

## Demonstrates rigorous and responsible work

### Principle IV

#### Principal's basis

The term 'rigorousness' seems to have a double meaning. On the one hand, according to the RAE<sup>1</sup>, it can mean harsh, cruel and rigid, that is, adjectives usually linked to severity and inflexibility. But also, according to the RAE, it can mean exact, precise and meticulous, that is to say, characteristics that we commonly value positively because they are associated with a well-done job. Therefore, it is not surprising that even in our times, we continue to associate rigorousness - in this second sense - to the sciences, mainly to the exact sciences<sup>2</sup>. In this context, a rigorous task or work would be one that precisely accounts for those attributes that are usually recognized to the sciences: clarity, distinction, evidence, accuracy and precision.

In the case of the teacher<sup>3</sup>, however, rigorous work would not only be given by the exercise and modeling of rigor -understood as we have pointed out in its second meaning-, but also by the demand for it. A rigorous teacher demonstrates but also demands rigor. Rigor, in this sense, is linked to the generation of tasks or experiences that challenge students academically, personally and intellectually.

Responsibility, on the other hand, is a concept closely linked to freedom. Responsibility is a prerequisite for the constitution of freedom, as far as it requires us to be able to freely choose and direct our actions and to be accountable for them. Thus, we speak of responsibility when we act or make decisions, accounting for them and their effects, both to ourselves and to others (Escámez, 2008). But in order to be responsible, certain requirements must be met: "[...] the agent must be aware of what he is doing, that is, know what he is doing, have the ability to interpret or understand the situation or scenario in which his action occurs or ceases to occur, also possess the ability to make the decision to perform or not to perform the action and, finally, the ability to control the initiation of the action or the cessation of the same, if he so wishes" (Escámez, 2008, p.203). In this sense, responsibility requires awareness, freedom and knowledge of the effects of the action. Thus, we can point out that there are degrees of responsibility. If the person who commits the offense does not act in a fully conscious manner, his degree of responsibility decreases. The same happens if I do not have enough knowledge or information to be able to foresee the possible consequences of my actions.

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<sup>1</sup> Real Academia Española (n.d.). Riguroso/sa. In *Diccionario de la lengua española*. Retrieved on March 9, 2022, from <https://dle.rae.es/riguroso>

<sup>2</sup> It should be recalled that, from the field of philosophy, Husserl (2009) had the pretension that philosophy should be constituted as a

rigorous science, that is, that it could count on attributes such as immediate evidence, conceptual clarity and distinction, and univocal rational configuration.

<sup>3</sup>The documents developed use the concepts of "educator", "teacher", "professor", "teacher" and their respective plurals indistinctly and inclusively. The same applies to the terms "child", "pupil", "student" and their corresponding plurals.

Therefore, it is important that, when acting or failing to act, people have the necessary knowledge and information and, in turn, develop the ability to anticipate or foresee the possible consequences of their actions. In many of our actions or decisions it is possible to anticipate immediate consequences. However, sometimes our actions bring unthinkable consequences in the long term. Hence, authors such as Hans Jonas (1995), have proposed to broaden traditional ethics - ethics considered by him as anthropocentric and centered on the immediate context of action - and have established the need to formulate an ethics that pays attention to the environment, nature and future generations and, therefore, considers the unforeseen subsequent effects of well-intentioned, well-considered and well-executed actions in order to evaluate the responsibility of our actions (cf. Jonas, 1995).

However, is it possible to consider, in our actions, all the possible immediate and long term effects of our actions and decisions? No. Although it is possible to foresee, consider and evaluate effects that can be expected under certain circumstances, it is impossible to predict all the future consequences of an action. Therefore, Spaemann (2005) points out that "our moral responsibility is concrete, determined, and not manipulable at will, as long as it is limited, that is, as long as we do not start from the idea that we must answer for all the consequences of every act and every omission" (p.88).

In this context, can we say that it is sufficient to focus on the consequences of the act in order to assess the agent's responsibility? Some authors have argued that it is not, that the mere focus on consequences could leave our actions without direction (cf. Spaemann, 2005). This is why Spaemann suggests, based on the famous Max Weber's distinction between the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility, that responsibility - understood in a more radical sense - must not only take into consideration the possible consequences of the action, but also those principles that mobilize or give rise to the action. Evaluating the responsibility of an action, in this case, would mean weighing not only the results obtained from it, but also the action itself and the motivations or intentions that were at the basis of that action. Although this last consideration does not necessarily exempt the perpetrator from responsibility, it does allow the action to be evaluated considering the whole set of circumstances (cf. Spaemann, 2005).

Thus, initially we can understand responsibility as being able to account for the result and the set of foreseeable consequences of an action and/or omission. However, given that *all* our actions have consequences, it is impossible to be responsible for all of them, so it is key in ethics to be able to discern what the consequences are. While usually in everyday moral analysis and reasoning, we tend to take into consideration mainly the effects of actions<sup>4</sup>; it is also relevant to consider the act itself. The actions (the motives that originated it, the means used to achieve it) are also important and it is usually from there that the degrees of responsibility are established.

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<sup>4</sup> In contrast to Kantian ethics, which focuses on principles, Max Weber distinguishes between the "ethics of conviction" and the "ethics of responsibility. Referring to the latter, K.O. Apel points out that: "[...] no one can be morally required to behave according to an unconditionally valid moral principle without a responsible weighing of the results and consequences of his action" (Apel, K.O. [1991]).

In terms of professional responsibility, according to Da Costa (1998), "a professional should be governed, at least, by these two simple principles: avoid any voluntary transgression of the professional and social norm; and minimize involuntary transgressions of the professional and social norm, product of the human weaknesses that afflict him/her" (p.82).

As professionals in education,, teachers must be aware of the role they play and the position they hold, both in society and in the educational context in which they operate. The teacher contributes to the transmission, construction and transformation of cultural and social reality, and as such, acquires a commitment that transcends the classroom and the school, to the extent that he/she is committed to the world and society. From this role, it is relevant that the teacher works with rigor and responsibility to the extent that his position, his reading and his commitment to the world impacts the training of students and the role that they will later assume in society. Thus, the way in which the teacher is inserted in the community and in its construction of meaning, purpose and value constitutes one of the most important responsibilities of the teacher, to the extent that it enables him/her to be a true agent of change<sup>5</sup>, identifying and responding to cultural and social demands and problems through the projection of ideas and solutions that contribute to the construction of a better world.

### Relevance of this principle

In 1987, Lee Shulman established 7 types of teachers' professional knowledge central to teaching. In 2000, Philippe Perrenoud presented the 10 new teaching competencies. Based on this work, it became clear that teaching was not only about training and teaching certain contents or subjects. The teacher's work, it was recognized, extends to such diverse areas that it is difficult to measure the workload and responsibility involved. The relevance of making this breadth of tasks and responsibilities visible, undoubtedly allows for a better understanding of what teaching consists of.

Today, among the documents that could help us understand this breadth and variety of responsibilities that teachers have and assume are the Framework for Good Teaching in Preschool Education (MBE EP) and the Standards for the Teaching Profession - Framework for Good Teaching (EPD-MBE). Although both documents seek to guide the exercise and practice of teaching in order to bring it closer to a more expert level, the different domains of these frameworks make explicit what the expected performance of teachers is, thus showing what their professional responsibilities are.

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<sup>5</sup> For Ashoka U (2019) an agent of change is "[...] anyone who takes action to address a problem, activate others, and work toward solutions for the good of all. Agents of change continually notice challenges and cultivate solutions in their family, community, workplace, sector, or country. They observe, act and encourage others to collaborate". They are characterized by: a) agent of change identity (deeply believe that positive change is possible and that each individual is an essential contributor to that change), b) self-awareness (cultivate a deep understanding of their experiences and intentions, weaknesses and limitations, perceptions and biases and act on that personal

awareness), c) empathy (they cultivate a deep understanding of the feelings and experiences of others. They build on this understanding to build trusting, collaborative relationships, engage others in action and create change), d) inclusiveness (they actively seek to engage all stakeholders in change by valuing diverse perspectives and pursuing equitable impact) and e) perseverance (they work to become comfortable with ambiguity and persevere through challenges).

In summary, UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report 2017/8 "Accountability in Education" states that:

"The primary responsibility of teachers is to deliver high quality teaching. In practice, good teaching is a complex and demanding task. Teachers have to manage and deliver the curriculum, ensure participation and learning, and adapt teaching to the needs of students and the changing dynamics of the classroom. In addition, they need time to prepare teaching materials and to organize and grade assessments" (p.75).

Whilst in another paragraph it states that:

"High-quality teaching itself involves multiple tasks: preparing and delivering lessons, assignments, tests, and grades; managing classrooms; developing instructional materials; and providing feedback to students and their parents. The complexity and diversity of tasks can place opposed demands on teachers' time and commitment, complicating efforts to hold them accountable for the quality of teaching and learning outcomes"(p.75).

As this document indicates, the tasks and responsibilities of teachers are multiple and complex. As we pointed out, this is also visible, in our country, in the 4 domains of the MBE EP and EPD-MBE. Considering this set of responsibilities is relevant as it a) makes diverse tasks visible, allowing for a better understanding of teaching and the difficulties associated with it, and b) as the UNESCO Report shows, it invites us to question how complex it is to evaluate teacher responsibility if we focus only on certain criteria (scores obtained in an evaluation, for example) to assess this responsibility. In this report's view, "successful accountability methods require solving problems posed by opposed responsibilities and ensuring that teachers get adequate time and compensation for the work they do outside of teaching" (p.95).

Thus, rigorous and responsible work must be understood within a framework that considers the teacher's work as a multiple and varied task, with demands of various kinds and therefore, difficult to evaluate. So then, what does it mean to demonstrate rigorous and responsible work?

### **How to demonstrate rigorous and responsible work:**

- **Comply with established times and deadlines:** just as students are required to comply with certain dates and deadlines, it is also the teacher's responsibility to carry out his tasks and work within the committed times, both in his work with students, colleagues, families and other members of the community.
- **Safeguarding information about the educational community and taking care in the way it is referred to:** it is important for the teacher to be responsible with the information he/she handles, both from parents, colleagues, leadership and students. The teacher represents a figure of trust, so any error or oversight regarding information that may be significant or confidential could undermine this value. It is necessary for the teacher to approach with caution

the personal information he/she has about the members of the community, taking care not to expose issues or problems that could be confidential. It is also important to be careful about how one talks about students, families and community members. Even when they do not reveal

confidential information, unnecessary or inappropriate comments and judgments could generate conflictive situations in an environment that should be protected.

- **Communicate professionally with precision and clarity:** the teacher is responsible for what he/she teaches and what he/she teaches not only corresponds to the disciplinary content of his/her subject, but also teaches to the extent that it constitutes a role model. As such, it is not only necessary for the teacher to be rigorous with the language of his/her discipline and/or subject, but also to use formal or academic language, if appropriate. It is also important for the teacher to be able to organize the information and arrange his or her thinking, so that students are not only clear about the sequences in which learning takes place, but also have a model to follow regarding how to develop a good argument, a good exposition and a good analysis. The teacher, therefore, must not be ambiguous, neither in his/her thinking nor in his/her speech.
- **Safeguard the curriculum and the characteristics and needs of the students in the planning and development of classes:** a responsible and rigorous teacher not only plans each of his/her classes, but also focuses on establishing precise learning objectives or results, in accordance with the curriculum and the characteristics and needs of the students. These objectives must be achievable and priorly evaluated (prior knowledge), during and at the end of the classes. In this way, the teacher can evaluate whether the initially proposed objective was met or if it is necessary to reinforce it in the following class.
- **Scaffolding student learning:** a teacher who is responsible for his or her job and committed to it, knows that different students will require different kinds of support to achieve the expected learning. That is why it takes into consideration the situation of each student, and rigorously establishes the tasks or support that each one of them requires, so as not to leave any student behind. This performance is transversal to other principles, such as principle 2.
- **Set a standard for the level of excellence expected:** a rigorous teacher has high expectations of his or her students and communicates them. These high expectations are based on the knowledge he/she has of them, on the establishment of the level or standard they can reach and on the knowledge of the scaffolds or supports he/she will provide them with to reach that level or standard. This is why the rigorous teacher demands rigor, inviting students to challenging activities or tasks and expecting them to respond and work at a high level. This performance is transversal to other principles, such as, for example, principle 1 and 2.
- **Develop remedial actions against possible difficulties that could intervene in the learning process of their students:** it consists of monitoring and reviewing the work of students to ensure that they are learning. It involves reviewing or supervising students' work or assignments, comparing them with the established standard. To do this, you can indicate correct and incorrect answers, ask for correction and re-supervise. If necessary, remedial actions can be

established to enable students to acquire or develop the expected contents, competencies and attitudes.

- **Safeguarding the learning of all students:** this involves gathering evidence that allows the teacher to ensure the learning of all students. It involves not only designing and generating strategies that allow for evidence of understanding, but also addressing errors made by students.
- **Model how students should work and think:** a rigorous teacher ensures that his students also work and think rigorously. In that sense, he or she is concerned with modeling good work and good reasoning. This means that he/she is aware of the steps and/or sequences of his/her work and is able to show how he/she did it. To this end, it is important for the teacher to be aware that both work and rigorous thinking require order, structure and precision. Achieving a good job requires good planning, which establishes goals, concrete actions, responsibilities, time and resources. Good thinking (or reasoning) requires identifying those elements that are at the basis of that thinking (beliefs, ideas, prejudices), so that this starting point is recognized and problematized. To support the ideas, verify their logic, identify its implications or consequences and to clarify meanings are requirements of good reasoning.
- **Teaching and modeling habits of discussion and conversation:** closely linked to the previous point, the rigorous teacher is concerned with fostering respectful forms of dialogue and defending one's own ideas. To this end, he/she takes care to maintain a neutral attitude - without showing his/her preferences or options- and, in the event of disagreement -in order for a student to develop his idea and defend his point-, he should do so in a respectful manner, recognizing the strengths of his opponent's argument and pointing out what he considers incorrect or wrong.
- **Citing evidence:** a rigorous teacher knows where to look for information. He/she recognizes that there are reliable sources and others that are not, and therefore discriminates -among all the available information- which one is truthful, accurate and updated. In addition, he/she cites this information and/or evidence, explicitly acknowledging the author of a given work or idea. In this way, there are no doubts about the authorship of a certain work and students learn, in turn, the need and importance of citing evidence.
- **Raise students' vocabulary level:** asking students to use formal, technical or academic vocabulary and encouraging them to expand and be more precise with their vocabulary is a way of taking responsibility for students' learning and development and demanding academic rigor in their training.
- **Making decisions based on evidence:** being responsible, as we have pointed out, means taking responsibility and being accountable for the consequences of our actions. Many of these consequences are foreseeable, especially if we make decisions based on evidence or knowledge. Acting from a lack of knowledge increases the chances of making wrong decisions and having to take responsibility for unsuspected consequences.
- **Assume the consequences of their actions and mistakes:** a responsible teacher assumes and

recognizes his or her mistake when he or she makes a mistake. This also implies assuming the consequences of the error, even if it was unintentional. This performance is transversal to other principles, such as principle 3.

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