



New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences



Volume 5, Issue 1 (2018) 09-16

ISSN 2547-8818

www.prosoc.eu

Selected Paper of 10th World Conference on Educational Sciences (WCES-2018) 01-03 February 2018 Top Hotel Praha
Congress Centre, Prague, Czech Republic

Towards a model of the axiological universe of teachers in Romanian pre-university education

Venera-Mihaela Cojocariu^{a*}, “Vasile Alecsandri” University of Bacau, Calea Marasesti, nr. 157, 600115 Bacau, Romania

Gabriel Albu^b, Petroleum—Gas University of Ploiesti, B-dul Bucuresti, nr. 39, cod 100680 Ploiesti, Romania

Suggested Citation:

Cojocariu, V.-M. & Albu, G. (2018). Towards a model of the axiological universe of teachers in Romanian pre-university education. *New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences* [Online]. 5(1), 09–16. Available from: www.prosoc.eu

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Prof. Dr. Jesus Garcia Laborda, University of Alcalá, Spain.

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Abstract

The axiological dimension of the teacher’s professional profile in pre-university education has not been investigated in relation to its formative impact. The problem: the knowledge of the set of values on which this class of teachers build their activity. The aim: to develop an axiological model of the universe of values in which the Romanian pre-university education teachers believe. During the last 5 years, we conducted questionnaire-based surveys to investigate the specific set of values of teachers of the pre-university education system in Romania: preschool, primary, middle, high-school. The obtained data materialised in axiological sets for teachers at each level. Based on the comparative analysis and by structuring their common aspects, we will be able to develop a model of the axiological universe of all categories of teachers in the pre-university Romanian education. The findings of the study will have implications for the design of initial/continuous training courses.

Keywords: Values, teacher’s axiological universe, model of the axiological universe of pre-university teachers.

* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: **Venera-Mihaela Cojocariu**, “Vasile Alecsandri” University of Bacau, Calea Marasesti, nr. 157, 600115 Bacau, Romania.

E-mail address: venera_1962@yahoo.com / Tel.: +04-074-706-6462

1. Again on the values of teachers

Trying to enter the teacher's inner world is an equally hazy and fragile attempt. From our point of view, however, it is a full-fledged attempt. And this for at least two reasons, stemming from the teacher's fundamental position in relation to the evolution of his or her students, regardless of their age: 1) because there is an explicit axiologically essential formative impact that the teacher may formally generate by teaching values (values education); 2) because this formative impact is amplified by what the teacher implicitly transfers, by what he feels, believes, experiences, vibrates, carrying out a genuine transfer of values. In both situations, it is essential for the teacher to reflect on himself, to clarify his own values and attitudes (DEST, 2003) and how they 'shape behaviour every day in the classroom' (Bloom & Ellis, 2009, p. 2), so that the expected impact is honest, coherent, consistent and, above all, meaningful. Based on understanding value as 'a deeply held view of what we believe to be important and worthwhile' (idem), we attempt to recover the importance of the values in which teachers believe in relation to their entire activity, regardless of the teaching subject, the age of their students. Brady (2011) will thoroughly illustrate the impact of the hidden curriculum on students. The didactic approach, always 'values-laden', comes to life and achieves strength through the choices of teachers on many components: scientific, emotional, moral, social. It is becoming increasingly clear that beyond their scientific competence, the values in which they believe influence the students' choices, preferences, aspirations and motivations, gradually contributing to the shaping of a sense of their own life (Albu, 2016a). Our desire was to know as much as possible the teachers' beliefs, their values and their behavioural coordinates towards students, their soul marks expressed more/less consciously, more/less implicitly during their interaction with them. With its inherent limitations, our research sought to reveal one of the most important centres of irradiation of values in society, a significant source of conservation and protection. Through his presence and activity, the teacher has, perhaps more than ever, an unambiguous responsibility to promote the values of society, the only ones able to ensure its functioning, balance, perpetuation and improvement.

2. The research methodology

The research is part of a transversal analysis upon the values which define the personality of the Romanian teacher, initiated by us in 2011. During the interval 2012–2017, we have conducted a series of questionnaire-based inquiries and published the results (Albu 2015c; Cojocariu & Albu 2015a)—on values of pre-school teachers; Cojocariu (2015a), Albu (2015b) and Cojocariu and Albu (2015b)—for values of primary school teachers; Cojocariu (2015b) and Albu (2016b)—for values of middle-school teachers; Cojocariu (2016) and Cojocariu (2017)—for values of high-school teachers; Albu (2015a) and Albu (2016a)—for values of teachers from pre-university education). Our intention was to identify the values in which teachers in the Romanian pre-university education system (still) believe. At the same time, based on the identified values, we have succeeded in setting up a possible axiological model for each category of teachers. With the help of the obtained, systematised and comparatively analysed data, we now propose to verify to what extent an axiological model may be elaborated at the level of the entire sample of teachers investigated from the Romanian pre-university education. The aim of this study is to highlight the way in which the partial models developed in previous studies may be articulated in an axiological model common to all the study participants from pre-university education. The group of respondents was made up of 805 teachers from two counties of Romania, Bacau and Prahova, as follows: 100 teachers—pre-school education; 200 teachers—primary education; 205 teachers—middle-school education; 300 teachers—high-school education. The data were collected, analysed for each subsample, completed with specific axiological models and presented at different international scientific manifestations during the interval 2012–2017.

The assumptions underlying the research are as follows:

- General hypothesis: If there may be identified a set of current values in which Romanian pre-university teachers believe, then this is specific for each stage of the education system (from pre-school to high-school level).
- Specific hypothesis: There is a set of values shared by all Romanian pre-university teachers.
- Objectives:
 - O1: comparative analysis of sets of values (anchor-values and core values) identified for teachers at each stage of the pre-university education system.
 - O2: highlighting some aspects of continuity and discontinuity between them.
 - O3: developing a possible axiological model of pre-university education teachers.

The questionnaire used consists of eight open-ended items that investigate *three levels* of the teacher's axiological universe: 1) anchor values, the first three values in which they believe that guide their activity to the largest extent (items 1, 4, 5, 8) (I1. The first three values in which I believe are, in relevance order...; I4. I believe that in today's world, the most dangerous counter-values are ... (Name three counter values in relevance order); I5. I believe that the fundamental values that pre-university education should inculcate to students are: (Name 3 values in relevance order) ...; I8. The future society needs the following three values (in relevance order) ...); 2) core value, the first value that defines them, which guides the entire professional approach (items 2, 3, 7) (I2. When I refer to my work, the value that concerns me mostly is ...; I3. I believe that for the activity of a teacher the most important value is ...; I7. I believe that the value that will always preserve mankind is ...); 3) complementary values, other values in which teachers believe and which are found in their widened axiological constellation, beyond the core and anchor values (item 6–I6: If tomorrow were my last meeting with my students, I would address them as a last message the urge/idea ...). For the items that required the hierarchisation of the respondents' options, the score of each value was established as follows: three points for the value placed on the first position, two points for the value from the second position, one point for the value placed on the third position.

3. Findings

In order to ensure the achievement of O1 and O2, we have conducted a comparative analysis of the data obtained during our previous studies on the groups of teachers in the Romanian pre-university education. Systematising the data obtained by applying the questionnaire and grouping them in relation to the two categories of values of interest for our study (anchor-values and core value), we have systematised the data that is briefly shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparative analysis of the sets of anchor-values and core-values for all the categories of teachers from pre-university education

Values	1. Preschool	2. Primary	3. Middle-school	4. High-school	5. Prevailing
Anchor	1. Respect 120p	1. Truth 286p	1. Respect 90p	1. Justice, truth 467p	1. Justice, truth 467p
	2. Work 42p	2. Responsibility 89p	2. Work 75p	2. Justice 76p	2. Work 117p
	3. Integrity 34p	3. Work 83p	3. Respect 59p	3. Justice 132p	3. Justice 132p
Core	4. Professionalism 20%	4. Professionalism 17.5%	4. Professionalism 25%	4. Justice, truth 28%	4. Professionalism

The comparative analysis of the data in Table 1 leads to the following findings in terms of anchor-values:

1. There could be identified three anchor-values for each category of pre-university education teachers (columns 1–4 of Table 1). On this basis, there could be systematised three anchor-values of all the categories of pre-university education teachers (column 5 of Table 1). They may be hierarchised as follows: 1) justice, truth—467 p; 2) work—117 p; 3) justice—132 p (rows 1–3 of Table 1).
2. The establishment of these anchor-values as defining for a possible axiological model of teachers from pre-university education is determined, for the value 1 (justice, truth) and the 3rd value (justice) by the options of high-school teachers (data highlighted on rows 1 and 3 of Table 1), and for the 2nd value (work), this is determined by the cumulative options of pre-school and middle-school teachers (data highlighted on row 2 of Table 1).
3. The scores obtained for each of the three identified anchor-values show a great difference in their appreciation. Firstly ranked is the pair of values of justice, truth (467 p) (values relevant to the moral and professional hypostasis of any teacher!), being highly represented. Secondly ranked is the value of work (117 p), with a scoring about three times lower than the first value. Thirdly ranked is the value of justice (132 p), with a fairly close scoring. Quite interestingly, the third-rank value scores higher than the second-rank value, indicating a large number of options for this third-rank value. Together, the last two anchor-values accumulate about half (249 p) of the first value score (467 p) (column 5 of Table 1).
4. We appreciate that the identified anchor-values—justice, truth, work, truth—are well articulated and highlight an axiological profile marked by the importance (somewhat unilateralising!) of justice and the necessity and role of work in the teaching activity.
5. Other first-rank common values are the value of respect for pre-school and middle-school teachers, which accumulates 210 p, approximately half of the score of the value assigned to the first-rank value (467 p) (row 1 of Table 1).
6. For the 3rd-rank anchor-value, there are no common values, each group of investigated teachers designating another value for this rank (honour—34 p, *work*—83 p, respect—59 p, justice—132 p) (row 3 of Table 1).
7. Although three anchor-values are identified, in order of their weight, 1) justice, truth—467 p; 2) work—117 p; 3) justice—132 p, we may assume that from the axiological point of view they express only two options, 1) justice, truth—599 p and 2) work—117 p, the first of them being about five times stronger than the second (as highlighted in column 5 of Table 1). From the data obtained at this level of depth about the belief system and the beliefs of the investigated teachers, we understand that in their view, we may build something solid and durable (in life, in our relationships, in the profession to which we have dedicated ourselves) if, both our (individual and collective) mind and the behaviour of each of us is built on serving justice, fairness, equity, the recognition of any of us according to personal merit. We can also understand that all these are strongly correlated with work engagement, effort and self-exertion in relation to what we do.

From the point of view of the comparative analysis of the core value, the analysis of the systematised results in Table 1 leads to the following conclusions:

1. There could be identified a core value for each category of pre-university education teachers (row 4 in columns 1–4 of Table 1). On this basis, it was possible to identify a core value in which all teachers in pre-university education believe, namely, the value of professionalism (row 4 in column 5 of Table 1).
2. This is a common core value for three categories of teachers, namely, pre-school, primary and middle-school teachers (perhaps connected by several common aspects of their professional activity, stronger and/or long-marked by continuous curricular reform and, implicitly, the value crisis we are going through) (row 4 Table 1).

3. While two of the anchor-values are determined by high-school teachers, the core value is determined by all three other categories of teachers, in a welcome complementarity, thus, ensuring a dynamic balance of their axiological options (column 5, respectively, row 4 of Table 1).
4. The value of professionalism as a core value is in axiological agreement with the anchor-values previously identified.
5. Regarded in this new configuration, the value of professionalism may be regarded as the core of the axiological profile of the group of teachers in pre-university education, around which there are articulated the anchor-values 1) justice, truth 467 p; 2) work 117 p; 3) justice 132 p.

The emergence of this value in the axiological system of teachers from pre-university education supports the conclusion that the professional is able to choose and defend—without compromise and without making it an end in itself—justice, truth. He is motivated to work according to his conscientiousness, abilities and talent. It seems that the existence of righteousness, truth, equity and fair recognition of the merit of each person are (re)discovered, in a first and last instance, in close connection with professionalism, with the high level of professional training and self-improvement.

In order to ensure the achievement of O3—the development of an axiological model of teachers from pre-university education—the data obtained and analysed above have been combined, integrated and represented graphically (as shown in Figure 1) where professionalism is the core value, and the anchor-values, although represented in the order of their weight, 1) justice, truth 467 p; 2) work 117 p; 3) justice 132 p, may be considered absorbed only in/by two anchor-values, justice, truth 599 p and work 117 p.

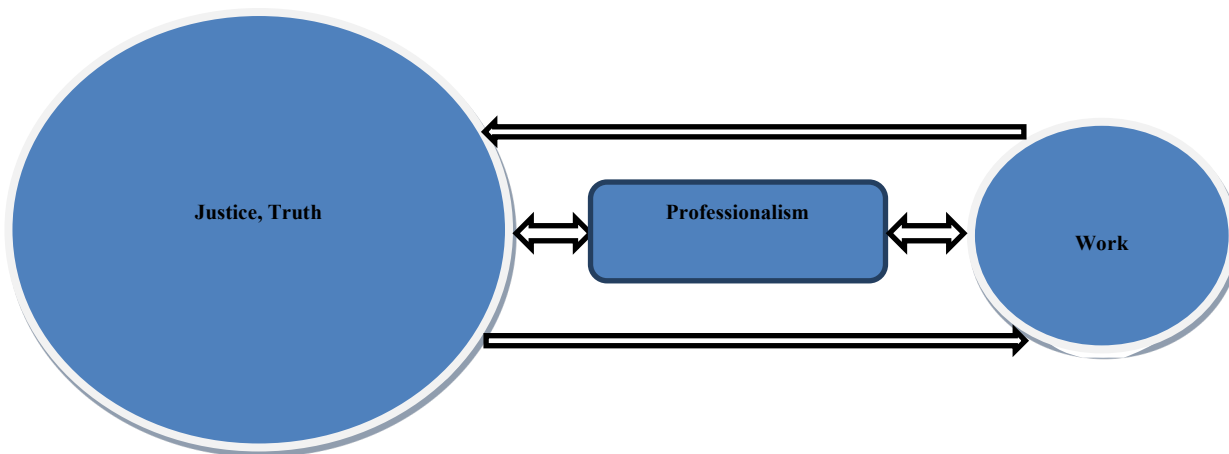


Figure 1. A possible model of the axiological profile of teachers from pre-university education

Aware of the fact that our research is still at the beginning, we may still consider that we have revealed some essential points of the axiological orientation of the pre-university teaching staff in Romania. According to it, dilettantism, superficial work, imposture and opportunism, theft are excluded. It also results that it would be absurd to believe that we could live and build a professional and private life (solid, durable, meaningful) based on lie, inequity, flattery (however much we might be seduced by the appearances, the *here* and *now* of our times). There are coordinates that teachers (in our group) believe and live in front of students and together with them. They can form (sooner or later) reference values for younger generations, for their behaviour and relationships. They are, of course, elements that may be found in a more or less distant future in our social life.

4. Conclusions and further research

The data and results presented and analysed enable us to consider that: general hypothesis has been confirmed; the specific hypothesis has been confirmed; all the proposed objectives have been

achieved. Following the comparative analysis of the values in which all the categories of teachers in pre-university education believe, we came to the following conclusions:

1. The axiological universe of pre-university education teachers is well structured, balanced, we could even say (unexpectedly!) relatively unilateral, emphasising a certain moral dominant.
2. All the values in which they believe (whether these are first-rank anchor-values or the other values that have been highlighted successively) are directly or indirectly interconnected to the core value of professionalism, of self-exigency.
3. The connection between justice, truth, work and professionalism is a necessary, possible, desirable, but perhaps also required by the profound needs of teachers. Some of them are the product of the pre-1990 school (marked by communism), while others have been trained after 1990 (marked by the transition to a democratic society). However, the extremely persuasive manner in which these values have been imposed (at least, the values of justice, truth and professionalism) express deep beliefs, general human and professional behavioural-attitudinal coordinates that transcend the social-historical arch and relate more or less transparently to current practices, to the fluid-volatile tensions and arrangements of the processes/tendencies of society in general and of the contemporary school in particular. They demand rigor and moral self-exertion, knowledge, (self) interrogation and work in order to achieve and manifest genuine authenticity that may limit and discourage as much as possible the manifestation of dishonesty, imposture, lies, dilettantism, superficiality, undeserved positions.
4. The values in which high-school teachers believe are an entirely particular axiomatic configuration—they converge to a unique value, that is, justice-truth, unprecedented at any other category of teachers. Their whole value universe is dominated by this value and is found in it. We believe that the significance of these results can be placed either in a possible solid optional-attitudinal consensus, or in the simplicity of their world of values, in their weak (or conjunctural) preoccupation for the enrichment of their inner world.
5. Regarding the complementary values, apparently, there is a great diversity of them. Among these, we have identified values such as: love and respect for parents; self-confidence; diligence, understanding for others—in the case of teachers for pre-school education; teaching, humanism, respect, self-confidence, honesty, perseverance, kindness—in the case of teachers for primary education; goodness, perseverance, seriousness, self-advancement, optimism, punctuality, self-knowledge, friendship, courage—as far as middle-school teachers are concerned; learning, perseverance, work, humanism, dignity, education, generosity, optimism—in the case of high-school teachers. However, these are mostly grouped only in the category of moral values.
6. At the same time, some values have not been completely forgotten, but are poorly represented, being mentioned only once (pride, sincerity, dignity, love) whereas others are totally absent (e.g. solidarity, freedom, initiative, creativity, tolerance, compassion, civic involvement, temperance, humanity).
7. For all the groups of investigated teachers, the economic, aesthetic, juridical, political, technological values are quasi-ignored.
8. The values identified as a whole (both by common and specific features) illustrate a solid axiological reality that teachers oppose to the current moral crisis and which can be an important resource for the construction of a future healthy, honest, serious, industrious, brave generation, aspiring to beauty.

We understand that we are dealing with a complex and coherent axiological realm (even if it is reduced, especially to the moral values subsystem). The answers of the subjects show, on the one hand, their main choices and, on the other hand, the fact that some values necessary for the psychological and social maturing of young people confronted with the temptations of the digital environment and the consuming manipulations are being overlooked.

We are aware of the complexity of our attempt and our desire to clarify this marginalised problem. The initial and continuing training of our staff does not include topics, courses, programmes, explicit

and systematic debates on the disclosure, clarification and deepening of this elevated field of personality ripening (teacher, student, man in general). The data obtained from this research reflects an elementary level of approach to this field, a knowledge that does not exceed (in the vast majority of cases) the level of common sense. This leads (may lead) ultimately (both for teachers, parents and students), if not to improvisation and unpredictable attitude-behaviour, then to a mimetic assumption, if not to an axiological resignation, then to a unfortunate lamentation about the inappropriate, inadequate, dangerous, trivial and scandalous behaviour of young people. At the same time, the ICT component of teacher training should not be left out. This should be correlated with the axiological dimension of their cultural universe, in order to ensure a good balance between all categories of values (scientific, moral, aesthetic, technological, religious) and to ensure a balanced relationship between the values of collaboration and independence (Nechita & Timofti, 2011). It is essential, in an increasingly fluid world, exposed to relativistic-consumerist tendencies, that we should not forget that we need, that we stringently need responsibility, simplicity, respect, temperance, honesty and humanity. Based on a literature review, Boghian has identified two main values associated with tolerance education, and education in general, namely good and humanity (Boghian, 2017).

Of course, we have to investigate (in future projects):

- a. The relationship between the axiological system of an ideology demanded and imposed on a formal level by a certain regime in control (at the time) and the universal axiological undying system, pervasive to the preservation of humanity as humanity (Breda, 1993).
- b. The tension between the status of the teacher as a bearer of the values of a state institution, on the one hand, and as the bearer of values in which he deeply believes, as a human being, on the other hand (Albu, 2016a).
- c. How new communication and learning technologies can contribute to shaping the axiological universe of teachers.

There are ways that drive us to new and interesting searches.

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