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The Father's Function, the Authority of the Teacher and the Conception of Education in the State School

Abstract: The article substantiates the significance, or the role, of the father's function, that is, the Other as the bearer of the Law or the embodiment of rules, in efficient education in the state school. It analyses how, in the process of enculturation, in the adoption of social norms and rules, the personality structure of the individual forms itself and the father's function arises, as defined by the notion of the (symbolic) Law. The key finding of the analysis for the formation of the conception of education of the state school is that pupils in the state school must be placed in a social network based on completely clear and pre-established rules that cannot be arbitrarily adapted. It is only possible to achieve this in the school with mutual reconciliation and by reaching agreement that is subsequently binding for everyone.

Key Words: the father's function, the symbolic Law in discourse, the authority of the teacher, the conception of education of the state school, the Oedipus complex, the Ideal-Self

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Introduction

How to undertake moral education in the state school remains a question that demands exhaustive reflection. In recent years, this question has been linked with the debates, polemics and doubts that have arisen in the implementation of the so-called school educational plan. The fact that primary schools in Slovenia are, by June 2009¹ at the latest, obliged to prepare and accept a so-called school educational plan presents primary schools with the demanding task of reflecting upon their own educational behaviours; that is, if they do not want the acceptance of this demanding document to simply be a »paper tiger«, a deed that will remain more or less on paper. Even without this current framework in which state schools have been placed by the state, however, the fact remains that schools operate within frameworks of contemporary society and moral educational models that constantly change. If moral education in the state school wants to achieve its own goals it must respond appropriately to the challenges of these changes.

The question that we address in the present article in connection with the formation of the conception of education of the state school (see also Kovač Šebart, Krek, Vogrinc 2006; Kovač Šebart 2005) concerns the massive shift in the position of the so-called father's function, that is, the bearer of the Law and thus of authority, in moral education. The basic aim of the article is to substantiate the significance, or the role, of the father's function, that is, the existence of the symbolic Law, in the efficient formation and implementation of the conception of education in the state school. We demonstrate the thesis that it is precisely the existence of the »father's function« in the moral educational concept that we need to consider and implement in the formation of the school concep-

¹ The Act on Amendments and Supplements to the Primary Schools Act, from 2007, charges primary schools with the formation of the so-called school educational plan (Article 60d, with direct links also to the provisions of Articles 60e, 60f, 60g, 60h) and in the interim provisions states that »the school board must accept the educational plan according to the procedures determined by this law by 1 June 2009 at the latest« (Article 48, The Act on Amendments and Supplements to the Primary Schools Act).

tion of education if we do not want moral education in the state school to give in to calls for authoritarianism and surveillance, if we do not want it to swing from one extreme to another in an unconsidered way, and if we do not want moral educational activities in each individual school in which various teachers implement contradictory concepts of authority; concepts experienced from the pupils' perspective as unconsidered, chaotic, unjust (from one side or another) and thus also unsuccessful – a realistic scenario in the absence of agreement on moral education in school.

We can indicate the problem with the words of Paul Verhaeghe (Verhaeghe 2004 Š2000Ć), who points out that at the conclusion of the first half of the previous century »the popular interpretation of Freud presented the authoritarian father as the source of all evil, both on the individual and the sociological levels. Authority had to be defeated; the answer was freedom. The obvious success of this movement from the sixties onwards has led to its exact opposite: today's popular opinion asks, sometimes even implores, for the return of law and order, i.e., for a return to the authoritarian father, once again both on the individual and the sociological levels« (Verhaeghe 2004, p. 31). Verhaeghe defines these shifts as »the collapse of the father's function« and in this connection quotes Colette Soler, who characterises the previous century as »a century in which we wanted to educate the father in his role« (ibid.).

It is possible to trace similar trends in the field of pedagogy, in the definition of the role of the teacher in school. In following these general trends of culture, pedagogy transformed the image of the teacher and the concept of his or her authority in an attempt to rework the authoritative figure of the teacher into a concept and teacher who rejects authoritarianism. Verhaeghe is probably correct when he points out that already in the second half of the previous century society swung back from »freedom« to a demand for »law and order«. However, given the position in which the state school finds itself today it would probably be more accurate to say that these major movements from the previous century still partially retain their influence, and that the functioning of moral education in the state school has thus been placed in a kind of fissure. Is it not, in fact, the state school, precisely because it is an educational institution, that is more than any other institution in society forced into a dilemma about how to behave if pedagogical theories and at least some parents, on the one hand, reject the teacher as a figure of authority while, on the other hand, some parents and the general public expect »order and discipline« to predominate in state schools? This call brings with it a demand that can quickly slide into authoritarianism, the very thing that it is supposed overcome.

The issue of the »absence of the father« in the role of the father's function in moral education was treated by numerous authors in the Slovene sphere in the 1980s and 1990s (Žižek 1985, 1987; Vuk Godina 1988; Šebart 1990, Kroflič 1997; Kovač Šebart 2002) and one of the key references in this connection is the classic study by Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979). In spite of this, we believe that the concept needs to be reconsidered and to be placed in the context of the imperative of forming the conception of education in the

state school, an imperative created by the legal demand for primary schools to implement a so-called school educational plan.

The aims of the current article are, on the one hand, epistemological. In theories of the process of moral education and socialisation, as well as the development of the basic structure of the personality, in addition to the established concepts of the contemporary »narcissistic subject«, and also the »Slovene« »Cankarian mother«, in the analysis of the role of the mother a moment remained in the background that Jacques Lacan establishes as key in this context; namely, that for the existence of the father's function, if we understand it as the *intervention of the Law* (which intervenes in the relationship mother-child) it is essential that »the mother establishes the father as the mediator of that which is beyond her law and her caprice, which is simply beyond the law as such« (Lacan, p. 20). We demonstrate that this thesis does not imply a response that would demand a call »back to the father« (to the authoritarian father to whom the mother is subjugated). We place the question of the function of the father in the area of speech and discourse, as well as in concrete discursive practice, and thus also in the area of the conception of education of the state school as the *plan* of discursive practice on which the behaviours of teachers are based. On the other hand, the article has a practical orientation, as the debate about the concept of the father's function can shed new light on and explain certain phenomena that influence the moral educational activity of the teacher and of state schools in the contemporary world. We seek to demonstrate that the implementation of the father's function, or the symbolic Law, in moral education is a way in which it is possible to re-establish a form of teacher authority that is neither capricious nor totalitarian. The treatment of the concept reveals certain reasons why it is necessary to build consensus in the state school regarding its moral educational activities. The implementation of the father's function or the symbolic Law can contribute to the efficiency of the moral educational activities of the state school and to the success of the realisation of the goals that are supposed to be achieved by the school conception of education.

The imperative of the passage from pre-theoretical to theoretical discourse or: the father's function is the function of the mediation of the symbolic Law

It is essential to understand the so-called father's function in moral education as the passage from explanations that speak of the »father« and the »mother«, as well as the »absence of the father«, to the concept of the (symbolic) Law.

In the popular book, *Families and How to Survive Them* (Skynner, Cleese 1983), family therapist Robin Skynner writes: »In fact almost all of the families I've seen in child psychiatry, where the child was brought as a *problem*, were mother-dominated. Either that, or completely chaotic« (ibid., p. 196). Having become acquainted with roughly ten families, Skynner complained to the so-

cial worker who was assigning the families to him that »they are all of this kind« (ibid.) and asked whether he could possibly be assigned a different kind of family. The social worker assured him that »she'd been there ten years and they were *all* like that« (ibid.). Skynner states that with this he is trying to say that »research on the *healthiest* families shows that the power in the family is *shared* between the two parents. They work together and make very conscious decisions about who's going to do what. But in all but those healthiest families, if one of them is to be the boss, it does seem more often to work better Šfor the childĆ if it's the father rather than the mother« (ibid.).

In order to attract the broadest possible public the book is written as a dialogue, with a conversation that preserves pre-theoretical discourse. However, in attempting to capture reality in the most appropriate way the book (unintentionally) does actually reveal theoretical questions. The quoted argumentation is paradoxical: on the one hand, we have healthy families that are dominated not by the father but rather by agreement (because power is shared by the parents). How then are we to understand the claim that it is not the father who dominates but rather *agreement* between the parents!? How does »agreement« dominate? On the other hand, we have dysfunctional families that are in this state either because the mother is dominant or because they are simply chaotic (i.e., they are dominated – in the general sense of the term – by no one). What kind of dominance of the mother (which is supposed to differ from that of the father) is being spoken about in this case?

The authors do, of course, treat the so-called Oedipus complex, or the Oedipal triangle. As Skynner and Cleese explain in the book to which we refer, it is when the child begins to grow up and the personality is formed that the father's role is to help the child – who initially establishes him or herself exclusively in relation to the mother, whom the child perceives as »omnipotent« and »all-powerful« (the power over the child also being located in the mother's ability to provide or withhold love) – to separate from the mother by drawing the mother back to him, by demanding »her back from the baby« (cf. ibid., p. 191). In so doing, the father begins to function as »a bridge between the mother and the outside world« (ibid.). In this regard, Skynner believes that the father has »usually a less cosy relationship, but perhaps a more robust, vigorous and stimulating one« (ibid.). The father is supposed to be the one who »by Źdrawing the line' when that's necessary – setting limits – he's helping the child to draw the lines on his internal map of the world« (ibid., p. 193). The function of the father is thus supposed to be that he enables the child to recognise that »the Mother isn't running the world, that she has to share power with Father« (ibid., p. 195), and that he later enables the child to discover that the Father »isn't God either« (ibid.). If the father »is doing his fathering job properly, he'll make it clear that he's part of something bigger too and has to fit in like everyone else« (ibid.).

With the thesis that the personality formation of the child in the family proceeds much better »if it's the father rather than the mother, if one of them has to be the boss«, the authors, of course, provide an answer to the very problem of the decline of the father's function (Verhaeghe), that is, »the absence of

the father«, »abduction«, »the breakdown of authority« (cf. Lasch 1992). As they write, »In the early days, we were certainly at fault because we used to blame it all on what we called žcastrating mothers'. Then, when we started seeing the fathers regularly, and seeing more clearly how the families operated, we realised that it was just as much due to the way the fathers opted out of responsibility« (Skynner, Cleese 1983, p. 197).

However, the quoted discourse of Skynner and Cleese (albeit having the advantage of being couched in language that is approachable to a broader audience), together with the above mentioned thesis pose a very basic theoretical question. Due to the fact that it speaks of the intervention of a real father (Father), a question soon arises that is actually also posed by the authors themselves: »Why should the father – the *man* – be any better in drawing lines than the mother« (ibid., p. 193)!? Could not all of this also be undertaken by »someone other than the man« (ibid., p. 201)!? If these questions remain unanswered the understanding persists that »the leadership of the father« is connected to the real father; there remains a quandary with which Cleese (Skynner's collocutor in the dialogue) continues, commenting that he can already hear how the feminists are »sharpening barbs« (ibid., p. 197).²

If there is no conceptual answer to the question, although we could agree with the authors when they write that, for instance: if »so far mother and baby have usually been quite a mutual admiration society«, »the mother may have some difficulty in being sufficiently realistic about the baby's actual virtues and faults« (ibid., p. 192), these are not satisfactory explanations. For instance, what about in the case where the mother is capable of doing this? And how, in this case *does she do this*? Not least, how does the personality formation of the child take place – »what happens« – if there is no father? In one place, of course, Skynner quite clearly indicates the answer, when he says that the function of the father can be undertaken by *a third person*: grandparents, other relatives, good friends, neighbours, teachers, etc. The fact that the »father« is better equipped than the mother for this intervention in the relationship between the child and mother is, therefore, simply because the father is the one who (usually) appears as the third person. This also means that the *function* of the father is not connected to »inherent psychological differences between males and females« (ibid., p. 193). The function is, therefore, some kind of mechanism and intervention of *the Third* as a »structural necessity« in the development of personality.

² In this regard, we can pose certain other questions – questions that may on first view seem superfluous. Supposing that we accept the thesis of the decline of the father's function, can this in fact have any important consequences whatsoever for moral education in the state school, in view of the fact that the vast majority of pedagogical workers are women?! Can the problem, therefore, have any bearing at all on moral education in the state school and on the women who work in the state school? If the thesis concerns not only men, whose father's function is supposed to be in decline, if the father's function has a broader scope, why does the concept nonetheless speak of the *father's* function? Not least, is it not true that the dilemmas and questions in connection with the father's function concern above all the Oedipus complex and the intersubjective *family* relationships in the period related to the preschool child!? Is it not, therefore, the case that the function of the father is without any real weight in consideration of the school conception of education!?

The essential weakness of the discourse in the book referred to is the absence of an answer that is key to the understanding of the concept of the function of the »father«, and of a reason for why the father's function has a broader scope in moral education, a scope that is not linked to the biological male or female gender. This reason can be found, for instance, in the theory of J. Lacan, when he postulates that in the »traditional« patriarchal structure the father functions as the embodiment of the Law, as the mediator of »social norms«, »the rules of the game«. As Žižek pointed out many years ago, the absence of the father as such does not mean his empirical absence but rather that he has not dispatched his father's function and has not functioned as the embodiment of the Law (cf. Žižek 1985; 1987). The notion of the Law essentially changes the scope of the father's function. In place of the thesis of the necessity of »the father taking leadership«, the involvement of the »father« is considered more as the necessity for some kind of intervention in the relationship between mother and child, which in essence concerns the existence of the symbolic Law (or: the Law in the Symbolic, in discourse). Just as by anybody else, this function can (in principle) also be taken on by the solo mother, for instance.

The demand that »the mother establishes the father as the mediator of that which is beyond her law and her caprice« (Lacan) or: the mediation of mediation (double mediation) as the key to the appearance of the symbolic Law

There is no need to justify the claim that kindergarten teachers, irrespective of their gender, can also fulfil this function; thus the kindergarten teacher appears as the Third Person who in relation to the child (for the child) intervenes in the dyad mother-child and functions as the mediator of the symbolic Law. Analysis of the role played by the father and mother in the child's internalisation of the world is important in the context of the school conception of education both because of the question as to how moral education in school will *interface* with the results of »primary socialisation« in the formation of the personality – whether it will continue, support or even undermine these results – as well as the question as to how to establish in this context the authority of the teacher and other professionals, including leadership personnel, in the state school.

Lacan's conceptualisation, however, also provides an insight into another particular moment, which explains the difficulty of moral educational tasks linked with the function of the mediation of the symbolic Law. In order for the symbolic Law to exist for the child or pupil it is not simply necessary for significant Others who mediate the symbolic Law in reality to exist. The difficulty lies primarily in the fact that the symbolic Law requires: (1) a subjective gesture, philosophically speaking, of double mediation (mediation of mediation), and at the same time (2) the existence of the Law in discourse (for more detail on this, see sections 4 and 5 of the present text).

First a clarification of the thesis about the subjective gesture of double me-

diation. In Lacan's theory, too, the preoedipal relationship between the mother and the child is defined as a relationship in which the child »at first feels completely subject to the caprices on which he or she is dependent« (Lacan 2004, p. 18), and insofar as the mother is, of course, a speaking being (and as such connected to the Law) the *mother's law* is »a kind of uncontrolled law«, which for the child »is completely situated (...) in the good or bad mother's will, in the good or bad mother« (ibid.). For the child the maternal preoedipal law is not the universal law but rather the law of caprice, of arbitrariness. On the other hand, according to Lacan »the father enters the game precisely as the bearer of the law, the one who prohibits the object, that is, the mother herself« (ibid., p. 16), and in so doing brings an essentially different dimension of the law – the possibility of its universality. The result is the establishment of the Ideal-Self as an internalised instance of the symbolic Law, as an instance of internalised social norms, of conscience, which is an essential basis of the personality structure in the child if we want moral education in the state kindergarten and school to form the child in terms of personality into an independent, responsible, autonomous being.

Such a situation is evident from Lacan's description of the three steps, or phases, that lead to the disentanglement of the so-called Oedipus complex in the child. In his lecture entitled »Oedipus' Three Phases« (Lacan 2004) he says that in the (first) preoedipal phase the »father's instance« appears in a veiled, or not yet present, form. This is no obstacle to the »father« existing in reality, to his being the bearer of the Law; however, the »symbolic character« of this, as the author points out, is still beyond the child's comprehension.

In the second phase someone must establish themselves as the one who takes something from the »mother«. Here the father (or the other significant Others) already supports the Law, no longer doing so in a veiled way but rather (and this is the essence of the complication) *in such a way that »the mother« appears as a mediator who presents the father as the one who submits her to the Law*. He emphasises that it is essential »that the mother establishes the father as the mediator of that which is beyond her law and her caprice, which is simply beyond the law as such« (ibid. p. 20). In this regard, the key thing is, as Lacan also emphasises, not so much a case of »the personal relationships between the father and mother«, of »the relationships between the mother as a person and the father as a person, but rather of the relationship between the mother and the father's *word* – with the father insofar as that what he says nonetheless does count for something« (ibid., author's emphasis). In connection with this he adds that: »The key of the Oedipus relationship offers us the close connection between the fact that the mother refers to some law that is not hers but belongs to some Other, and the fact that in reality the object of her desire is the comprehensive ownership of the same Other whose law the mother refers to. This means that we must establish as key not so much the relationship to the father but the relationship to the father's word.« (ibid., p. 22).

In the third phase the father is revealed as the one who has the Law in his possession. This is also a result of the Oedipus complex, which, as Lacan says,

is favourable as long as in this third phase there occurs an identification with »the father« who intervenes as the one who represents the Law. This leads to identification with the father and the establishment of the Ideal-Self (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 24-25).

The successful resolution of the Oedipus complex thus demands the double gesture of the break from directness on the part of the significant Other (and this function can be undertaken by anyone), a gesture that (1) releases the child from »directness« in relation to (the mother as) the object of desire, and at the same time (2) connects the child, not directly (to the father) but rather to (the father or the significant Other as) the mediator of the symbolic Law.

Here we therefore have the demand for double mediation, first that of the mother as a mediator of the father, who himself is also »just« a mediator – a mediator of the symbolic Law, the Law that is defined by the fact that it has existence »in the word«, for instance in some norm or rule, in concrete terms.

However, this double mediation can, in fact, be realised by one person – for instance, the mother. The significant Other must behave in such a way that, on the one hand, he or she does not operate simply in the function of satisfying the child's desire (or that the significant Other implements his or her own demand, that he or she does not subjugate him or herself to the child's demand). On the other hand, these behaviours must be based in certain generally established norms and rules in relation to the child.³

Some implications from the analysis of the father's function for the consideration and formation of the school conception of education

The first implication of the father's function as the symbolic Law for the formation of the school conception of education is that moral education whose goal is to attempt to establish the independent, autonomous and responsible being must implement the existence of the symbolic Law in moral education – in other words the *norms* and *rules* implemented by moral educational behaviours in school – as something that is beyond the »possession« of the individual teacher and his or her »caprice«. This is, of course, possible when the pupils have been placed in a social network that is based on clear and pre-established rules that cannot be arbitrarily adapted (or, to use Lacan's terminology, as symbolic Law that exists in discourse, that is, in the Other). This can be achieved in school only with prior agreement and mutual reconciliation (primarily of teachers but also of teachers and parents, with the inclusion of pupils as far as possible), with agreements that are subsequently binding for everyone.

Secondly, Lacan emphasises that the result of the Oedipus complex is depen-

³ The Oedipus complex is, of course, also linked to the constitution of the female or male gender – but that we put aside. In this connection we can refer to the discussion of V. Vuk Godina (1995), who also emphasises the universal significance of the symbolic Law, especially the connection with heterosexuality, both for the female and the male genders.

dent on whether the mother establishes the father as the one who is beyond her law and caprice, which is demonstrated by whether the father's *word* counts for her (which in the patriarchal structure is not questionable, at least not as much as it is in the contemporary world). If the answer is positive the father will gain a place of authority in relation to the child. This has obvious implications for the establishment the authority of teachers in school, although in this case, of course, a broader complex of intersubjective relationships is at work, on which the authority of both the institution and the individual teacher depend. Lacan says: »The problem appears at the point when the father's position is placed under question due to the fact that his word is not the law for the mother« (ibid., p. 23). This explains why »the absence of the father«, or »the breakdown of authority« is not essentially connected with the physical absence of the father, nor in the end is it only the problem of real fathers (or mothers), but rather it is the result of the contemporary relationship of the significant Others to the child in general, insofar as they behave in relation to the child in such a way that for the child their word, or the word of others, »is not the law«, if we can put it this way. The physical presence of the parent cannot take the place of the essential intervention that must be on the level of discourse, of the symbolic Law, whose bearer is the norms/rules that are missing and the behaviours appropriate to them.

Furthermore, in the school the problem appears when the established position of the teacher is under question, but not simply due to the fact that for the child the teacher's word »is not the law« – this is actually just a consequence of a more complex situation. Firstly, permissiveness in relation to the child (about which we will say more below), along with, for instance, theories that attempt to build motivation in the pupil by stimulating so-called inner motivation, can place the teacher in a role in which, in an effort to motivate the pupil internally, he or she starts to take on (or simply adopts) the role of the satisfier of the pupils' desires or pleasure. Lacan's theory points out that for the successful resolution of the preoedipal relationship between the mother and the child, which tears the child away from the logic of functioning purely according to the principle of pleasure, the mother herself must first appear as the mediator of the symbolic Law. Later, too, when it is a case of building upon these relationships, this means that in relation to the pupils the teacher must fundamentally appear from the position of the mediator of the symbolic Law (and in so doing he or she can also lead the pedagogical process and a sovereign way), not from the position of the satisfier of the pupils' desires or pleasure. Arriving at the logic of functioning according to the principle of the pleasure of the child is of no benefit to the formation of his/her independence and individuality. Furthermore, it undermines the pedagogical process if the pupils, acting according to their own caprice or according to the principle of pleasure, begin to dictate the course of the pedagogical process.

The next difficult point concerns the very existence of the symbolic Law; namely, that the mediation of the law as such establishes itself in speech and discourse, on the discursive level (which expresses Lacan's idea that in the struc-

ture of the Oedipus complex the father's position is placed under question in the case that *his word* is not the law for the mother). In other words, the symbolic Law of which we are speaking is situated »in the word«, in the sense that it is always »mediated« by speech and discourse, which (and for the school this is crucial) also includes the relationship between the teacher and the other teachers (and the relationship of the parents to the teacher's word and behaviours). Here again, similarly to in the family, it is not so much a case of the personal relationships between the individual teachers as of the attitude that the individual teacher demonstrates towards other teachers through his or her own attitude towards and use of the *norms and rules* according to which they behave as teachers at a particular school.

This explains the appearance of »the breakdown of authority« in the contemporary relationship of adults to children, or of teachers to pupils, as a consequence of the behaviour of the bearers of authority, when they behave such that for themselves their word »is not the law«, and that the word of others, too, counts for »nothing«, to state it rather drastically.

With regard to the relationship between narcissism and permissiveness, it is worth pointing out that Lasch (Lasch 1992), too, does not attribute permissiveness in moral education only to the consequences of the psychological mechanisms connected with narcissism. For the Slovene sphere, permissive behaviours that function as such, albeit detached from narcissistic patterns, are perhaps even more characteristic than permissiveness connected with narcissistic patterns that lead to so-called pathological narcissism. This has probably received too little emphasis in discussions, a fact that can be attributed to Lasch's theorising itself, which is derived from an analysis of American culture and which emphatically weaves the concept of pathological narcissism into the analysis. However, Lasch also quotes Rogow, for instance, who finds that American parents who in their behaviour with young people are alternatively »permissive and wavering«, »find that it is easier to achieve conformity if they submit to bribery than if they deal with the emotional agitation associated with repressing the child's demands« (ibid.). In other words, even just the principle of pleasure can lead parents to permissive behaviours in relation to the child: when they are with the child they do everything in order not to have to »deal with emotional agitation«, especially the kind of agitation that could be a consequence of the child's resistance in relation to their demands. As Lasch adds, »in this way they weaken the child's initiative and prevent him or her from developing self-mastery or self-discipline « (ibid.).

The absence of the Law can be a consequence of a specific subjective uncertainty of the parents (of the significant Others) in relation to the child. Rose, who is quoted by Lasch in his analysis, writes: »Some parents, for example, are incapable of such things as putting the child to bed if the child protests or is not able to contain his or her aggressiveness...« (ibid., p. 194). Obviously the point here is not so much connected with the *contents* of the norm or rule (when and how the parents put the child to bed), as with the inability, the incapacity, of the parents to *implement* a particular norm or rule in relation to the child. This also

holds for cases where in relation to the child the demand is »declared«, where the parents are aware of what they »want« or what they »should do« – they nevertheless »give in« and do not insist on the demand set, they do not oppose the child when he or she resists. Similar situations can arise in school, such as when practice or repetition must be undertaken by the pupils (homework, for instance). In these cases it is therefore crucial that teachers and parents do not give in, that they insist on the tasks being completed.

On this point contemporary families and other moral educational influences (such as moral education in kindergarten) probably function in quite different ways, which has an impact on the fact that on entering primary school pupils arrive with various levels of personality formation.

In the formation and implementation of the school conception of education this demands taking as a point of departure the view that it is necessary to strive for a situation in which the teachers' *word* is – metaphorically speaking – the law; a situation in which the words and behaviours of the teacher have the support of other teachers and of parents. In so doing the authority of the teacher establishes itself and this is (amongst others) a path by which educational measures also gain validity (or with time become increasingly less necessary, increasingly less inefficient). However, this is a realistic demand only in the case (once again we come to the same point) that the school – in face of the differences that exist between teachers, between teachers and parents, etc. – reflects upon moral educational behaviours, that it attempts to reach binding agreement, and that words are supported by appropriate behaviours. It is obvious that this cannot be an undemanding, simple process; nonetheless, it is a process with which it is necessary to engage.

As we will demonstrate in the continuation, the existence of the symbolic Law (and the father's function) in the traditional structure of the social matrix (social norms) was able to be maintained due to the simple fact that (or the extent to which) social norms were not subject to question, which today is no longer so self-evident. This once again establishes the demand that in the formation of the conception of education it is necessary to form and accept agreement with regard to moral educational behaviours, enabling the discourse and behaviours of one teacher to be supported by that of other teachers.

The function of the father as the symbolic Law exists (or does not exist) in speech and utterances (in discourse)

In the contemporary world the existence of the symbolic Law is undermined both by the changed relationship between the sexes and by the relativisation of social or cultural norms. This must be reflected in the formation of the school conception of education and, of course, solutions must be found to remove the difficulties that can arise in connection with the authority of the teacher.

When, for instance, Berger and Luckmann write that »primary socialisation causes in the child the gradual generalisation from the roles and attitudes

of the significant Others to roles and attitudes in general« (Berger, Luckmann 1988, p. 124), in the clarification they provide a concrete example in which we cannot overlook the fact that their view of the child's gradual generalisation of roles and attitudes – not by coincidence – also includes a very characteristic moral educational situation from the viewpoint of the formation of the personality. They write that »in the internalisation of rules there is gradual progress from 'mummy is angry with me' to 'mummy is always angry with me when I spill the soup'. Due to the fact that the other significant Others (father, grandmother, older sister, etc.) support the mother's negative attitude towards spilling the soup the generality of the rule subjectively expands. The decisive point is when the child recognises that everyone is against the spilling of soup and generalises the rule as: 'A person does not spill soup'« (ibid.).

The question as to whether the significant Other establishes his or her relationship to the child through norms or rules conceived in this way becomes even more important as the child grows, when he or she begins to notice that the mother's attention is not directed only towards him or her but also towards others, and when he or she is able to express his or her power (aggression) in a more determined way. The content of the social and cultural norms that enable him or her the basic functioning in human society will be mastered and adopted by the child as he or she grows up; above all, the relationships with the significant Others will influence his or her personality formation.

Thus Berger and Luckmann's example does not only describe the situation of the child's generalisation and adoption of social roles and attitudes in the sense of the *contents* of the rules, norms, values, etc., that are mediated by the significant Others, such as the concrete norm that »one does not spill one's soup«. When we have a situation like the one described in which the other significant Others also support the mother's negative attitude towards the spilling of soup this first signifies what the child with time realises: in relation to him or her the mother does not arbitrarily establish demands, or rather that *the mother herself is also subject to the rule*. The assumption in this situation, as described by the authors, is the general, universal validity of the norm or rule – in other words, the Law. They describe the moment of the operation of the father's function, the consequence of which is that the »father«, as the mediator of the Law, intervenes in the previously »uncurtailed« relationship of the child with the mother (which occurs to the extent that the significant Others actually behave in this way in relation to the particular child). In so doing the father not only contributes to the gradual adoption of various social norms and rules but also to the continuous formation of the child's personality.

In the example of Berger and Luckmann we can see that when a particular norm holds as universally valid (for the mother, the father, the grandparents, etc.) and unquestionable the consequence is *self-evidence* in the behaviour of adults in relation to the child. This »self-evidence« regarding the correctness of the behaviours of the significant Others in relation to the child is most often not connected with rational reflection and foundation but rather with the absence of doubt on the part of adults with regard to the correctness of the norm, which is a

consequence of the fact that the significant Others themselves adopt it as their own in the process of socialisation. However, it is precisely the certainty and unquestionability that marks the following of the contents of social norms that can be characteristic for a primary society (for the life of some tribe remote from the rest of the world, which lives in the closed circle of its own social subjectivity towards itself) but that no longer exists in contemporary societies. Furthermore, is not to be expected that we could, if we wanted to, »create« a society in which this was not the case, i.e., that social and specific cultural norms in these globalised societies would not be subjected to various influences and changes.

However, if we accept that in contemporary society there cannot be entirely unquestionable social and cultural norms and rules in terms of content, is an inevitable consequence of this fact also the failure of the father's function, insofar as it is the mediation of the Law connected to the universality of norms, to the question as to whether in fact in relation to the child these norms are implemented as valid for everyone?

In principle the answer is, of course, negative. The realisation of the relativity of norms in society, insofar as it is already present, *in itself* does not lead to the adult individual not respecting a moral educational model in relation to the child according to which the demands placed upon the child are presented and established in the form (for the child) of generally valid norms or rules that are implemented as such. However, moral education in such a society faces a new challenge: insofar as even in the environment of the primary society the child is placed in relationships in which there is not just one significant Other who »decides« about norms and rules, and that consequently there are no entirely unquestionable social norms/rules *in terms of content*, the demand for the child to be able to recognise the »general« validity of norms and rules that the significant Others transmit to the child obliges the significant Others to *agree upon* the norms and rules that will subsequently be implemented in relation to the child.⁴

A similar situation holds for the kindergarten and school. Here the process of the formation of *agreements* about the norms and rules that all of the teachers subsequently implement in their behaviours in relation to the pupils is more complex. For agreements whose norms or rules can be established as common, those which everyone can be expected to uphold on the level of behaviours, it is necessary to reflect the fact that pupils in the state school can come from various ethnic, religious and other difference-generating environments. Here the question of the specific cultural norms of the majority is particularly sensitive, as in moral education in the state school it is necessary to ensure that the pupil who stands out from the majority in any way whatsoever is not excluded, that he or she is not in one way or another marginalised, ignored, subject to inequalities (for more on this see Kovač Šebart, Krek 2003, 2005, 2007a, 2007b).

⁴ With this we do not want to say that there are no longer any unquestionable, generally valid norms or rules, or that all rules must or could be entirely rationally justified.

The reflective establishment of the function of the symbolic Law, of »the point«, that mediates norms or rules (the Law)

A further reason for the reproduction of the father's function in the conditions in which contemporary families operate not proceeding in family moral education in the same way as in the traditional patriarchal family lies in the fact of changed interpersonal relationships insofar as they are influenced by social models of gender roles, or relationships between genders. In the traditional patriarchally structured family the mother herself must also take care of the maintenance of the father's function.⁵ Such a situation is evident from the description of the three steps or phases that in the child lead to the disentanglement of the so-called Oedipus complex, as described by Lacan. Of course, these structures can also be complex – we only need to recall the analyses of the so-called maternal Superego and the paternal Superego (Žižek 1987, Šebart 1990; Kovač Šebart 2001; 2002). However, here we are not dealing with the forms and excesses regarding the law in the traditional family or in the school context of the past, but rather with the question of the lack of the symbolic Law in discourse in the contemporary world.

The self-evidence (unquestionability) of the *universality* of the rule in the traditional patriarchal family structure is based upon the norm that the father is the one who »establishes rules«, a norm that is internalised in the process of moral education. Even in the case that the »master« (in terms of the interpersonal relationships of a particular family) is in fact the mother, in her attitude towards the child the mother establishes and maintains the appearance of the existence of the »father«, or »someone« (this role can also be represented by more abstract instances, such as by invoking God) who »establishes the rules« beyond her, and in so doing maintains the *function of the father*. If we can assume that there has been a shift in the subjective understanding of interpersonal relationships between genders in the contemporary family, whereby the mother and father no longer understand that one or the other is (self-evidently) superior or inferior simply because they are a woman or a man, this means that on the level of family patterns it is no longer predetermined who (the mother or the father) in the family »establishes the rules«, who is the »master«. It is precisely in the light of these changes in the relationships between the genders that it has become important for both parents to equally retain the function of the father (the mediator of the symbolic Law) in relation to the child. This means that in relation to the child they both support each other in the function of the subject who establishes the rule for the child or, put more generally, that the significant Others mutually support this function.

If for any reason there exists within the family a struggle for dominance – if, for example, the parents impugn each other in the function of the father

⁵ With somewhat different argumentation Lasch also finds that in the American family not only the father is »absent« but in a sense »that her dominance is felt primarily in the child's fantasies (where the father also plays an active role), not in everyday life«, »the American mother is also an absent parent« (Lasch 1992, p. 204).

(»the bearer of the rule«) – and this is transferred to the relationship with the child, such behaviours most likely have an influence upon the moral education of the child and the development of his or her personality structure. These processes undermine the existence of the function of the father in the sense that the child is exposed to the implementation of now one now another rule – there is a lack of the previously described situation of the constant repetition of the same by all of the significant Others, which ensures that the child can recognise the universally valid rules behind the concrete demands, consequently the establishment of the »point« that could represent the bearer of the rules becomes questionable.

This in itself does not mean that the moral education of parents is based on caprice, insofar as each of the significant Others in his or her own way implements with the child specific (in reality to a certain extent different) norms and rules. In so doing they enable a process of identification with the bearer of these messages, an internalisation and adoption of the mediated norms and rules. As long as in relation to the child the moral education of the significant Others is based on the validity of norms and rules, even though the child perceives differences between the way these norms and rules are implemented, this conveys the child to the field of the validity of social rules and in a certain way draws him or her away from a position in which he or she would be exposed to the »incomprehensible«, capricious demands of the significant Other – on the condition that in so doing the significant Others also provide resistance to the child's aggression and self-will.

It is true, however, that such behaviours at the same time open up room for contradictory messages (in a period when the child is not even yet capable of distinguishing between them) and consequently also room for the child's manipulation of the demands of the significant Others (firstly, of course, in the case of the parents, if they allow the child to do so as part of, for instance, their struggle for dominance over one another).⁶

In view of the described moral education in family environments, and also the moral educational influences in kindergarten, there can be diverse influences on the formation of the structure of the personality, resulting in significant differences between pupils by the time they enter primary school. However, this is not a reason for the formation of the conception of education of the state school, when it is a case of a general approach, to shy away from moral education based on rules or norms that are valid for everyone in an effort to adapt to the differences between pupils – quite the opposite. One of the moral educational principles must be to put in place efforts, in an even more reflective and considered way (taking into account the value basis of moral education in the state school), to build the establishment of rules and norms, as well as devoting equal attention to how teachers and parents implement the agreements in their behaviours.

⁶ A specific trait of the personality structure can be understanding norms simply as tools for the manipulation of others.

The implementation of the norm/rule (the Law)

It is characteristic of the permissive moral educational model that it causes, even in the case when the significant Others are well aware of which norms and rules they seek to implement in terms of content (!), the relationship of the significant Others to the child to lack the appearance of the Law. In situations when the child exerts his or her own will permissive significant Others give in. There is a lack of intrusion of the child's »own« borders »from outside«. This not only conveys a message to the child that in the moral educational relationship he is the master, with which the child retains an unrealistic conception of him or herself and of his or her capabilities, but it also leads to an understanding that the symbolic matrix of the social norms and rules that are followed by the significant Others »do not count« for the child, which results in the child's not being able to take on board his or her own limitations.

As we have already established, it is possible that due to diverse moral educational influences during the preschool period significant differences in personality formation can appear between pupils prior to entering primary school. In spite of these differences, which have an impact on the possibility of recognising, accepting and following the symbolic Law, the teacher must strive to place (all) pupils in an environment in which they will (be able to) recognise that the demands of the teachers are not established arbitrarily, that the »rules of the game« apply to everyone, including the person who mediates or enforces these rules. The point is thus that the introduction of the symbolic Law in moral education demands of the teacher a »passage to action«: both in terms of functioning through the generally valid rules and norms (through »the Law in the Other«) and the *implementation*⁷ of these rules and norms on the part of the teacher or the parents in behaviours in relation to the pupils. However, various aspects of the »passage to action« in moral education present a problem that demands separate interpretation.⁸

⁷ As Dolar writes, »the subject cannot arrive at self-reflection simply via the path of cognition; in order to come to 'self-knowledge' he or she must at some point abandon a contemplative, cognitive, purely theoretical attitude and take a step towards 'practical action'« (Dolar 1992, p. 121).

⁸ Here we must bear in mind that the father's function as the symbolic Law can also be lacking in the conditions of the traditional patriarchal family: in the case of dominant mothers who maintain complete control over the child, but with violence, drastic punishment, humiliation and similar behaviours from which there is an absence of the implementation of the norm or rule, and which serve only the mother's domination of the child. Thus both in the case of the apparently »frail«, permissive, protective mother (or father), and in that of the dominant, controlling and punishing mother, as well as in some combination of these patterns, the problem does not lie in the fact that the real father is simply ousted from moral education, but primarily in the ousting of the implementation and enactment of generally valid norms/rules (= the Law) in relation to the child. Something similar also holds true for the repressive/totalitarian model of authority in school.

Conclusion: the father's function, authority and the formation of the state school conception of education

It is, of course, possible to establish the question of authority in a different way. We can proceed from the thesis that in the pedagogical profession there is no real dilemma as to whether the teacher should have authority or not (cf. Kroflič 1997, p. 317-399) – the teacher should gain authority over the pupils in any case. The rejection of authoritarianism is supposed to first prompt the question as to *what type*, or *what form* of authority is appropriate to the role that the teacher has in the state school. Thus after an analytical examination of the history or theory of forms of authority in moral education (apostolic authority, Kant's symbolic authority of reason, Rousseau's hidden authority of the educational environment), Kroflič endorses the concept of the self-limitation of authority as a suitable form of authority in the postmodern era (ibid.).

Kroflič's analysis of forms of authority enables an outline of certain methodological differences in the conceptualisation of authority. In contrast to the approach by which the concept of authority is outlined through an analysis of forms of authority – whether these forms are considered through history or as the theories of individual authors – the notion of the father's function in this analysis of authority is derived from the concept of structure, and therefore does not rely so much on description, or on the possibility of an exhaustive description of the behaviours that would need to be undertaken in order to proceed in accordance with a particular concept of authority. Nor is the concept connected directly to a particular historical form of authority, but rather in its point of departure it establishes the thesis that, in moral education and in the relationship to the child or pupil in general, the parent, the caregiver, the teacher (the significant Others) »undertake some function«, some work; in concrete terms: *to mediate the father's function*. This perspective in principle opens up the *possibility* that in forms of the implementation of authority – in spite of the differences that have appeared throughout history and that could be analytically differentiated (although here we leave this aside) – the implementation of the father's function has always been »at work« in the social matrix (in the norms on which moral educational behaviours are based) and in the moral educational behaviours of the significant Others. Whether or not this has been the case, the thesis about »the collapse of the father's function« indicates a certain radical shift in the social matrix and in the moral educational behaviour it is based on. Of course, the story about this, as already indicated by Verhaeghe, has not yet concluded. In this regard, the role that will be played by moral education in the state school is far from insignificant.

It is precisely for this reason that we emphasise the fact that in the formation of the conception of education of the state school one of the points of departure must be that pupils need to be placed in a social network that is based on completely clear and pre-established rules that cannot be arbitrarily adapted. It is only possible to achieve this in the school through mutual reconciliation and by reaching agreement that is subsequently binding for everyone. In the forma-

tion and implementation of the school conception of education this demands the point of departure that it is necessary to strive for a situation where, metaphorically speaking, the word of the teacher is »the law«, and where the words and behaviours of the teacher are supported by other teachers and by parents. In this way the authority of the teacher and of the institution is established. However, this is a realistic demand only in the case that the school engages with the difficult process of reflecting on moral educational behaviours, and through this attempts to achieve binding agreement, subsequently supported by appropriate behaviours. As already stated, this cannot be an undemanding, simple process, but it is nonetheless necessary to embark upon it.

In this regard the argumentation also indicates the sense in which the doubt that Kroflič expresses towards the role of the »symbolic order of laws« (Kroflič 2008, pp. 68-69) in the moral development of the individual and in the moral educational operation of the state school is not aimed at the correct target; namely, »personal closeness, encouraging friendly relations, an inclusive atmosphere and the implementation of inductive logic in the perception of the damaging consequences of morally contentious behaviour« (ibid., p. 69) is not, and cannot be, an alternative to the role of the symbolic Law in moral education – as the author's argumentation could also be understood. The validity and implementation of the symbolic Law is a *condition* of the establishment of an inclusive school culture in school – and for the establishment of an »inclusive atmosphere«, as Kroflič writes, it is undoubtedly worth striving. The function of the implementation of the symbolic Law is, on the one hand, that moral education is established according to certain »rules of the game« that are valid in school for both the pupils and the teachers. The rules are what protects the pupil from the »caprice« of the teacher. Of course, these rules establish borders for the pupil, but they establish the same borders for the teachers, and are also binding for them, thereby providing the child with a sense of security. On the other hand, an essential aspect is that this enables the pupil to identify with the significant Others, and that through this mechanism of identification the child internalises the »rules of the game« – the Law. The process in which the individual integrates the demands of the environment, structured in the symbolic instance of the Ideal-Self, forms itself on the basis of symbolic identification with the bearer of the Law.

Therefore, both the teacher's word and his or her behaviours must also occupy the place of the mediator of the universal Law. These processes in the formation of the basic personality of the pupils, which must be built upon in the state school by moral education, are one of the reasons that moral education in the state school – whose basic goal is to develop the child into an autonomous, independent, responsible person – must respect all of the valid (= universal) rules. If in moral education the limitations, the borders, established for the child are not based on norms and rules that are in principle valid for all pupils, the teacher's demand gains (or rather retains) a non-universal, capricious, tyrannical character – something that has already been established numerous times (cf. Šebart 1990, Kovač Šebart 2002; 2005).

A key factor, therefore, is how these processes, which also influence the formation of the personality of the pupils, proceed.

(1) Either they proceed in such a way that the process of forming the personality of the child leads to the establishment of an instance of the symbolic Law, to the establishment of the Ideal-Self as the mediator of internalised social norms, thus to a process whose result is the formation of an inner guide, an inner-binding Law, which is a condition for personality traits to develop in the child that will enable him or her, as he or she grows up, to develop into an autonomous, responsible person.

(2) Or they proceed in such a way that the significant Others – whether due to an excessive, cruel, implementation of the rules (with violence), or due to the absence of rules (the Law) in moral education – function with regard to moral education in a specific away: such that in the structure of the child's personality in one way or another there is retained the original trauma of »external constraint« and a direct dependence on the Others, as well as an inability to resist.

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