

A STUDY ON THE AXIOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF THE SCHOOL SUBJECTS PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND COUNSELING AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

In the context of recent transformations of the educational paradigm, increasingly oriented towards the integral formation of the pupil, it becomes necessary to reconsider the way in which education of values is approached. From this perspective, the paper proposes an exploration of the role of axiological education in the current Romanian school, treating values not as simple contents to be transmitted, but as processes of construction, transformation and identity internalization, with impact on the way the pupil relates to himself, to others and to social reality. The two disciplines provided in the curriculum – Personal Development and Counselling and Personal Development – are analysed as formative spaces capable of supporting the development of autonomy, critical reflection and moral responsibility. The psychological and philosophical foundations of human development are correlated with the role of the teacher-counselor, who becomes a mediator of value orientation in real learning contexts, supporting the passage from the theoretical level of values to their application in authentic situations relevant to pupils' lives and to the personal meaning of moral choices. The conclusions highlight the relevance of these formative approaches in contemporary education and underline the importance of collaboration between school, family and community in order to support the coherence and continuity of value formation, within a flexible educational framework adapted to the real needs of human development.

Keywords: *axiological education; values; educational counseling; Personal Development; Counselling and Personal Development.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Axiological education, as a practical approach of orienting the educational process towards a congruent axiological system, attached to constant and fundamental values (Cucoș, 1995), is increasingly brought back into discussion in the context of postmodern society and culture, marked by uncertainties “supported by a certain re-dimensioning of classical values and by the change of the experiential register of the young generation” (Noveanu, 2007, p. 82). G. Fath (1991) states: “Any pedagogical act inherently involves an axiological dimension which always unfolds on several distinct levels. (...). Even a teacher who unconsciously applies a certain programme or procedure, from the moment in which he imposes his proposal of action (...), supports an axiological centering, formulates a kind of claim of existence and excellence in favour of what he believes is right to do” (Fath, 1991, p. 97).

The philosophical foundations of educational counselling are anchored in traditions such as idealism, realism and pragmatism, which shape the role of the counsellor, the educational objectives and the selection of intervention methods. Values thus become criteria for orienting action, and the counsellor is called to integrate both the formative dimension and the reflective dimension of the pupil's experience, facilitating his exploration of the personal meaning of learning and becoming. This perspective is also found in contemporary approaches to education and development (Neacșu, 2010).

Starting from the premise that authentic education is achieved through the integration of the axiological dimension in school experiences and through the creation of learning contexts that go beyond the simple

accumulation of knowledge, we aimed to integrate several reflections regarding the axiological character of the school disciplines Personal Development (prep grade – 1st and 2nd grade) and Counselling and Personal Development (5th-8th grades). Approached within the wider context of educational counselling, the two disciplines have an evident axiological character, because their purpose is to form and to consolidate a system of values essential for the evolution of the pupil in society.

The present study also highlights the role of the teacher as the main axiological reference in promoting the general human values which have grounded human existence from the beginning until today (moral good, scientific truth, applied scientific truth, beauty, health), of cultural origin (scientific; ethical/political, juridical, religious; technological/economic, informational; aesthetic; physical/hygienic, medical, sports), expressed pedagogically through the general contents of education.

Education focused on values formation in the current school cannot be understood in the absence of an integrated perspective, which correlates the philosophical deepening of meaning with the data offered by developmental psychology. Understanding how values are constructed, differentiated and internalized becomes essential for designing formative approaches that go beyond declarative transmission. In this context, the role of the teacher-counselor acquires strategic relevance, by his positioning at the intersection between knowledge, subjective experience and personal orientation. The two disciplines analysed do not limit themselves to offering thematic content, but represent the space in which the pupil structures his own relation to himself and to the world, developing the capacity to operate with values in a conscious, ethical and responsible manner.

2. THEORETICAL DIMENSIONS

2.1. The axiological character of the disciplines personal development / counselling and personal development

In the context of the curricular reforms in Romania in recent years determined by the evolution of technology and information, the introduction of the school subjects Personal Development (Preparatory class – 1st and 2nd grade) and Counselling and Personal Development (5th to 8th grade) represents an important step in the direction of forming socio-emotional competences and the internalization of values essential for life. The school has the role not only to transmit knowledge, but also to form a system of values compatible with the educational ideal. According to axiological pedagogy (Cucoş, 2006; Nicola, 2000), values constitute the core of personality development. In this sense, the axiological dimension of education – education through values and for values – becomes fundamental.

Included in the curricular area "Human Being and Society", the school subjects Personal Development, respectively Counselling and Personal Development, are dedicated to learning activities that aim at developing the pupil's capacity to know himself and to express in a positive manner his interests, aptitudes, personal experiences, relational and communication skills, reflections regarding learning. Approached in the broader context of educational counselling, these subjects have a profound axiological character, because they aim at forming and consolidating a system of values essential for the evolution of the pupil/student in society. By their interdisciplinary nature, they combine elements of psychology, civic education and philosophy, aiming at the harmonious development of children/pupils, cognitively, emotionally and socially, through the formation of essential competences for managing emotions, relating to others and making social, emotional and cognitive decisions necessary for a balanced and harmonious life.

Through the proposed learning contents and activities, pupils/students are guided to discover, understand and adopt values and attitudes which serve as reference points for social cohabitation: ethical values (respect, honesty, responsibility); aesthetic values (beauty, creativity, harmony); intellectual values (truth, rationality, knowledge); social values (solidarity, cooperation, equity); economic values (work, efficiency, innovation) etc. Respect towards oneself and towards others, decisional responsibility, integrity, empathy, cooperation, congruence, perseverance in achieving personal objectives are only some of the attitudes promoted within the lessons of Personal Development in primary education, respectively Counselling and Personal Development in lower secondary education (gymnasium).

The Personal Development subject, introduced in the cycle of fundamental acquisitions, aims at supporting the child in the knowledge of himself and of others, the development of life skills and the formation of attitudes based on authentic values. In the School Curriculum for the subject Personal Development. Preparatory class, 1st grade and 2nd grade, approved by ministerial order no. 3418/19.03.2013, it is stated that the Personal Development subject offers a significant framework for stimulating cognitive flexibility and the creativity of pupils/students, who are encouraged to ask questions, to communicate their own opinions and arguments, to reflect on the themes under discussion, to show initiative, to express original ideas and authentic emotions about what they learn.

In primary education, the topics addressed are the following (M.E.C., 2013, p.10):

1. *Self-knowledge and healthy lifestyle*
2. *Emotional and social development*
3. *Specific aspects of learning organisation and preparation for life at the young school child*

The following general competences are aimed at (Ibidem, p.3):

1. *Manifesting the interest for self-knowledge and the positive attitude towards oneself and towards others.*
2. *Adequate expression of emotions in interaction with known children and adults.*
3. *Use of abilities and attitudes specific to learning in the school context.*

A distinctive note of the Personal Development subject is given by its contribution to the emotional, social and career development of the pupil/student. The thematic areas of the curriculum give a generous space, in which pupils/students are invited to become aware of who they are, to analyse the emotions they have, to relate in a healthy manner to others, to be motivated to learn successfully, to explore what jobs/professions they would like to practice. (Ibidem, p. 11).

The Counselling and Personal Development subject (lower secondary education - gymnasium) aims to respond to the needs of preadolescent students who are going through a complex stage of their psycho-physical and social development, marked by the search for identity and the need for autonomy. The subject aims at the consolidation of autonomy, the development of critical thinking and responsibility in decision making. The values cultivated at this level aim at: self-respect and personal dignity; tolerance and acceptance of diversity; autonomy and initiative; solidarity and equity; civic responsibility. The emphasis falls on the awareness of values, on the critical relation to social models, on the development of life competences necessary for integration in the community.

In lower secondary education (gymnasium), the topics addressed are the following (M.E.N., 2017, p. 7):

1. *Self-knowledge and healthy and balanced lifestyle*
2. *Socio-emotional development*
3. *Learning management*
4. *Career management*

The following general competences are aimed at (Ibidem, p. 4):

1. *Adopting positive attitudes towards oneself and a healthy and balanced lifestyle*
2. *Harmonious relating with others in school and extra-school contexts*
3. *Reflection on motivation and on the efficiency of strategies for progress in learning*
4. *Making decisions related to continuing studies and career by valuing information about oneself, education and occupations*

Through the learning activities approached, the Counselling and Personal Development subject contributes significantly to the well-being and to the consolidation of self-confidence of pupils/students, as unique and valuable persons, who know their individual potential, interact harmoniously with others, learn effectively and make school, personal, career and healthy lifestyle decisions (Ibidem, p. 2).

The comparative analysis of the school curricula highlights the complementarity of the two subjects and a certain axiological continuity: in primary education, the foundations of life skills are laid and the fundamental values are introduced; in lower secondary education (gymnasium), these are consolidated and related to complex life situations. The differences appear in the level of approach: from modelling and practice through play at small ages, to critical reflection and assumption at gymnasium students.

The two school subjects, through the contents addressed, contribute to the development of the attitudinal-axiological dimension of the pupil's/student's personality, of character and of personal identity. Within the Personal Development and Counselling and Personal Development classes, the pupil/student learns through experimentation, self-reflection, self-evaluation, as well as through communication and relation to others. New learning modalities are promoted: experiential learning, through which the pupil/student is directly and actively involved in a concrete learning experience, using the observation and critical analysis of his own perceptions and representations, states, behaviours, attitudes, the active experimentation of what he learned in new situations, personal reflection on the lived experiences; social and communicational learning, which encourages learning through observing others, through structured conversations with others and through collaboration and cooperation with them; reflective learning, through which the pupil/student analyses his own learning experiences in order to improve his strategies and tools of effective learning in future situations (self-evaluation, peer evaluation, learning journal, observation journal, reflective comments etc.). These working strategies contribute to the increase of motivation and self-confidence of pupils/students, to the development of responsible and empathic behaviour, of social responsibility, to the improvement of interpersonal relationships, to a better management of emotions and stress, to the creation of a balanced educational environment, in which values are constantly respected and promoted.

At the philosophical level, orientations such as idealism, realism and pragmatism offer complementary reference points for understanding the way in which values are transmitted and transformed into personal identity. Related to the subjects Personal Development and Counselling and Personal Development, these perspectives support a values based education that cultivates meaning, discernment and moral responsibility in real situations. The philosophical foundation thus completes the axiological basis of these subjects (Neacșu, 2010).

2.2. Psychological and philosophical foundations of the subjects Personal Development / Counselling and Personal Development

The psychological foundation of the subjects Personal Development and Counselling and Personal Development is anchored in the integrative perspective on human development, in which cognitive, emotional and social processes evolve in interdependence and progressively configure the identity of the pupil/student in relation to stable internal values. Educational Psychology supports the idea that personal development cannot be reduced to the accumulation of informational resources, but it promotes the assumption of the existence of a process of internal construction, based on exploration, reflection and gradual integration of the personal meaning of reality (Neacșu, 2010). In this framework, the internalization of values becomes possible when the pupil/student is exposed to coherent learning contexts, centred on behavioural modelling, on the awareness of emotions and on the capacity for self-regulation and self-organisation.

In primary education, the subject Personal Development contributes to the establishment of the first stable value structures, in which the recognition of emotions, the understanding of the differences between experience and reaction, as well as the assumption of prosocial behaviours represent the foundation of later maturation. Developmental psychology underlines the fact that the preschool child and the young school child operate predominantly on the basis of the concrete operational processing, and values are constructed in an exemplary manner through repetition, modelling and supportive feedback (Erikson, 2015). Thus, value formation at small ages is not only theoretical, but experiential, being connected to play, exploration and exposure to authentic social situations.

In lower secondary education (gymnasium), the subject Counselling and Personal Development supports the pupil's/student's passage towards a more advanced level of self-reflection, decisional autonomy and critical internalisation of values. Here, the pupil/student not only identifies values, but subjects them to analysis and comparison, developing the capacity to justify his/her options in relation to his/her own beliefs and to the social norms in which he/she is integrated. The emotional component acquires a significant role in this stage, because emotional self-regulation ensures the basis for coherent, responsible and conscious decisions (Goleman, 2018). In this sense, the subject contributes to the consolidation of personal identity, to the assumption of responsibility towards oneself and towards the community and to the formation of the capacity to operate with values in diverse, complex, problematic and not rarely ambiguous contexts. Thus, the value progress between school cycles reflects the natural evolution of the pupil's/student's psychological and emotional development.

The philosophical dimension supports in a complementary manner this axiological construction, because values do not represent simple social conventions, but symbolic forms of man's relation to meaning, to truth, to good and to beauty. Educational idealism highlights the transcendent character of values, placing them in the area of universal reference points which configure the becoming of the human being in an anticipatory manner. Realism places emphasis on their social functionality, by reference to norms, rules and structures of concrete action, while pedagogical pragmatism orients the formation of values towards utility, lived meaning and verifiable in real experience. In the perspective of axiological education, these three orientations do not exclude each other, but complement each other organically, ensuring the coherent integration of values in the pupil's/student's life, through the harmonization of universal human reference points with the requirements of contemporary social reality (Cucuș, 2006). The two subjects are thus included in a formation paradigm which has the role of articulating moral values with the existential project of the pupil/student, avoiding both axiological relativism and rigid normativism.

In this vision, Personal Development becomes an introductory stage of value sensitization, and Counselling and Personal Development becomes the stage of refinement, differentiation, decantation and critical assumption of these values in relation to the identity in formation. The philosophical reference to the axis "meaning – value – identity" ensures the grounding of the two subjects in the modern logic of education oriented towards the formation of personal autonomy and responsibility. They do not propose only the transmission of declarative contents, but the cultivation of a moral conscience capable of operating with values in a reflexive, adaptive and contextual manner, in a society marked by rapid transformations, uncertainty and axiological diversity. Thus, the articulation of the psychological and philosophical dimensions transforms the two subjects into a formative device with major potential in the prevention of emotional vulnerabilities, in the consolidation of internal coherence and in the formation of a stable value identity.

Therefore, Personal Development and Counselling and Personal Development are not limited to offering instruments of self-expression, but contribute to the configuration of a consistent axiological matrix which supports the student's progress from simple moral conducts to the capacity of critical interpretation, conscious and responsible selection of the existential direction. This integrative perspective supports the relevance of the two subjects in relation to contemporary education and grounds the role of the teacher-counselor as a strategic actor in the configuration of the student's value and emotional maturation.

In this integrative logic, the role of the teacher-counselor becomes essential, because he ensures the passage from the theoretical grounding of values to their transposition into effective formative practice, through authentic educational interaction, guidance, mediation and support in the process of the student's personal becoming.

2.3. The role of the teacher-counselor in promoting values

The teacher, in his capacity as educational counselor, is not only a transmitter of knowledge, but also a model of behaviour, a guide in the moral formation of students. The teacher has the mission to initiate a coherent programme of educational experiences that will lead to the personal, educational, professional and social development of students. The professional qualities of a good pedagogue must aim at: empathy, sensitivity towards students' problems; unconditional acceptance of the student; honesty, correctness in the relationship with students; authenticity, good faith, sincerity, seriousness and sobriety, but also joviality; positive valorisation of the student's resources; high capacity to observe and objectively analyse the specific particularities of students; verbal skills; capacity to send and receive both verbal and nonverbal messages; continuous training in order to increase the accuracy of students' evaluation; responsibility, seriousness and competence in relation to students' problems; self-imposing high professional standards and a correct line of ethical conduct (Moraru, 2013, p. 9).

In this sense, the role of the teacher-counselor exceeds the strictly didactic sphere, integrating psychological dimensions essential for accompanying the student in the process of his/her value becoming. From a psychological perspective, the teacher-counselor becomes a facilitator of emotional self-regulation processes and identity development, offering students a secure, non-critical and empathetic space for the exploration of their own experiences and values. His intervention has a predominantly preventive and formative character, distinct from the psychotherapeutic one, but coherently grounded in scientifically validated principles in the field of the helping relationship (Rogers, 2008; Goleman, 2018). At the same time, the teacher-counselor acknowledges the limits of his role and relates ethically to the moment in which referral towards specialized intervention is necessary. This delimitation clarifies educational responsibility and protects the student, maintaining professional coherence within the school.

The teacher-counselor, as primary school teacher, form teacher, school psychologist, support teacher etc., must be aware of his/her own system of values, of the fact that he/she cannot promote what he/she lacks, that he/she cannot impose his/her own conceptions and beliefs.

The creation of a secure, non-labelling, encouraging climate represents an important aspect, which depends mainly on the attitude of the teacher in the relationship with students (M.E.C., 2013, p. 11). The offering of positive feedback to each student ensures the framework for the optimisation of self-image and the development of self-confidence. The focusing of attention on the student's experience, on the cultivation of qualities and abilities, reflects the concern for the valorisation of the dignity and human quality of those who dedicate their life to shaping the human personality through education. The acceptance of the student as a valuable person in himself/herself, with availabilities waiting for the favourable context to be realised, constitutes the main reference point in the continuous action of educational counselling carried out in school.

Such a vision facilitates the development of an authentic teacher-students relationship, removes status-role barriers, creates the premises for open communication. It is essential to establish an empathetic relationship with the student, of mutual trust, of mutual respect. This ensures efficient participation and collaboration, the clear expression of ideas, the assertion of positive feelings, values and moral beliefs.

An individualized approach for each student is recommended, the design of activities which facilitate the critical analysis of personal and social values, the involvement of the educational community (teachers, parents, community representatives) in the process of value formation, the continuous development of the teacher's educational counselling competences, through professional training and reflection on his/her own educational practice.

Therapeutic experience shows that values are not consolidated only through intellectual transmission, but especially through the significant relationship lived in interaction, where acceptance, authenticity and empathy become facilitating conditions of personal becoming (Rogers, 2008). In agreement with Goleman (2018), the development of emotional competences supports the formation of responsible value identity. The integration of these principles in the school environment consolidates resilience, well-being and the autonomy of students.

Although educational counselling and psychological counselling have different domains, they converge towards the same objective: supporting the well-being of the person, in his/her emotional, cognitive and relational complexity. School success is closely linked to mental health, and emotional balance facilitates profound and autonomous learning. The integration of psychological principles in educational counselling intensifies the efficiency of value formation and supports the resilience of students, in agreement with Neacșu's (2010) perspective on identity development as the foundation of personal becoming.

CONCLUSIONS

The disciplines Personal Development and Counselling and Personal Development have a profound axiological character. Through a student-centered approach, these disciplines contribute to the formation of responsible, autonomous and balanced young people, capable of facing the challenges of the future, cultural diversity, axiological relativism and rapid social changes. The axiological dimension of these disciplines shows that school is not only the space for the accumulation of knowledge, but also the framework in which values, attitudes and life behaviours are formed. Value-based education is the key to a sustainable future, in which the person assumes his/her own choices and decisions. In the absence of an authentic axiological dimension, education risks becoming a process limited to purely theoretical considerations and reflections, with reduced impact on the student's psychosocial life.

In the convergence of the psychological and philosophical foundations of education through values, as well as through the role of the teacher-counsellor in translating them into the formative experience of students, axiological education is shaped as a central element of the contemporary school. The two analysed disciplines become privileged spaces for the development of personal identity, moral responsibility and the capacity of conscious orientation in relation to oneself, to others and to the world. In this framework, the partnership between school, family and community remains essential for the continuity and depth of value formation, contributing to the transformation of values from simple declarative contents into inner landmarks assumed and lived authentically.

In conclusion, we consider that it is necessary to strengthen to a greater extent the practical character of the two disciplines, to diversify the methodological resources, but also to involve the family and the community in order to ensure an authentic axiological education.

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