Particularities of axiology in preschool education

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Abstract

By means of the purpose of education, axiology proves itself to be necessary in the educational process. Concepts like evaluation, value and valorization are inter-related and they originate in fairy tales and legends. Kindergarten plays an overwhelming role in the child's axiological values. The article refers to the selection and organizing of a set of values in a preschool education curriculum where children are prepared for a dynamic world. Multiculturalism leads to the incorporation of individual and national values into a universal value of all mankind.

Keywords: axiological education; value; preschool age; axiological exercises

1. Introduction

Education should be brought back into the axiological sphere, whereas now it crosses this sphere only in particular areas. All the factors which are involved in education should have this thing on the board frontage of the professional values.

Education is not an activity evolved in and for itself, but one that aims at achieving certain purposes.

In each moment of the educational action evolution, the activities are directed and guided according to the followed purposes (results), thus outlining a final character. These purposes express the directions assumed to the educational policy level in order to develop the human personality within certain values.

Throughout the school period the basic purpose is defining one type of personality, the individual who is to be integrated in the society he lives. Of course, this result (and all the steps to be followed) depends on axiology. Due to the fact that through purposes it is aspired to human perfection, it is absolutely necessary for them to be dependent on relations with valid system of values. The values are conveyed through the instruments of education and socialization, being assimilated and inverted by individuals; thereby, they acquire a normative character and they get into our structure of thoughts and beliefs, where they act as direction marks and criteria to behaviours and actions.

On the time axis, the educational ideal expresses a broad synthesis and it is to be compassed over a very long time (historical stage). Higher terms on this axis are represented by the purposes which are achieved in average spaces, as a result of a range of educative actions. Ultimately, the objectives are those which are proposed to be achieved in short time, after clear sequences, bounded by training.

The system formed by ideal, purpose and objectives watch over the whole organization and evolution of the educational act. According to the educational ideal, the planned aims and objectives, organize the entire educational system, the content of education it is structured, the educational technology and methodology which is considered to be the most efficient one it is chosen and used. Once assigned, the
purpose and the related educational objectives form an important assessment criterion of the efficiency of the effective educational activities.

![Fig.1. Time axis and educational finalities](image)

The educational ideal, purposes and objectives are made up into a dynamic system which has to push periodically „the refresh” button of its historical time, exposing itself to evaluations with positive and negative results. The mutuality must close the circle for evolution. The reference to results throughout the whole educational act must be done periodically by those who mediate to keep a good direction, as previously decided.

2. Some Considerations Regarding the Value Concept

The concept of value belongs to the category of the socio-human concepts, alongside the concepts of culture, education, motivation, civilization and so on, which bear scores and hundreds of definitions, without being a common acceptance.

The great philosophers of time were constantly concerned about the study of the values, although these are a habit for the majority of people. The world of values – of the Truth, the Good, the Beautiful – comes back from history into the people`s consciousness in the moments of balance. Most of the times, these moments have been represented by conflagrations, in the collective conscience, but it happens the same in the moments of deep pursuit, limitations, and staggering reconfigurations in the individual conscience as well.

The evolution of the individual, of a nation, of humanity – broadly - consists in the evolution of values too. Reconsideration of the values must be done analyzing the past and keeping only those which define the character, they ennoble it, but also observing, glimpsing the future, the way to pursue. Rediscovery of axiology has a cyclic character. To choose values among pseudo-values represents a general available imperative in each period of time.

The society we live in nowadays does not think enough about the high lack of positive values, and on the other side it constantly develops pseudo-values. Drawing a parallel with sets of numbers, we will avoid the „non-value” term, choosing the “pseudo-value” one because, in our opinion, it represents the empty set of value or anything else which is not included in the sphere of values. The set of all values can be compared to the set of the integer numbers (Z), because it comprises both positive numbers, and negative numbers. Each positive value finds a correspondent in the negative side of the axis. To rank, for instance, something „bad”, it implies an appreciation, a balance, an evaluation (of a deed, intention or consequence). When something is „good”, we use (the same as in the operations with sets) negation. Therefore, „it is not bad”, is something positive in the absence of the bad. Moreover,
it can be even stated that a mistake is a value, even fake is a value. The role of the negative values is to highlight the positive ones, giving them a meaning. Between values, functional relations can be established, which can explain the harmony or the clash between individuals.

A value is demonstrated through many attitudes. The process in forming social values implies the individual introversion of the rules, specific to the group/groups it belongs to, developing proper values and the own conception about value (Vlăsceanu, L., 2010). By getting in contact with other members of the group, these can be conveyed in values shared by the whole collectivity.

The personal system of values is an opened one, a system where through experience other categories can be added. If we refer identity as pertaining to a whole (to a community, a country or humanity) broadly speaking, that possesses a set of values, an identity which is part of the whole with an accurate role, then we can say that it has got its own attitudes as a reaction to different stimuli of the environment that surrounds. The reactions can be different, according to the consonance that stimulus can be found in each individuality (its acceptability). The subject gets from a simple observer, an indicator of things or events into another one that finds the significations to things and ranks them. The subject succeeds in doing this thing by setting, adjusting itself to the situation.

3. The Educational Values and Preschool Environment

The educational values can be compared to plants. They have their roots in the system’s ground of social value. This ground sometimes suffers modifications as regards to its composition - system of values in contradiction or in the middle of restructuring. Plants and ground are in a relationship of interdependence: plants absorb the sap of the ground and reflect in the beauty of flowers the ground’s composition, and on the other hand, a soil where plants grow is one that resists the water’s erosions. In the same way, a system of social values where proper educational systems are embedded in can show its strength against the factors that wash and dilute the sediments. Hence, the educational values expand in results – instructional contents, teaching-learning procedures, principles, methods.

The assimilation of values and the formation of attitudes represent a long process due to the fact that noticeable and measurable affective acquisitions are difficult to be followed. Attitudes are difficult to be operated, and the integration of the values has a potential character, with noticeable effects throughout time. The formation of attitudes does not exclusively lean on the institution of the formal education, it is influenced by non-formal and informal factors. Based on Robert Hawley's model (1975) for spreading values in learning environment, consisting of 6 procedural steps, in two stages, we will check the adjustment of the questions to set up exercises:

a) choice
1. preferences – What do I really like?
2. influences – How did I make this decision? Did my colleague or teacher influence me?
3. alternatives – Could I choose something else? Did I sufficiently think about it?
4. consequences – What happens after I have chosen? How do I influence the other ones? Do I disturb someone with my choice?

b) action
1. practicing – Can I do this thing? Does this help me to accomplish what I have chosen?
2. incorporation – Am I satisfied with what I have done? Do I still like this thing, after doing it? Am I going to repeat this thing for another time?

If in a specific valorization exercise we are not able to follow all these steps, then we try to follow three moments:
a) bringing the value in the foreground and discussing about it from more perspectives (What do you think about...? Why is it important? Does it worth talking about...too? What is better, more beautiful, more equitable...?);
b) accepting the ideas, the beliefs of others without criticizing, through empathy exercises, developing feelings of respect on the values accepted by the other ones;
c) stimulating thinking through assessment exercises of some inexperienced values yet.

In the emotional field, where it is operated with feelings, emotions, acceptance/rejection, appreciations and so on, it is useful the scheme of Krathwohl and Bloom regarding the emotional learning. This was prepared in 1970 after several years of studies: the value acquiring; the emotional answer; valorization; organization; characterizing through a value.

The learning of attitudes and values is better outlined in the moral education nucleus. The seeds of morality are planted in the preschool stage, they will get roots later on. The stages in forming a moral behaviour are: forming the elementary habits, awakening the moral conscience, forming the ethic attitudes, structuring some values and the moral ideal. As practical manners to deploy the moral education we may mention:
a) encouraging the positive attitudes, doubled by the effort of reducing the negative ones;
b) directing the teacher’s behavior to the achievement of a positive, simulative emotional climate;
c) respecting the students’ personality;
d) establishing some open relationships with children to be based on environment’s sincerity and the ethical capability of children.
e) Ensuring connections with real life by requiring the children’s experience, especially their imagination and creativity;
f) joining history, literature, art.

As regards the methods of evaluating, they are a good exercise of valuing. Constantin Cucoș (2014) recommends to stress on:
a) The questions of value (comparison, assessment)
b) Promoting confidence in the children’s opinions and thoughts in order to get to a mutual respect among the group.

The curriculum for the preschool education is structured on the objective frame and reference and it is carried out in knowledge, abilities and attitudes. The curriculum for early education forms, on the basis of attitudes, the first values. The kindergarten educational purposes become requirements of the primary school.

4. Axiological Exercises in Preschool Age

Beyond teaching-learning-evaluating of the specific concepts from the preschool Curriculum the perspective in specific activities from kindergarten should be enhanced so that it aims the necessity of achieving the education’s purposes, not just the recommendations of the European Parliament and the European Union Council as well, regarding the key competences from the point of view of the lifelong learning, but also the Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education in the XXI century.

Taking into account these grievances and looking back to the objectives of reference from the preschool Curriculum we notice that they can be improved. We are going to try to identify those objectives that can be considered as the basis for finding other objectives, more suitable to achieve the axiological education. Therefore, we
propose a few axiological exercises for the high group level to respond in this way to our demands.

The immersion process of the values at the preschool level is achieved by conveying messages that belong to the axiological education, in the area of different factual domains.

The axiological exercises predict/set up the child for acquiring some abstract concepts from the domain Education for the society (School based curriculum for the preparatory class, the first form and the second form), continued with Philosophy for children (School based curriculum for the third form and/or the fourth form) – approved by O.M. 4887/26.08.2013.

The axiological exercises act interdisciplinary, including: the Domain Man and Society (MSD), the Domain Language and Communication (LCD), The Domain of Science (SD), the Domain of Esthetic and Creative (ECD), the Domain Psycho-motric (PMD). These axiological approaches follow 3 objectives of reference, specific to the early education:

1) The identification of some values from the basic texts, showing availability.
2) The examination of the consequences of some actions or behaviors upon one person, a group or the environment.
3) Getting in practice of some behavior skills through comparisons to other similar situations from known stories or familiar contexts.

Each approached content needs to pass through all these three objectives of reference, because the assimilation of the values (at the understanding level specific to the big preschool pupil) is a process where emotional-attitudinal acquisitions are followed. This process implies three stages: value acquiring, affecting answer and valorisation. The integration of the values has a potential character, with effects that can be noticed in time, but the exercises propose an introduction / a propaedeutics in the axiology sphere.

The axiological exercises are an occasion for reflection and set the way for getting the following acquisitions from the primary course.

Thus, we have defined the space of locating the axiological exercises in the existing domains, but embedded with other aspects too. The personal integration of children will be aimed at the cognitive, emotional and behavioural level, but all the participants in this process will be placed in a human light, in harmony with the proper values and the exterior reality, comprised for instance, in the social rules, in the proper or others roles of life. By this thing it will be aimed the awareness of the participants at the process, to themselves and the community where they live.

4.1. Contents of the Axiological Exercises

The axiological education, in the educational aspect, tackles the issue in a double perspective (Cucoș C., 2014, p.117):

- descriptive – the enforcement act of the axis development of values between the positive and negative pole;
- prescriptive – the enforcement of the positive values and the expanding of the character's positive traits. The child’s education is centered on the enforcement and promotion of values, beginning with the human, national and, certainly, ending with the formation of personal value priorities. These three positions guide us to the knowledge of age and psycho-individual particularities.

In the context of activities with the preschool pupils we can operate a list of values referring to the experiential topics and domains proposed by the curriculum, according to the table below:
Table. 1. The matrix: topics – values- experiential domains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curricular topics</th>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Experiential Domains</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When /how and why does it happen?</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>LCD SD MSD ECD PMD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>✓✓✓✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>✓✓✓✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Courage</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is/ was and will be here on Earth?</td>
<td>Duty</td>
<td>✓✓✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fairness</td>
<td>✓✓✓✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heroism</td>
<td>✓✓✓✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>✓✓✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who and how does he/she plan/organize an activity?</td>
<td>Beautiful</td>
<td>✓✓✓✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diligence</td>
<td>✓✓✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>✓✓✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do we express what we feel?</td>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What and how do I want to be?</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tolerance</td>
<td>✓✓✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Etc.</td>
<td>✓✓✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When choosing the exercises we considered more sources, making a list of more than 80 values, adapted to the understanding capacity of children. The values are dichotomous, both positive and negative meanings, and the examples from literature sustain the polarity, as a fundamental characteristic of values.

Children have a conceptual mechanism which allows them the understanding of fantastic stories, fairy-tales, they can use “constantly, flexible and easily the most abstract concepts such as good/bad” (Egan, K., 2007, p. 19). Although there are plenty of preconceived ideas that learning at the preschool age does not allow acquisition of the abstract concepts, the five years old children can appropriately define concepts like loyalty and courage. We must make the difference between defining appropriately an abstract concept and the ability of using it in understanding a story.

Values are created “in an uncertain time and by the conscience and imaginary collective, like myths, fairy tales, legends, aphorisms, being entirely the moral and useful values” (Ceauşu, Gh., 2014, p. 83). The literary and non-literary texts (stories, fairy tales, fables, poetries for children) convey values, standards and acceptable norms of behaviour. The right selection of the texts helps children to face with possible types of situations, to make them think about their approaching, about finding solutions, other perspectives.

The therapeutic stories proved to be helpful in practice, they represent a „first-aid kit” when the repetition of a behaviour is observed, a behaviour that hides behind the acceptance of a value with a negative connotation. A source of axiological exercises has been represented by the collection of healing stories for children (Burns, G., 2011, pp. 91-92) which is suited to the preschool age. It comes the teacher’s task to harmonize the literary texts according to the learning context, children’s experience or to the peculiarities that he wants to highlight.

If there are longer readings there can be found alternatives of retold or remade texts by the teacher. According to the teacher’s talent, imagination, creativity there can be created axiological exercises to help children.

It is also known the fact that drama exercises and proper dramas have a decisive role in the cognitive and affective-attitudinal development of the preschool pupils. These contributes to the development of understanding capacity of the literary texts,
to the vocabulary improvement and to the correct use of grammatical structures, as well as to the improvement of children’s socio-emotional abilities.

The role play exercises from the drama pedagogy permit the freedom of speech, reactions of those who interpret to be remarked, they hide feelings, emotions, judgments, attitudes. The play role, for instance proposes familiar subjects, inspired from the participants’ real life. Through this method there are objectives to be aimed namely: the development of empathy and capacity of understanding opinions, feelings, and the competence to solve difficult problematic situations. Beside the role play there can be successfully assigned the improvisations and exercises on a given topic. It can also be useful in practice the stage setting of the social inter-relational notions so that subsequently to get to exercises for forming social skills, needed in achieving the objectives from the Man and Society Domain.

Also in the sphere of drama pedagogy, accustomed to the preschool age, it is recommended to watch theatre shows for children, in the theatre room, where we can find “samples bearing values, not in a didactic way, but through its own structure and artistically reflection”. (Perțea, A.-M., 2014, p. 273) The aim-values followed in the instructive-educative process through the exercises and games from the sphere of the theatre pedagogy are: “observing, concentration, stimulation, relaxation, attention, emotion, breath, intonation, speech, communication, imagination, fantasy, association, action and reaction, rendering, interpretation-construction” (Perțea, A.-M., 2014, pp. 294-295). These aim values can be achieved by middle values that lead to the formation of some skills, cognitive autonomy, assessment and self assessment capacity, reflection, self knowledge and so on.

One of the nucleuses of the theatrical pedagogy, pedagogy by playing supposes a mechanism made of relaxing exercises, movement, observing, useful to create favourable conditions for the individual or group: a mood of inner peace, of removing the vigorous and focusing gridlock upon a common aim. Thus, the theatrical pedagogy remains a fundamental pedagogical option because there can be “educated values for life: knowing the fellows, acknowledging the body bearing, ways of verbal expression, self-confidence, social behaviour” (Perțea, A.-M., 2014, p 299). By axiological exercises, the everyday life needs of the kindergarten child could be entirely covered.

Conclusions

The teacher’s interest to his axiological reference, and to his continuous evolution as well, is crucial in educating the future generations of children. This thing represents a necessary attitude in approaching the preparing and deploying of axiological exercises with preschool pupils. Through these activities children are trained into the thinking and creativity evolution, emphasizing on problem solving, building a preferred profile of the future adult. This one will live in a dynamic world, and the multi-culture where he will be formed now will lead to the inclusion of the individual values and those specific to a nation in a universal value, of the whole humanity. For this reason, to create the assumptions needed to form the universal conscience in the own conscience we suggested axiological exercises grounded on different base-texts from the literature for children.

References