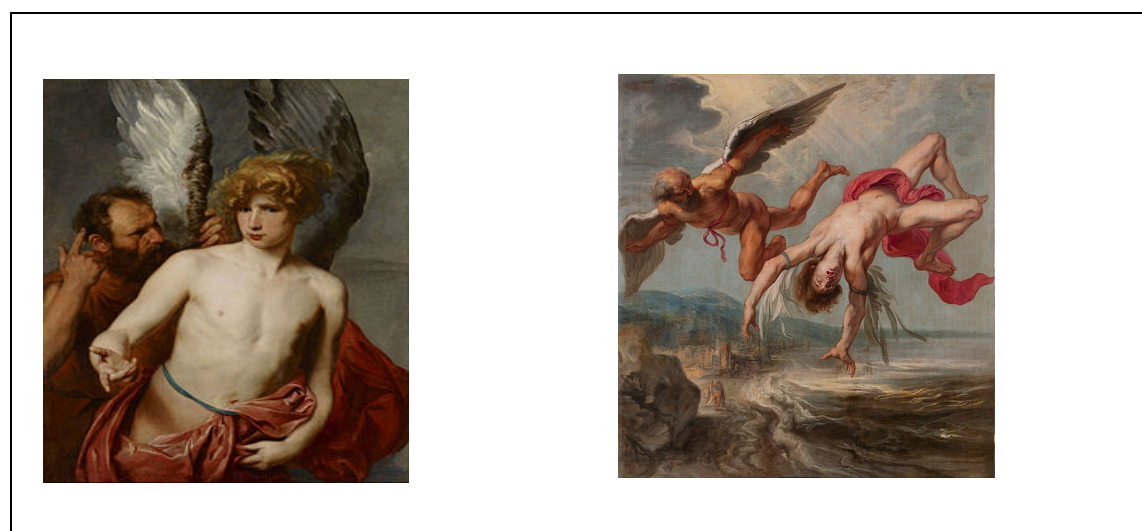
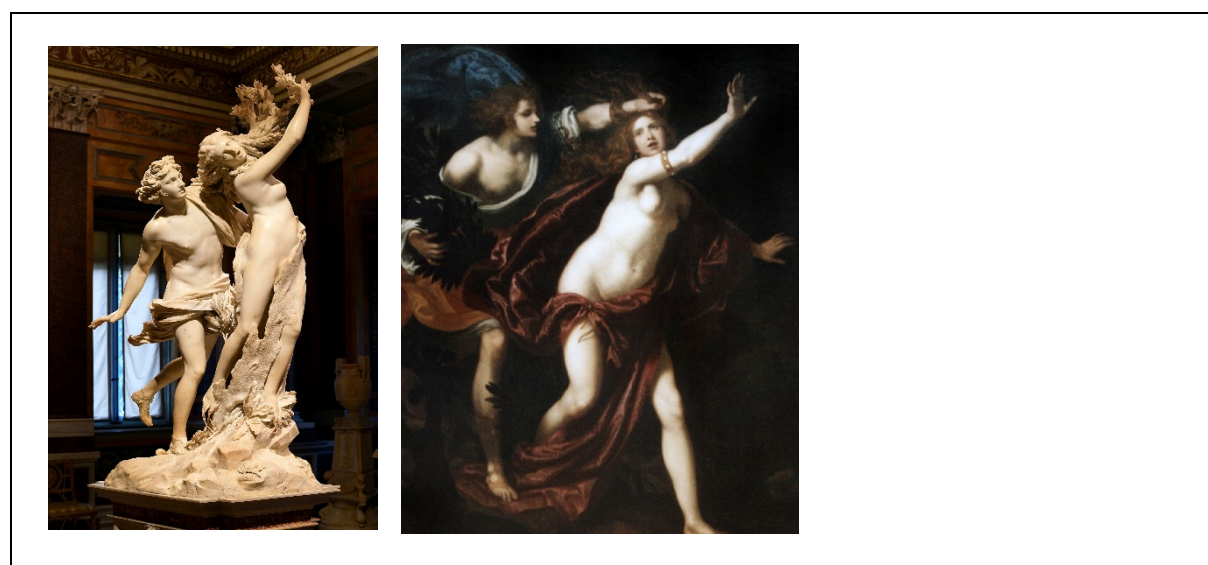


Fig 1: Artworks used in the lecture: Daedalus and Icarus (A. van Dyck and J. P. Gowdy)



³ The public radio show *Parnas (Radio Devin)* about *Metamorphosis*. The stories were accompanied by commentaries by Pavol Valachovič and Daniel Škoviera. An audio recording is available at: <https://devin.rtvs.sk/clanky/literatura/108163/parnas-publius-ovidius-naso-metamorfozy>

Fig 2: Artworks used in the lecture: Apollo and Daphne (Bernini and G. Biliverti)

After the lecture, we approached the students with the following request:

You attended a lecture that worked with artworks based on themes from Metamorphosis. We would be grateful if you could share what this approach evoked in you, what impression it made on you. We would also be interested in learning whether this was meaningful for you and how or in what ways you think such an approach might have an impact on your teacher training and subsequently on your work as a teacher. Thank you for your comments of at least 600 words.

The research questions

From our perspective, it was interesting to observe how students, in this case future teachers, would react to more varied contexts of teacher training, in particular an excursion into art history presented through stories, and how they would interpret the lessons and morals that form the implicit content of the stories. For the purposes of this study, we pursued the focus of our research using the following questions:

- What do female students think about the use of art-historical material in the ethics-oriented dimension of their professional education?
- How do female students perceive and interpret the lessons and morals presented in the stories?

Data collection, the research sample, and the methods of analysis

The students were informed in advance that we planned to use their reflections for research purposes. We took advantage of the hybrid nature of content analysis (after Dvořáková, 2010), which, for the purpose of this analysis, served both as a method of data collection and a method of data processing. Text analysis is a relevant research method in qualitative research. We viewed the students' texts as contemporary primary texts from the pens of direct witnesses to the given events (after Hendl, 2015). We analyzed 152 comments, and our database of approximately 90,000 words represented a rich body of material for further research. The research sample thus consisted of the written comments of 152 first-year students in the bachelor's program in Early Childhood and Elementary Education (in AY 2023/24). We did not establish a sampling strategy in advance for this research, and after collecting our data, we determined it was a selective sample. The research sample was created from texts by students who completed the course and interactive lecture.

Given the nature of the texts, it seemed appropriate to use a thematic analysis to process the data, as such analysis is well established in professional discourse (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After the first reading, it was already possible to observe in the students' comments certain patterns and primary themes they had in common, within which ethical contexts emerged. With this in mind, we then proceeded through the usual six stages recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first stage involved acquiring a thorough familiarity *with the data* through repeated readings and identifying its different aspects, which was followed in the next stage by the *generation of initial codes*. It should be noted here that we chose an analytical strategy built on inductive coding. The database was extremely broad and offered a wide range of possibilities for working with the results and modeling the research questions. The codes were then repeatedly sorted and grouped (and regrouped) into the generated themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) refer to this process as a '*topic search*'. The next stage entailed *re-examining the themes* so that they formed a coherent pattern in their internal homogeneity, while remaining heterogeneous in relation to the other themes. Thematic mapping, a visual schematic of the results, was very helpful at this stage. Before the sixth and final stage, which the authors call the *drafting of the report*, we finalized and named the themes so that they had the force of an analytical narrative.

The limitations of the research

The quality of data, a determinant of research reliability, is influenced by the methods used to collect it, as was the case in our study. Bearing this in mind, we see the limitations of our research as lying in this area. Although our research focused on the education of future teachers at the undergraduate level and our research aims were aligned with the education space, the students offered their reflections after being asked by their instructor and submitted their responses to her in electronic format. While the students were repeatedly reassured that they should comment freely and that their responses would not be used in their final assessment, for transparency in the research methods, it is important to acknowledge the potential bias that could arise from this relationship. On the other hand, the reflection assignment was formulated dynamically and supported the assessment of both the process and the outcome. It was also not checked whether all the participants submitted responses with their reflections, and the unsigned responses (which amounted to one-third of the total) were not matched with names that could be identified when submitted.

Results

As noted above, the student reflections provided us with a wealth of data. The students were asked to share their perceptions of their own writing experiences and then identify and communicate the impact of those experiences. These experiences were largely described in terms of the personal and professional dimensions of each author's life, and it was interesting to observe where they extended beyond these two dimensions, particularly in how the experiences impacted others.

As shown in Figure 3, the individual steps in the thematic analysis led to the identification of three main themes: art for me as an individual, art for me as a future teacher, and art for everyone. Figure 3 also reveals the subthemes that emerged under each theme. For the purposes of this study, we present those that have the potential to shed light on the different aspects of the ethically oriented professional preparation/training of future teachers (from distrust to acceptance; didactical inspirations, the timelessness of art; and the morals and lessons learned). These form the foundation of the analytical narrative we present in the next section.

Below, we will attempt to outline the narrative of this empirical data. This outline is interspersed with excerpts from the students' reflections that illustrate analytical points that are representative of the data (based on Braun & Clarke, 2006).

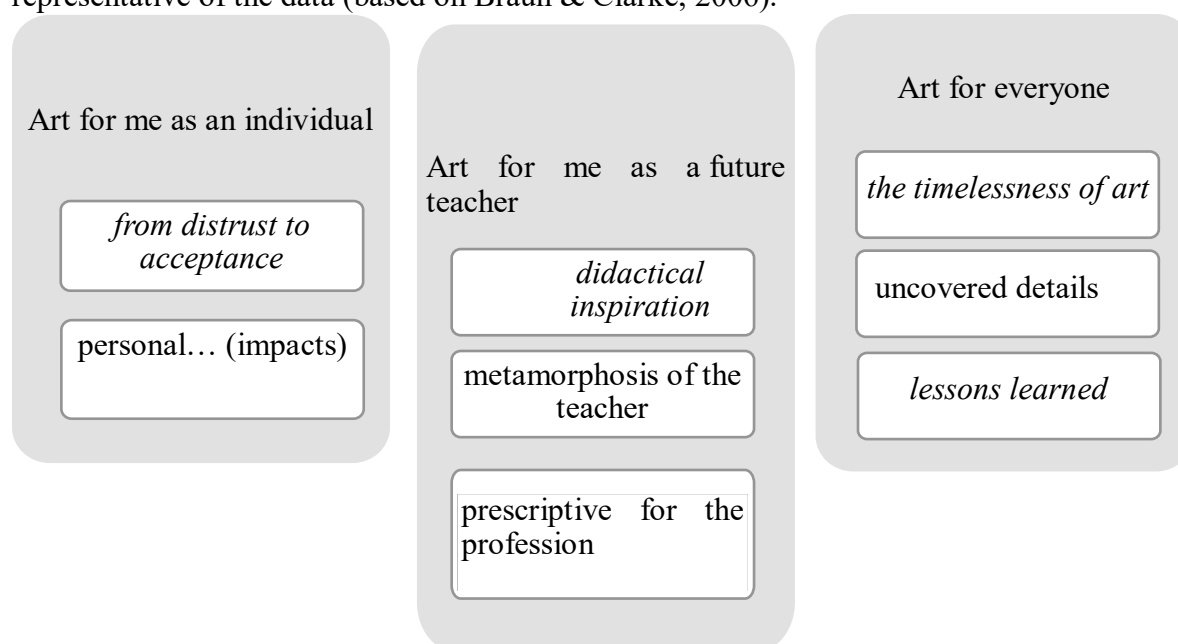


Figure 3: Final thematic map, showing the final three main themes with related subthemes.

From distrust to acceptance

The documents were created by the student teachers in our study as part of highly interactive undergraduate lectures (not seminars) that had by then already taken place. They were asked to prepare for the class not just by studying the selected stories on their own but also by listening to a radio program. This assignment, along with the announcement of a new guest lecturer, elicited various expectations and thoughts from the students. They tended to react with surprise, often coupled with disbelief, misunderstanding, confusion, and sometimes even fear or skepticism, especially given the focus of the course (which was ‘Ethics in the Teaching Profession’). However, these rather neutral or negative reactions were overcome by the lecture itself, which, as students described in their reflections, elicited feelings of positive surprise or shock, coupled with a very positive response to its content and form.

At the very start, we were assigned to study and listen to Greek mythology in advance. To tell you the truth, because I don’t like Greek mythology very much, I was a bit surprised, and the questions buzzing in my head were ‘why?’. After all, this isn’t what I’m studying. ...That class was a huge surprise for me, and it made our lesson more interesting (S7).

I must admit that I was very skeptical at first, and I didn’t feel like reading and listening to some old stories that till then, I’d thought I had no interest in, were boring, and wouldn’t add anything to my life. ... But I was very wrong. First of all, I was impressed by the professor’s enthusiasm, just by telling us about the work and explaining its substance. I think he really succeeded. He helped us, or at least me, to understand that even art can be seen from different perspectives (S45).

For many students, their surprise was amplified by their past experience with topics in mythology, history, and art in secondary school. The contrast between the superficiality of the methods and content the students encountered in secondary school and their current experience, where they were offered the opportunity to learn about things in depth and in detail, ‘to get a real taste of them’, helped them to break through a boundary that had left them on the outside and without access to the worlds of history and art and their implicit messages.

I had already encountered the works mentioned above in secondary school, but back then, they didn’t appeal to me at all, and we didn’t examine them in such detail. I’m more interested in them now because of the detailed explanation. Here we learned how important it is to explain something with interest and passion so that it’s interesting to others, not just a boring monologue (S87).

I always found it uninteresting and very boring, it didn’t interest me at all. After this lecture, I have to apologize to history and art (S44).

In one extreme and distinct case, the person spoke of an acquired sense of inferiority for failing to understand the message of art. Conversely, there were a few reflections on the cathartic effect of the encounter with art and stories they had just experienced, which became a tool for inner reflection and for their own actions.

Didactical inspiration

While the lecture was a highly positive experience for the students, its productive nature also had a formative impact on their identities as teachers. What was noticeable was the impact of the guest lecturer as a person, whose performance could, in simplified and figurative terms, be described with the phrase ‘a man on fire can light a candle’. The sparks were his enthusiasm, which bordered on passion, his joy, energy, and ability to stoke curiosity, and his deep insight

into his subject matter.

Because you managed to pull it off ... I was really enthused. As a future educator myself, I would always want to motivate, be engaging, be curious, and then pass that on to the children through the learning activities and the teaching, which would definitely be more fun for them and for me (S58).

The interest and passion for the arts conveyed to us in the lesson were incredible, in a positive sense, of course. Sometimes I forgot to breathe as I waited, eager to see what else I would learn. I liked how we were able to view certain works of art (S7).

His love of history and art was infectious, and I felt like a time traveler during his lecture, discovering new and fascinating worlds (S93).

The students found not just the lecturer's personality in the role of 'teacher' inspiring, but also the overall didactic strategy he used to provide background for the art-historical content. The story proved itself to be a key effective narrative tool with the potential to engage and illustrate the given and expected values.

An important aspect of the story of Daedalus and Icarus is its use in education. A story can serve as a teaching tool for discussing moral values. This includes, for example, responsibility, obedience, and prudence. Also, the theme of metamorphosis in Daedalus and Icarus can be used to reflect on the kinds of relationships that can form between teachers and students (S95).

In their reflections, the students also expressed their appreciation for the interactions among the actors in the teaching scenario (between the guest lecturer and the students, and among the students themselves, as they also mentioned peer learning). This interaction was mediated in creative ways, while, according to the students, it also stoked their creativity.

I like that in this approach, the lecturer interacted with the audience. The students are given the opportunity to reflect on the problem with the lecturer, who guides them through the process. So the lecturer always has to be one step ahead, asking the right questions... (S147).

He didn't force us to simply accept the facts, but encouraged us to ask questions, discuss, and reflect on our own. The lesson with him included discussions, creative exercises, and real stories, which opened our eyes and enabled us to view history and art from new perspectives, perhaps even with a childlike perspective (S143).

The timelessness of art

The word 'art' was articulated in the students' statements in different ways and contexts. Clearly influenced by the lecture they had attended, 'art' was prominently discussed in terms of its communication potential, in the sense of its dialogic nature, range of interpretations, and the significant multiplicity of meanings it offers.

So much can be said through art. I became aware of so much through this lecture (S15).

From the students' perspectives, the aesthetic dimension of art extended beyond beauty, inspiration, and human creativity. The social and moral aspects of art were presented as a tool for humanization and, in reference to stories, as a source of hidden lessons and inspiration.

I'm interested in art in all its forms, and I'm fascinated by its infinite variety and deep meaning. This lecture on artworks inspired by *Metamorphoses* intrigued me for several reasons. As well as being completely absorbed by their artistic beauty and creativity, they also represented an escape from the ordinary goings-on of teaching. The new ideas I learned drew me even closer to understanding the importance of art in the world. And I realized that art is not just about visual beauty, but is also about being able to open the door to new ideas and directions and to foster creativity and the development of the mind (S95).

The (morals and) lessons learned

It was expected that the students would grasp and understand the key messages and lessons of these '*powerful and lesson-rich*' (S15) stories that had been passed down over the centuries, and that is indeed what happened. The story of Daedalus and Icarus, with its central theme of 'not flying too low or too high', was interpreted in relation to the search for a middle way as a distinctly moral lesson – that human ambitions should be reasonable, goals should be realistic, and we should keep our feet on the ground.

The story prompted reflection on the balance between ambition and cautiousness and on the potential consequences of individual actions (S140).

The father tells his son not to fly too high so that his wings don't burn and the wax doesn't melt, but not to fly too low so that the sea and the waves don't pull him down and drown him. This statement can be put into practice. Sometimes we should choose the middle way. Because we humans are often too ambitious, we can easily get burned. On the other hand, many people are afraid to step outside their comfort zone and try something new. They have low self-esteem and, even if they get the opportunity to show what they can do, they stay where they are. This can lead to the subsequent failure of 'being sunk' (S120).

The students found Icarus appealing as a character, and they also liked Daedalus. Icarus became a symbol of both freedom and independence, as well as of pride and recklessness. Daedalus caught their interest as a vehicle of wisdom and experience left unused by Icarus.

In my opinion, this story is highly symbolic. While Daedalus represents reason, wisdom, and especially prudence, his son Icarus represents pride and recklessness (S142).

Another powerful effect this story had was refracted through the lens of intergenerational relationships, both within the family and in school. The theme of passing on and receiving wisdom, as the story symbolized in the students' eyes, embodied '*exactly what education is all about*' (S10). In the case of personal relationships, the predominant reference was to the father–son bond.

Here, the analogy that comes to mind is the parent–child relationship, where parents often forbid their children from doing something or draw their attention to something (for instance, something dangerous). The child does the forbidden thing, then remembers that the parent warned them about it and was right (S112).

In the case of relationships that form in the context of education, the main highlight was the teacher–student relationship, and an analogy was even made to the teacher–child relationship in kindergarten, which falls apart if the child won't listen. Daedalus was perceived as a mentor, a role model, and a teacher who exercises responsibility and influence.

Daedalus was more than just a craftsman and a father to Icarus; he was also his teacher, providing his son Icarus with the knowledge and skills needed to survive. This teacher–student relationship can be interpreted in various ways and can be used to underscore the importance of teaching and mentoring in education (S86).

For me, the epic of Daedalus and Icarus clearly reflects what we strive to do when we raise and educate children. The image of Icarus falling into the sea is something that every parent and teacher dreads. It is the image of the child we spend countless hours caring for, attending to, teaching them what and how, and guiding them down the right paths. And that same child suddenly veers off track. He doesn't listen to our advice, to what we taught him. He becomes caught up in a world that gradually leads him onto a different path (S71).

In this context, the relationship between senior and junior colleagues, and its untapped potential for mentorship, personal growth, and mutual professional enrichment, was one theme the students sensitively discussed as an analogy for the relationship between Icarus and Daedalus.

In this case, I see a connection to the teaching profession, where we, future teachers, are expected to constantly suppress our ambitions. ... I consider listening to and respecting those who have more experience to be key to developing wisdom. Teachers still have their own aspirations and ambitions, which are important for both personal growth and development. The lack of support and acknowledgment that younger teachers with fewer years of experience may receive leads them to feel unsupported by others ... Although young teachers may try, it can be difficult for them to acquire the support of their colleagues. I will refer again to the example of Daedalus, where, although he was older, he offered a warning about flying too high but supported Icarus through the relationship between father and son. ... The older generation of teachers should draw new energy from the younger generation. The younger generation would then have room to explore and be free, just as Icarus wanted (S41).

According to the students' reflections, the second story, about Daphne and Apollo, primarily prompted them to reflect on personal integrity, interpreted as being true to oneself and one's beliefs, and at the same time being respected by others.

We can see in this story how important it is not to give up on other people. To stand up for your beliefs.... Some of us might at times be ashamed or afraid to fight for our beliefs (S64).

This story may also highlight the importance of respecting personal boundaries and the rights of each individual. In this day and age, when we encounter boundaries being violated and abused in various ways, it is important to recognize that everyone has a right to their personal integrity and to respect their boundaries (S13).

The story of Daphne from *Metamorphoses* is fascinating not just for its lyrical beauty but also for its profound themes. One of its most intriguing aspects is the conflict between human desire and natural freedom. Daphne, a nymph, as a symbol of nature and freedom, rejects Apollo's love, opting instead to turn to nature to protect her from divine passion. For me, this story is an example of courage and determination in the face of external pressures and expectations (S97).

The students found the nymph Daphne to be inspiring and sympathetic as a symbol of femininity, love, and determination, in no small part because she did not want to lose her

freedom and identity. Her sacrifice is meant to be a signal to those who, analogically, would seek to limit the weaker or younger, or to promote a power dynamic in which the man has the apparent advantage of being stronger, while the woman must fight for her independence.

While reading this epic, I thought about aspirations and realized how much I sympathized with Daphne. Daphne had her own dreams, desires, and an idea of how she wanted to live her life. However, her plans were not only obstructed but completely ruined by the Delian god Phoebus ... Since he was much stronger, older, and more dominant, there was nothing Daphne could do. She could only run away and, in the end, completely sacrifice her freedom and even her life. Such situations often arise in our world. When older people or those in power control those who are weaker. This also happens to children, their parents, and their teachers. In the course of our life, and especially our profession, we have to be very careful not to destroy the dreams and aspirations of those junior to us with our own ideas and aspirations. They could end up like Daphne – transformed into something they never wanted to be in the first place (S71).

Daphne's strength and independence were, however, in the students' reflections also presented in contrast to the image of a threatened victim, a woman persecuted and raped, who resolves to bravely escape this fate. By highlighting the relations between men and women today, the students touched on sensitive issues of male dominance, female resistance, and freedom.

I was most impressed by the second work, which nowadays is unfortunately an all-too-common situation – when men's affections are unrequited, and then they act as though they've been struck by an arrow. Sometimes, though not by the arrow of love, but, perhaps, the arrow of blindness and lust (S96).

I was a bit taken aback by the idea that Daphne's story is connected to rape, but after giving it some thought and consideration, it made perfect sense. I don't know how I could have missed it while listening. Maybe I just didn't want to admit to myself that, even then, there were things we still have to struggle with today (S24).

It is clear that both stories made an impression on the students, and although initially they were 'pressed' into analyzing them, they appreciated the learning approach and highlighted the impact it had on their personal and professional development.

Summary and discussion

The students' reflections were an extremely rich source of data. To conclude, we present a statement by one of the students that aptly captures the main message of the reflections analyzed and actually offers a concise response to our first research question.

As for the importance of this approach to me personally, I have to say it has opened my eyes and shown me art not only as a visual experience but also as a way to penetrate the depths of human experience and thought. This approach has given me new tools for interpreting and understanding art and has also inspired me. I see great potential for this approach in the context of teacher training and the performance of the teaching profession. In my opinion, analyzing works of art through the lens of *Metamorphoses* can help us students not only develop our critical thinking and aesthetic sensibilities but also better understand human psychology and emotional processes. In my opinion, this can lead to a deeper understanding of ourselves and the world around us. In addition, working with artworks on the theme of *Metamorphoses* has had a very stimulating effect on my creativity and my students' creativity. The opportunity to interpret and reflect on

different aspects of human existence and transformation can stimulate our own creative work and inspire our personal growth and self-reflection (S143).

This account confirms Hábl's (2013) or Verducci's (2014) theoretical premise that narratives should be incorporated as a didactic strategy across various taught subjects. They justify the revival of this strategy by citing the tradition of the Classical epics, which shaped the community's morality and character. Classical epics are nowadays viewed as artistic and cultural expressions of ancient Greece, but in the period when these stories were shared, they were understood as influencing a person's affective development. Although the students' reflections offer more general insights into the importance of art itself, they also identify the clear potential of art to shape teachers' character.

It must be said, however, that justifying the use of narratives is a necessary but insufficient precondition for it to be able to fulfill its potential. Hník (2022), Marshall (2003), and Norris (2001), in particular, underscore the significance of narratives in the teaching process. Our goal of developing ethical competences requires that we know the text from the inside out and that we work with the imagination. Only then do we have a chance of having a direct impact on the values, attitudes, and personal qualities (Hník, 2022) of the future teacher, who will then pass them on.

This approach, of course, is also productive for cognitive development; the teaching of professional ethics has a theoretical foundation that should provide students with 'deep and cross-cutting knowledge of professional teacher ethics and applied ethics' (Teacher Ethics Course Information Sheet, 2024). Based on the students' reflections, however, we would point out that the pressure for cognitive development is more likely to find fertile ground when the teaching materials used allow students to penetrate the deeper nature of the subject (Fiala, 1993). 'It is better to correctly master a certain and finite number of things, even if they are small in number, than it is to be confused by an infinite number of them, because the former yields a steady and reliable form of learning, while the latter is changeable and based on assumptions' (Comenius, 1971). The students mentioned in their responses that they had already studied the content (stories) presented in secondary school, but that it was discussed there in a superficial, uninteresting way. As a result, it had been boring and devoid of meaning, and they forgot about it. For this reason, Fiala has developed a philosophy of education that will allow 'something to remain when everything is forgotten' (2004, p. 70). This metaphor essentially expresses what we nowadays refer to as competencies or skills in subject outcomes. In this approach, an inductive method can also be used, in which individual premises are used to develop a broader, more abstract understanding. For example, on the basis of the *Daphne* myth, it is possible to define the concept of a moral dilemma, demonstrate a mode of moral reasoning, provide justification for a decision, and observe its consequences. Various ethical systems, of course, are reflected within the context of the given decision, and their principles can be explored *ex post*. These sequential processes lead to the development of ethical competencies. In the second story, these competences can be applied directly to the teaching profession, since the story explicitly refers to the aim of education. In both stories, the issue of (professional) power can be raised, as it is also addressed in professional ethics.

One objective of professional ethics, including teacher ethics, is to minimize the gap between theoretical knowledge and practice, so that postulated values are directly reflected in practice. For example, in the course titled 'An Introduction to Professional Ethics', one of the stipulated learning outcomes is to 'demonstrate the practical application of ethics' (Information Sheet for the course 'Introduction to Professional Ethics', 2024). As it is difficult to measure the transfer of ethical competences into practice in primary school, it is also difficult to assess their acquisition in undergraduate education. Naturally, there is no guarantee that a student will experience a metamorphosis in the subject and that this encounter with the subject will then be

translated into his or her teaching practice. Based on the students' reflections in this study, however, it is possible to be hopeful in this regard. In our second research question, we therefore focused on the dimensions of the lessons and morals learned, as well as on how students perceived and interpreted them. In this respect, it was clear that the metamorphoses in the stories resonated in three primary ways. The first was emphasis on the middle way as a strong and universal moral principle grounded in the importance of balance, stability, and the avoidance of extremes. The second was an underscoring of the potential inherent in intergenerational relationships, specifically in the areas closest to the student, namely, in the family and in their future profession as teachers. The third way in which the stories resonated in the students' responses was found, or rather confirmed, to relate to the point of sacrifice and against a background of love, to implicitly resisting coercion, limitations, and violence, which also has implications for the educational environment.

By stopping to focus on individual stories, the lessons of which were certainly amplified through the use of artistic images conveying the emotion of what the students were experiencing (e.g. the gaze of the father at his son in the painting by Anthony van Dyck), the students described in their reflections the experience of a reawakening, demonstrating an awareness of moral dilemmas and the impact of an action and an action's consequences. The students themselves reflected on the rightness of one or another action in a dichotomy of good/bad and right/wrong, transporting the moral principles of both stories into the world of their own profession. This is the basis for the formation of competences that Gluchmanová (2008) refers to in relation to professional ethics. As noted above, this then needs to be anchored in a theoretical foundation in ethical systems.

A byproduct of the interactive lecture was an unexpected effect that is so often mentioned in the context of teaching that it has become a cliché. In texts focusing on the teaching profession, it is not uncommon for references to be made to the importance of a teacher's personality and qualities – not just moral ones. The implicit influence that teachers have on their students is a fundamentally integral part of the education process (Hábl, 2021), where 'caught rather than taught' is the rule (Arthur et al., 2017). The students' reflections attest to the validity of this rule and clearly state the impact that the approach the lecturer used here had on the formation of their professional identity. They noted the impact of their teacher's strong personality, depth of professional knowledge, and, most importantly, their dedication and passion. The focus of teacher ethics is on these aspects, which define the so-called ethos of the profession (Dorotíková, 2003). It is worth recalling, in this context, that the law on handing down an example applies to university teachers, especially those involved in teaching courses in teacher education programs. They implicitly pass on not only teaching methods and strategies but also what they bring to teaching, which contextualizes teacher ethics.

Conclusion

In this empirical study, we examined the use of the narrative form to teach teacher ethics and sought to demonstrate its importance as a didactic device that can positively influence future teachers at multiple levels. Based on the lecture and students' responses, we would venture to formulate the thesis that stories, supported by works of art depicting them, have the potential to shape teachers' ethical competencies during teacher training. This kind of encounter with art not only provides them with deeper knowledge of art history but, when the right strategy is applied, also shapes their cognitive development and other aspects of their teacher identity. The students' ability to identify the power of art and to translate the lessons they have learned into professional practice demonstrates that the formation of values has an essential place in teacher education. Applying this strategy helps to legitimize its necessity and supports the inclusion of professional ethics as a compulsory course in teacher education. These findings are consistent with those of Spilková and Zitková (2024), who found the ethical dimension to be important in

the teaching profession. They have shown that in the education of future teachers, not enough attention is given to the cultivation of values and moral qualities as ‘pedagogical virtues’ (Helus, 2009).

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