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Exploring the role of exemplarity in education: two dimensions of the teacher’s task

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role of exemplarity in education through a conceptualisation of two different dimensions of exemplarity in educational practice. (1) Pedagogical exemplarity, which relates to the pedagogical and ethical dimension of educational practice. In other words, this dimension explores the educational moments when someone takes up an exemplary function in educational practice. (2) Didactical exemplarity, which relates to the exemplary function of subject matter or educational content. In other words, this dimension explores the educational moments when something takes up an exemplary function in educational practice. Through an initial conceptual exploration of these two dimensions, via the works of Linda Zagzebski and Martin Wagenschein, the paper sets out to lay the foundation for a deeper understanding of the role of exemplarity in education.

KEYWORDS

Education; schooling; exemplarity; exemplarism; philosophy of education; didactics

Introduction

In this paper, I will explore two different ways in which exemplarity plays a part in educational processes. The first way in which exemplarity works educationally is pedagogical and ethical, and concerns how personified exemplification plays a part in education, both in the form of narratives and in the way in which teachers themselves can function as exemplars. I will use the term pedagogical exemplarity for this dimension of teachers work. The second way exemplarity works educationally is in the form of examples that are used to explicate or illuminate subject matter. In other words, this concerns finding the right examples or exemplary things to bring to the table in teaching. This dimension I will refer to as didactical exemplarity. The first dimension will be explored through the lens of moral exemplarism as developed by Linda Zagzebski, and the second through the lens of exemplary teaching and learning as presented by Martin Wagenschein. Theories of ethical exemplarity have shown how judging and acting often refer to or take as a reference point some
exemplary person or narrative in order to guide the action or judgement at hand (Blum 1988; Croce and Vaccarezza 2017; Zagzebski 2017). Educationally this entails that we think upon how our favourite teacher or colleague would handle a particular situation and look for guidance in the practical experience of others we deem to be morally or pedagogically exemplary. From the vantage point of the pupil, this would entail using a teacher or a narrative presented in class as a guiding rod when facing a moral dilemma or becoming interested in acquiring knowledge or a skill. The second dimension of exemplarity to be explored in this paper concerns the task of assembling exemplary content for students to engage with. Wagenschein proposed that we develop the courage to leave what he called the systematic approach – begin with the simply and move from there to the complex – to teaching and learning, and engage instead in exemplary exploration. By choosing something exemplary rather than something simple when first introducing a subject to students, we open to the possibility of curiosity and formative experiences through what he called entryways [Einstieg]¹ (Wagenschein 1956, 5–6). In this way, we focus attention on the students becoming curious towards and interested in the subject, rather than – at best – merely accumulating knowledge or – at worst – becoming disinterested during the course of the standard systematic approach. What Wagenschein argued was that the systematic approach might very well be logical, but that this does not mean that it is pedagogically or didactically sound. In other words, often the systematic approach leads to students losing interest along the way from the simple to the more complex. Rather, we should focus on creating moments of attention where the students can be gripped, and begin to comprehend the inner workings of the subject at hand. I will begin the paper by exploring what the emerging ethical theory of exemplarism has to offer for the notion of pedagogical exemplarity, before moving to this didactical dimension. First, however, let us look at the role exemplification plays in other fields of human practice.

**Examples and their use**

Examples play a significant role in our everyday language and as David Carr has recently argued: ‘[e]xemplification is arguably the most basic vehicle of learning’ (Carr 2018, 1). Examples serve the function of signifying something general through a particular instantiation of a feature or part of the general claim or phenomenon. Two different yet commonplace ways of using an example might be; there are many interesting films related to educational processes, *for example* Captain Fantastic, or, some birds cannot really fly, *for example*, the penguin. The example functions by instantiating some element of the general claim. The penguin instantiates the feature of not flying. It also makes explicit reference to that feature by making manifest through its behaviour and physical features that it does not fly. These two features of
the example have been highlighted by Catherine Z. Elgin, who, expanding on the work of Nelson Goodman, has shown how exemplification works not only within the arts, but also in science. Exemplification as defined by Elgin ‘is the relation of a sample, example, or other exemplar to the features or properties it is a sample or example of. The features or properties exemplified may be dynamic or static, may be monadic or relational, and may be at any level of generality or abstraction’ (2011, 400). Exemplification thus plays a role in many fields of human inquiry and it is hard to imagine a course or even a lesson without some use of exemplification. An example according to Elgin makes something manifest by possessing some feature and by referring to this feature. She refers to these two necessary conditions as instantiation and expressive reference. It is thus necessary for an example to be an example that it instantiates something and makes it expressive (Elgin 2011, 400; Goodman 1968, 53). For something to be an example of a cup of coffee, it would need to actually be coffee. This also means that exemplification is not the same as representation, and it is not the same as making a point through analogy. The example needs to actually possess the feature we are trying to highlight.

For educational purposes, the fact that Elgin and Goodman highlight expressive reference as a necessary condition for exemplification is important, since it appears quite often to be overlooked when exemplification is employed in theories of moral education (Fogh Nielsen 2019). It seems obvious however, that in order for an example to have educational relevance it would need to be expressive in its reference to what it is an example of. Elgin, in fact, points to some educationally relevant features when describing how examples work in sciences.

Effective samples and examples are carefully selected or contrived to exemplify particular features. Factors that might distract are omitted, bracketed, or set aside. Some exemplification is achieved simply by directing attention. A naturalist brings an unassuming plant to exemplify poison ivy simply by pointing it out as such. Although the method is more complicated, in proving a theorem a mathematician does something similar. Relations among mathematical truths obtain timelessly. That the square of the hypotenuse of a Euclidean right triangle is equal to the sums of the squares of the other two sides did not await a geometrical proof to make it so. The proof’s function is to exemplify mathematical relations that held anyway. By juxtaposing axioms and articulating consequences, it affords epistemic access to those relations (Elgin 2011, 406).

The example thus functions as a way of giving epistemic access, or in other words by making something visible or accessible to the examiner, scientist or the student. Elgin describes how mathematicians do not satisfy themselves with proving a theorem, but they instantiate and refer in several steps and in various ways in order to solidify the proof. This is done by sampling and examples (2011, 406–407). There is, of course, an art to this process since the
example needs to have the features required in order to function as a proof. ‘Epistemic access can be better or worse. One reason for careful sampling is to insure that the sample has the properties of interest; another is to obtain a sample that affords ready epistemic access to them’ (Elgin 2011, 407). This can readily be translated into educational terms, by pointing to the importance of careful selection of what examples to use when trying to make the students understand and pay attention to what is going on in the experiment or subject matter at hand. Wagenschein’s theory of exemplary teaching and learning points to this of course and shows us how the careful selection of what examples of the ways in which physicists work is essential to not only capturing the attention and interest of one’s students but also in establishing moments of and possibilities for formative experiences. Before turning to this didactical dimension, I will first elaborate on how exemplification has been employed in the ethical theory of exemplarism.

**Moral exemplarism and its educational relevance**

Teachers convey values and standards through their behaviour and through their selection of material. This happens both consciously and behind their own back as sociological and critical perspectives have shown (Jackson 1990; Giroux and Purpel 1983). Critical pedagogy has shown how the teacher can exemplify and manifest conservative and exploitative values, but through the work of Freire (2003), also how the teacher can play an emancipatory role through their person and their work. Others have pointed to the necessity of recognising the particularity of educational practices (Smeyers 1992) thus leading us away from standardised or generalizable principles of action (Biesta 2007, 2010; 2014). Following this, moral exemplarism perhaps offers a framework for exploring how teachers can find guidance in particular instantiations of exemplary action that is not reproducible in a direct or generalizable way, but rather points to concrete ways of being in the world and to character traits that are admirable in a teacher. Students see their teacher as a person and not just a reservoir of knowledge. More often than not the teacher we remember, we remember for a character trait rather than for their expertise in a specific area. Linda Zagzebski has in her recent work pointed to the notion of admiration as foundational for what she calls an exemplarist moral/virtue theory. Zagzebski attempts to formulate a foundational moral theory based on the notion that admiration and exemplification function both practically and theoretically. In other words, they function as descriptions of what moral practice is, and in addition, they have the ability to guide moral action (Zagzebski 2017, 7). Zagzebski thus formulates a theory that can both describe the basis for moral judgement, and guide us in making particular moral judgements. Zagzebski uses the term ‘hook’ to describe the link between a moral theory and a moral practice, and states:
‘Exemplars are my hook’ (Zagzebski 2017, 8). The exemplar functions as a guiding rod for moral action, and we acquire moral virtue by admiring and attempting to imitate the admirable exemplar. Exemplarity thus founds the theory as both theory and practice. The basis for her claim is the theory of direct reference as proposed by Hillary Putnam and Saul Kripke in the 1970s. This idea revolutionized semantics, and Zagzebski uses it to found her moral theory. The theory of direct reference states that we can refer to objects by direct reference without needing description. ‘For example, gold is, roughly, whatever is the same element as that, water is whatever is the same liquid as that, a human is whatever is a member of the same species as that, and so on, where in each case the demonstrative term “that” refers directly – in the simplest case, by pointing’ (Zagzebski 2013, 198–199). We can thus refer to objects by claiming that they are objects like that, without needing further knowledge about them, or needing observation or description. We rely on the knowledge of (expert) others in our community, and do not need to know the particulars or the deeper structures of the object. Zagzebski, as mentioned above, uses the examples of water and gold. We do not need to know that water is H2O in order to refer to and understand what is being referred to when we use the word water. The same goes for gold, and in fact, for many centuries we did not know the deeper structures of gold and water, but referred to them and understood what we meant by the words nonetheless. Zagzebski connects this with moral theory and claims that: ‘basic moral concepts are anchored in exemplars of moral goodness, direct reference to which are foundational in the theory. Good persons are persons like that, just as gold is stuff like that. Picking out exemplars can fix the reference of the term “good person” without the use of descriptive concepts’ (Zagzebski 2013, 199). In this way, exemplars – through direct reference – allow us to identify moral goodness in various instantiations of it, and ‘[p]ractices of picking out such persons are already embedded in our moral practices. We learn through narratives of fictional and non-fictional persons that some people are admirable and worth imitating’ (Zagzebski 2013, 199–200). It is not that description and the deeper structures of an object or a moral exemplar are irrelevant, but rather that they are not needed in order to refer to them. They need not be ‘settled at the outset’ (Zagzebski 2017, 18). Description or empirical studies can confirm or negate our assumption, but that does not preclude us from using figures as examples of moral goodness, and it does not preclude us from learning from them. That they are seen as admirable affords us the opportunity to imitate moral goodness.

In fact, her whole structure is founded upon the emotion of admiration.

I am proposing, then, that the process of creating a highly abstract structure to simplify and justify our moral practices is rooted in one of the most important features of the pre-theoretical practices we want to explain, the practice of identifying
exemplars, and in a kind of experience that most of us trust very much – the experience of admiration, shaped by narratives that are part of a common tradition (Zagzebski 2013, 200).

Thus, the central emotion in Zagzebski’s theory is admiration, and it is through this emotion that we identify someone as exemplary of some virtue. When explicating who we might be having this feeling towards, Zagzebski uses the examples of the hero, the saint and the sage. The hero is someone we admire for their courage in particular situations whereas the saint is someone we admire for their way of living and their character in its totality. The sage is someone we admire for his or her knowledge of the world. These figures are problematic each in their own way, and the scepticism towards the idea of emulating saints is well rehearsed (Melden 1984; Wolf 1982). However, Zagzebski argues that we do not need to strive to become saints ourselves in order to learn from them, we could simply use the exemplars as ways of improving parts of our moral behaviour (2017, 25–26). For our educational purposes in this paper, heroes, saints and sages enter the frame only as narrative exemplars and at times as subject matter. Teachers are rarely heroes, saints or sages, at least not in the sense that Zagzebski uses the term, but that does not mean that they cannot be exemplars. Heroes, saints and sages are confirmed through continued narratives about them. Teachers, on the other hand, are confirmed through direct reference and the emotion of admiration felt by colleagues and students. The appropriateness of the emotion can then be tested by seeking out whether others felt the same emotion. As mentioned, we might not be correct in our emotion of admiration. Teachers can fake it so to speak, but so can other objects of our emotions. The emotion of admiration does not guarantee that the person for whom we feel admiration is, in fact, admirable or exemplary (Zagzebski 2017, 33), but the emotion is nonetheless the surest link we have to exemplars. Zagzebski concludes:

I am assuming that the emotion of admiration is generally trustworthy when we have it after reflection and when it withstands critique by others. We have no guarantee that what we admire upon reflection is admirable, but then we do not have any guarantee that our vision or memory is trustworthy if it withstands reflection either. All we can do is the best we can do by using our faculties as conscientiously as we can, and our disposition to admiration is one of those faculties (Zagzebski 2010, 52).

That we feel admiration is thus the ‘motor’ in ethical and moral practice, and exemplars function as the hook or link between this practical level and the theoretical structure behind it. In this way, Zagzebski has attempted to create a comprehensive theory of morality based on exemplarity, but she also admits that the emotion does not validate the actual exemplarity of the object of the admiration. Zagzebski uses almost exclusively famous and revered persons when describing exemplars, and thus shows how narratives strengthen the trustworthiness of our admiration. We often feel admiration
for generally admired persons. Jesus, Gandhi, Confucius, the Dalai Lama, Mother Theresa, for example, while we at the same time might be inclined to ridicule them for their do-goodness (MacFarquhar 2015), just as we might admire and ridicule our teachers at the same time. Teachers are not confirmed as exemplars through common narratives or generalised admiration, but rather through particular actions and emotions elicited by their concrete actions. For our educational purposes here, it is thus important to attempt to tackle the less obvious dimensions of moral exemplarity than the ones Zagzebski introduces in her admiration-imitation model.

**Pedagogical exemplarity**

Returning to Elgin and Goodman’s theory of exemplification, we need instantiation and expressive reference in order for an example to work. Zagzebski differs from this account by calling into question instantiation as a necessary condition. An exemplar does in fact not need to actually possess the character trait we admire in order to serve an exemplary function. As we shall see, this does not apply to subject matter, which in fact needs to instantiate whatever feature it is we are concerned with. Otherwise, it would be a representation, not an example. It is also possible to question Zagzebski’s contention on moral grounds, since there would be an element of manipulation on the part of the teacher if they elicit emotions of admiration on false grounds. However, it is certainly a possibility, and reveals not only the always present potential for manipulation and indoctrination in educational processes and relations, but also the importance of tackling this dimension of a teacher’s work.

Exemplarism in education thus has a more varied function than the one Zagzebski introduces with her moral theory. She herself states that we also admire character traits and abilities in exemplars that are not of a moral nature, and we can be driven towards moral improvement by other emotions than admiration. For example, we can be driven by envy as well as admiration for a teacher’s ability to play the guitar or their knowledge of mathematics and strive for attaining the same proficiency. We might also be struck by their way of life and way of conducting their work, and want to emulate the way they live. If, for example, we admire a teacher who lives in a permaculture commune, uses only sustainable clothing and eats only vegan food, we can be inspired by this behaviour and at the same time be envious of the circumstances that made it possible for them to choose such a life. This even leaves out the question of whether the life we admire is, in fact, a moral life. Further, we might not want to emulate all of the aspects of the admired person’s life, but just some of them. For example, buying only sustainable clothing. This is the same argument as Zagzebski formulates when confronted with the critique of using saints as exemplars, and one which is expertly depicted in *Drowning Strangers* by Larissa Macfarquhar, where she describes the ‘do-gooder’ as an object of differing emotions, mostly ones of envy and
contempt (2015, 3–4). Moral exemplars can thus elicit very different emotions in us, and we can strive in different ways and based on different emotions to emulate or perhaps even to surpass them (Alfano 2018, 56). Educational exemplarity is a wider practice – than the one proposed by Zagzebski – where non-moral character traits and abilities become exemplary, and a wider pallet of emotions must be allowed into the framework. The definition of instantiation and expressive reference as necessary conditions exemplification – as presented by Elgin – is challenged by moral exemplarism since we might not need instantiation. However, when we are concerned with teaching, the educator would actually need to possess the ability in order to function as an exemplar, i.e. the example of the skilled guitar player, or at the least would have to instantiate the will and grit necessary to acquire the skill. Pedagogical exemplarism can thus be loosely defined as moments when someone exemplifies – instantiates and makes explicit reference to – an ability or a character trait worthy of emulation. This also entails that pedagogical exemplarity cannot be confined to the admiration-emulation model, but must incorporate a wider spectrum of motivational forces. The dimension of pedagogical exemplarity is thus too wide in scope to be captured by the theory of moral exemplarism, even if it helps to elucidate some aspects of it, here, with the aid of Elgin’s account of exemplification. I will now turn to didactical exemplarity before attempting to formulate a more comprehensive account of the role of exemplarity in education.

**Didactical exemplarity – revisiting Wagenschein**

In his work on science didactics, Martin Wagenschein presents a way of conceiving teaching as a task of selecting material and creating situations in which students can have formative experiences which are made possible through what he calls *Einstieg*. By this, he means an experience of stepping in or passing through a gateway into a subject. Through a particular experiment, task or subject matter, the student is invited into the subject matter and invited to become interested in it. Wagenschein counterpoises this to what he labels the ‘systematischen Lehrgang’ (1956, 2) where we follow the traditional systematic and chronological structure of proceeding from the simple to the more complex in mathematics or physics, or proceeding from the beginning of an era chronologically to the end of said era in history.

By wanting to simply provide the students with the systematic and chronological facts of mathematics, physics or history, we may well be proceeding logically, but according to Wagenschein that does not mean that we are proceeding in a pedagogically or didactically sound way. We risk losing our students along the way because they never truly become interested, or ‘crack the code’ of the subject or discipline at hand. ‘Bildung ist kein addierender Prozess’ (Wagenschein 1956, 3) he adds. The main fault of the systematic
approach is that it is much too focused on the final aim and with getting somewhere specific. Those who follow this approach see the finished subject and not the individual child or the interconnectedness of the subject matter and the life of the child (Wagenschein 1956, 2). Highlighting the interconnectedness of student and subject matter and how both are constantly changing, recognises the contingent nature of educational processes. The alternative Wagenschein claims, is the exemplary way [Das exemplarische Verfahren]. This way does not attempt to outline the path of knowledge accumulation, but instead searches out the exemplary elements of a subject that will potentially open it to the students. Experiments, historical events, texts, tasks, equations, films, field trips invite the students to step into the subject, or as Wagenschein said, invites them to partake in ‘die Denkweise des Physikers’ (1956, 6).9 We aim to establish agglomerations (Ballungen) and condensations (Verdichtungen), we attempt to carve out places in which we can grow roots into the subject, and where the students can ‘feel at home’. At first, Wagenschein offers the term platform for these places, but concedes that the metaphor ‘ist mangelhaft insofern, als Plattformen unwirtlich und zugig zu sein pflegen. Was gemeint ist, der Ort der „Verdichtung“, hat ja im Gegenteil, etwas Wohnliches’ (Wagenschein 1956, 4).10 Instead he offers the term Einstieg [entryway]. These entryways offer the possibility of creating a space where students can engage with and explore a specific example of the way in which a discipline is structured or the inner workings of a phenomenon.

The main idea here is not that examples can function as stepping stones or parts of a progression, but rather that on one hand they are a way of opening the subject matter, so that it becomes accessible at all, and on the other hand that these examples carry within them the whole of the subject. “Die Beziehung, die das Einzelne hier zum Ganzen hat, ist nicht die des Teiles, der Stufe, der Vorstufe, sondern sie ist von der Art des Schwerpunktes, der zwar einer ist, in dem aber das Ganze getragen wird. Dieses Einzelne trägt nicht, es erhell, es leitet nicht fort, sondern es strahlt an. Es erregt das Fernere, doch Verwandte, durch Resonanz” (Wagenschein 1956, 4).11 The example is intended to illuminate the whole and reveal the workings of the subject or discipline at hand. This rests on the notion that it is only from a place of interest and attention we can even begin with the process of learning and on the idea that the exemplary contains within itself the whole of the subject. The exemplary way thus points to the realisation that in order to truly become interested or in fact even truly remember something we need to see how things not only in the moral realm but also in the physical, are not isolated events or phenomena, but that things are interconnected and stand in relation to each other. This experience of interconnectedness leads for Wagenschein to formative experience and what he refers to as Weltvertrauen [confidence in the world]. Weltvertrauen is the understanding of the interconnectedness of the
objects in the world, and this understanding leads to a sense of confidence in
the world and one's understanding of it. It is a sense of belonging, confidence
and understanding, and as such, it is Wagenschein’s definition of Bildung. Now
these moments of formative experience are not something easily achieved or
readily plannable, but occur, sometimes unexpectedly, in moments of interest
and attention.

In einigen seltenen Fällen fängt ein Gegenstand, der so ins Blickfeld getreten ist,
plötzlich an, im eigenen Lichte zu leuchten … und schließlich füllt das von ihm
ausgestrahlte Licht einen immer größeren Raum in unserem Denken, greift auf
andere Gegenstände über und wird schließlich zu einem wichtigen Teil unseres
eigenen Lebens (Wagenschein 1956, 10).12

These moments can, of course, occur in the course of a traditional systematic
course, but according to Wagenschein they are the very foundation of the
exemplary way, and thus more likely to occur when structuring a course on the
basis of the exemplary way.

The exemplary way, however, is not a form of canon, or an attempt at
fixating or identifying the only true and valuable parts of a subject or disci-
pline. It does not prescribe which elements are exemplary and it does not
entail a compartmentalisation of the subject. There is no universal catalogue of
exemplary content. That, according to Wagenschein, would be the death of
the approach. The exemplary way thus entails that the selecting of exemplary
content is a continuous and collegial undertaking, which cannot be adminis-
tratively or centrally decided (Wagenschein 1956, 8). It must be done in
connection with the subject and course at hand and in collaboration with
fellow teachers and with students. Selecting examples that illuminate and
express the whole of the subject, and which offer entryways into a subject
or discipline requires studious work and cannot be reduced to the setting of
objectives and learning goals. These remain secondary to finding examples
that can establish conglomerations and entryways for interest and attention.
Didactical exemplarity or the exemplary way thus offer a radical alternative to
the dominant discourse of learning, in recognising, on one hand, the contin-
gency of educational practice, and on the other the fact that what truly
matters is not where we are going, but how to begin.

Concluding remarks

In this paper, I have explored the role of exemplarity in education through two
very different perspectives and accounts of exemplarity. The first being Linda
Zagzebski’s account of moral exemplarism and the other Martin Wagenschein’s
theory of exemplary teaching and learning. The first dimension I have refered to
as pedagogical exemplarity and the other didactical exemplarity. Loosely these
dimensions can be defined as (1) moments when someone serves an exemplary
function in educational processes and relations, and (2) moments when something serves an exemplary function in educational processes and relations. These two dimensions, of course, require further exploration of both theoretical and empirical nature for us to fully grasp their educational significance, but I have attempted to lay the foundations for differentiating between the two and for understanding the comprehensive role that exemplification and exemplarism plays in educational processes. Pedagogical exemplarity is in need of further clarifications and distinctions, however. The moments when someone serves an exemplary function in education are common occurrences in educational processes, and they occur whether we are conscious of them or not. We cannot help but elicit emotions of admiration, envy, pity, contempt or numerous others when we teach. And as such, we serve as exemplars of ways of being in the world; of ways of doing, acquiring, learning, studying, communicating, knowing and acting in the world. Not always positive and emulatable exemplars, as Zagzebski seems to lean towards, but also as exemplars of ways of being to be avoided by students. We also invoke different moral examples in our teaching by selecting some examples over others. This is the intersection between pedagogical and didactical exemplarity; the moment when someone becomes something that we place on the table in an educational situation. A moral exemplar becomes subject matter. Only when we reflect on these matters and understand the role of pedagogical exemplarity in education can we begin to shed light on what kind of an example we are to our students, and in what ways we employ examples in our teaching. Instantiating and making expressive reference to exemplars can be done in various ways. It can be – and is constantly being – done, in and through our own person, but it is also be done by using narrative fictive and non-fictive characters in books, films, art, and other portrayals. Doing so is of course never without its perils as David Carr has recently shown. Much of what is on offer for children and young people in the digital age is of a somewhat questionable nature in terms of exemplarity. However, it also ‘affords an invaluable vehicle and much space for youthful exploration of human character and its implications for moral good and/or ill, with greater critical distance from the messy contingencies of more or less positive association that generally beset the business of personal role-modelling’ (Carr 2018, 10). Working with pedagogical exemplarity thus entails close examination of oneself as a teacher and of the examples one makes use of. We must find exemplary material and examples that instantiate and make expressive reference in ways that capture the attention and interest of our students, and this goes for didactical as well as pedagogical exemplars and examples. There is perhaps no better way of doing this than by exploring what exemplary objects and narratives we can find that illuminate and make manifest some essential quality or phenomena we wish to reveal and introduce to our students. At the very least it can help us to point to something more than just the next learning objectives
or learning goals on the systematic ladder, but to something which in fact is of interest to us and which constitutes part of our common world.

Notes

1 A more direct translation of Einstieg would be access- or entry-point, but there is an active connotation to Einstieg in Wagenschein’s use of it, which is more akin to a place to or possibility for ‘stepping in’ to a subject. Therefore I have here and elsewhere used the term entryway.

2 I am thus focussed here primarily on the role exemplarity plays in teachers work, or how teachers work with exemplarity and thus not so much with the roles exemplarity and role modelling play in character education, or perhaps more precisely only concerned with this as a secondary element of pedagogical exemplarity.

3 This of course raises the issue of whether it is the person him or herself we admire or a specific character trait. Something, which has also been explored in depth in Aristotelian character education. I return to this question below.

4 It is and cannot however, be the only one as Zagzebski acknowledges. Alfano, building on Nietzsche’s exemplarism suggest that we add competition/envy and pity to admiration (2018, 10).

5 Whether it is in fact a comprehensive ethical theory is beyond the scope of this paper to examine, but in the following section, I explore its educational relevance.

6 See Korsgaard and Aldinger (2018) for a discussion of this issue in relation to certain strands of critical pedagogy and progressivism.

7 “systematic course of instruction” (Wagenschein 1956, 2010, 162).

8 “Bildung is not a process of adding on” (Wagenschein 1956, 2010, 163).

9 “the way in which a physicist thinks” (Wagenschein 1956, 2010, 167).

10 ‘is flawed inasmuch as platforms in this sense are generally inhospitable, drafty places, whereas the areas of “concentration” should be inviting’ (Wagenschein 1956, 2010, 164). A proper translation of ‘ Wohnliches’ would be homely, which is of course an important difference.

11 ‘The relation between individual and whole here is not that of the part, the step, the stage, the prestige. The individual is a focal point, admittedly only one, but one in which the whole is borne. In this sense, the individual does not accumulate, but bears and illuminates the whole; it does not lead away from the whole, but enlightens it. Through resonance, it excites further, related knowledge’ (Wagenschein 1956, 2010, 165).

12 ‘in a few, rare cases, an object that has come into our view in this way suddenly begins to shine by itself … and in the light it radiates fills an ever-increasing part of our thought, enlightens other objects, and at last becomes an important part of our own life’ (Wagenschein 1956, 2010, 171).

13 Elsewhere the metaphor of pearl diving has been employed for this second task (Korsgaard, 2018, 2019).

Disclosure statement

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