

## Features of Educational Activities in the Contemporary Society

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**Abstract.** *The intellectual, cultural, moral and civic value axis of each educable individual is a desirable construct that comes into shape, throughout one's development, starting with the first educational environment represented by family and continuing through the specific forms/institutions (school, cultural, religious and social institutions). Humanist-democratic tendencies emphasize the need for role-models and educational practices that promote ethical and moral values (truth, justice, altruism) together with socio-emotional attitudes and behaviors (empathy, assertiveness, and consensus). Successful educational solutions aim to develop the socio-educational dimension of human personality.*

**Keywords:** educational ideal, educational models, values, socio-emotional.

### Issue overview

Confronted to frequent paradigmatic changes, the society is forced to identify new directions of future actions, fitting the inner and intersocial, political, economic, climatic, technological and cybernetic requirements. Consequently, according to the recorded developments and transformations it is mandatory to redefine the educational ideal. While from a macro educational perspective the ideal is related to norms, principles, aims and specific objectives, which direct the formative process of the young generation<sup>1</sup>, from a microeducational perspective, the ideal is related to the projection of a relatively perfect personality (an independent, self-aware, and responsible for oneself, with others and for others). The prototype of the pupil associated to the educational aim will reflect a person that is aware of his/her own limits, wishes, aspirations and interests, capable of communicating ideas, emotions and feelings, a person that is compassionate, empathetic, tolerant, capable of accepting and generating change, pragmatic, visionary and balanced. In this context, within educational activities, the social-emotional dimension will prevail. Even if educational actions are mainly aimed at children, adolescents and the youth, the dynamics of social life needs forces adults as well to pursue Lifelong learning. However, as compared to adults, the young generation is at the level of structuring their own personality traits, with the contribution of various factors: family, school, organizations, socio-cultural background, and mass-media, each of them with their own specific educational influence.<sup>2</sup>

Contemporary society is, due to technological progress and computer literacy, a communication society, a society of generalized communication, which implies adequate restructuring in the educational reality.<sup>3</sup>

New questions occur about the role and aim of educating future generations, multiple questions that transcend borders and historical periods,

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<sup>1</sup> C. Cucoş, *Pedagogiy, Iaşi, Polirom*, 2014, p. 96.

<sup>2</sup> I. Albulescu, *Education and Mass-Media. Learning in the Communicational Society*, Cluj-Napoca, Dacia, 2003, p. 75.

<sup>3</sup> C. Baciuc, C. Stan, *Elements of information and communication technology*, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2006, p. 123.

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especially since there is a social crisis at the level of contemporary societies. This is doubled by a moral crisis, which is triggered by the disappearance of some moral values and by the impossibility to relate to universal values. Family disintegration, job insecurity, the feeling of alienation determined by the exodus from rural to urban areas, doubled by the migration towards more prosperous countries have shaken the belief in old moral values. The emotional and moral balance of the modern man is deeply damaged by the continuous distractions, changes and radical transformations, by social disorder and strong inner feelings<sup>4</sup>. In the contemporary social, human, historic and geographic context of contemporary Romania we attempt to identify solutions for an education that resonates with universal values (truth, love, freedom, happiness, democracy, peace, justice, loyalty, responsibility), especially given that moral, ethical, socio-cultural and professional values support the personal and professional qualitative development of man and scientific progress. Also, in today's society, when information is no longer a problem, being able to find it is relatively easy now, in books, libraries or on the Internet, the question now is selecting what is relevant. So, for students to know or learn to select what is important, relevant, valuable or useful or learn to create connections between information, training critical thinking plays an important role.<sup>5</sup>

### **Action plan**

Contemporary school is focused on building skills, in the sense of deepening knowledge, practicing certain responsibilities and training the decision-making capacity. To have educated and instructed students means to have people/personalities labeled as individuals who are good, altruistic, empathetic, capable of performance, fair, brave, endowed, experienced, prepared, able, valuable, hardworking, proud, practical and generous.<sup>6</sup>

According to the recommendations of the European Commission, the instructive-educative action in Romania focuses on the areas of key-skills, namely: communication in Romanian and in foreign languages, mathematical skills, science and technology, digital competences (TIS-Technology of Information Society), social skills, civic skills, learning to learn, initiative, sensitivity and cultural expression. The congruence of the three dimensions of the educational ideal, respectively the social, psychological and pedagogical dimension will be reflected in operational aims and objectives that are adapted to students' needs and features. Consequently, the educational trainer-trainee pair will require at the same time intellectual and temporal resources in order to generate psychosocial behaviors corresponding to the requirements of current and forthcoming society, thus promoting personalities that are characterized by dynamism, flexibility and adaptability.

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<sup>4</sup> A. D. Manea, "School- the axis of knowledge", in *The Proceedings of the International Conference Globalization, Intercultural Dialogue and National Identity*, 3 (2016), p. 269-275.

<sup>5</sup> D. Andronache, M. Bocoş, "Designing Curricular Tools for Critical Thinking Development", *Educația* 21, No. 14 (2016), p. 29-42.

<sup>6</sup> A. D. Manea, "School- the axis of knowledge", p. 269-275.

Literature (Balderstone, 2000) mentions a few models for the teacher-student relationship, promoted for their capacity of gaining integrated skills and being reflected in the didactic strategy:

- a) The transmission-reception model, based on a predominantly "teaching style", which implies lecture-based teaching, bringing forth a unidirectional communicative strategy;
- b) The stimulus-answer model, based on a certain informational collaboration between teacher and students, which implies a strategy sequenced on the predominantly conversational relationship between teacher and each student.
- c) the interactional model in which the teacher is partially exterior to the educational process, which unfolds through cooperation between students, organized in groups; in this situation the teacher practices a different approach of the educational strategy, by organizing the learning activity (with the help of different tools), and which, afterwards he/she monitors. In this case, classic "teaching" is significantly reduced, and the main interest of the teacher is that of organizing and monitoring learning, which mainly unfolds between students and learning materials.<sup>7</sup> A particular case of the interactional teaching is the use of simulated environments for organizing and monitoring the interactions of the students with critical situations and thus, their learning activity.<sup>8</sup>

Regarding the action plan at the level of macro and micro-system, we expect a paradigm change, marked by conjugated efforts of decisive actors and educational actors in order to ensure:

- real decentralization of education at the institutional level;
- building of integrative skills;
- Passing from a one-discipline curriculum to the inter and trans-disciplinary one;
- focusing on individual needs and capacities;
- flexibility and adaptability for educational syllabi and curriculum content;
- approaching the assessment as an integrated part of the educational process, which aims to identify the effectiveness, the relevance, the importance, and the success of the educational programs, by reference to a system of indicators<sup>9</sup>;
- the transparency of assessment and decision-making process, based on adapted analyses, highlighting progress according to the specific and particularities of each assessed entity;
- transforming higher education institutions into pedagogic laboratories that develop the human potential

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<sup>7</sup> A. Ardelean , O. Mândruț (coord.), *Didactics of competence training, Research - Development - Innovation - Training*, Arad, "Vasile Goldiș" University Press, 2012, p. 79.

<sup>8</sup> I. Koglbauer, "Gender differences in time perception", in R. Hoffman & colab. (eds.) *The Cambridge Handbook of Applied Perception Research*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 1004-1028.

<sup>9</sup> D. Andronache, "Designing the assessment for a competence – based curriculum. A conceptual framework," in *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai - Psychologia-Paedagogia*, 61 (2016), p. 75-82.

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The instructive-educational process focused on achieving the educational ideal and the materialization of the aims and operational objectives needs a variety of action strategies that generate *cognitive and socio-emotional skills*. The formation of cognitive skills takes in consideration the development of general cognitive skills starting in kindergarten (working memory and attention control), in order to obtain an increase in specific skills: emerging literacy and numeracy skills<sup>10</sup>. Empiric studies have revealed a direct relation between school performance and the level of socio-emotional skills. In this respect, we can mention the results presented in the article *The Relationship between Socio-Emotional Status and Academic Achievement Among Students*, by dr. Dafna Hadar Pecker, in which some factors are highlighted for having a direct influence over the involvement of students in learning and their feelings. We refer to self-perception and academic auto-efficiency, perceptions related to motivation, including the learning styles and the accomplishment objectives. In light of the existing inter-relation that exists between emotional functioning and school performance, and considering the fact that in the school context the student faces different situations which give him/her both positive and negative feelings, the study underwent the examination of some skills considered to be essential in school adaptation: emotional intelligence, emotional control and emotional resistance. The results highlight the fact that the emotional skills of students are of great importance in dealing with feelings, thoughts and behavior. Consequently, their socio-emotional status is affected, as well as their involvement in learning, directly related to their academic performance<sup>11</sup>.

Considering the fact that emotions are part of learning and life, acquiring and developing socio-emotional skills, especially at an early age, is associated with an improvement in academic results, educational results, employment level, and income and reduced risky behaviors. Thus, developing the socio-emotional skills is not only the result of learning, but also a way of improving learning<sup>12</sup>.

Socio-emotional skills represent a product of emotional development and social learning, which leads to the optimization of the learning process and to obtaining performance. Another study, led by Maria Plesca at the Pedagogic University "Ion Creanga", from Chisinau, has highlighted the fact that personal development, as well as socio-emotional development, have enduring effects on the academic performance, adaptability to academic background, relating to others and integration in society. Socio-emotional skills are associated to a significant increase in academic performance. The proof of the statistically proven influence suggests

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<sup>10</sup> J. A. Welsh, L.R. Nix, C. Blair, K. L. Bierman, K.E. Nelson, "The development of cognitive skills and gains in academic school readiness for children from low-income families" , in *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 102 (2010), no. 1, p. 43-53.

<sup>11</sup> D. Hadar-Pecker, "The Relationship between Socio-Emotional Status and Academic Achievement among Students" <http://education.academy.ac.il/SystemFiles/23142.pdf> accessed 09. 03. 2018.

<sup>12</sup> P. Villasenor, "How can teachers cultivate (or hinder) students' socio-emotional skills?", 2017. <http://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/how-can-teachers-cultivate-or-hinder-students-socio-emotional-skills>, accessed 13. 06. 2017.

the fact that socio-emotional development has a predictive role in the area of concepts related to academic and professional development. As a result, performing an activity in a successful manner requires an optimal level of socio-emotional development<sup>13</sup>.

The results of the study presented above are also confirmed by the Graduation, Promotion, Success Program (GPS), from Malden High school, USA, which included interventions based on three strategies: involving the adults/family in the success of the student; learning at the workplace; positive school and socio-emotional climate as a support-system. The interventions have been built in an ensemble of activities of socio-emotional assistance, group and individual counseling, less formal activities, monthly meetings with parents, personal development activities, meant to achieve success from doing actions outside the school. The level of success has been acquired in direct relation to the axis of self-awareness and self-control, making important decisions and learning new behaviors, relevant in the job preparation<sup>14</sup>.

An efficient method of improving the socio-emotional skills is represented by cooperative learning. The participants in the investigation made by Lopez&Tomas (2017) have witnessed an improvement in their relationship with others, by practicing learning through cooperation, which, implicitly, generated a more successful and a more productive group activity<sup>15</sup>. Consequently, the socio-emotional skills such as: empathy, assertiveness and mutual understanding lead to scholar progress, which entitles us to underline the importance of the preparation and instruction of the trainers, which they themselves must have such skills, in order to be able to pass them on to their students. At the same time, the school unit "must be responsible with the instruction of the students in what concerns the development of the proactive attitude towards learning, in forming a constructivist conception towards self-instruction and education, being well-known the fact that self-education means self-awareness, self-control and self-leading<sup>16</sup>."

Educational models that promote ethical and moral values can be identified in biblical writings (the pedagogic model of Jesus, love as preached in the Gospel and reflected in public life<sup>17</sup>), literary texts(classical, modern, futuristic-novels, poems, prose, short stories), historical sources/documents (legends, stories, myths, letters), cinema productions, heroes of social, cultural, sports and technological life.

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<sup>13</sup> M. Pleșca, "Socio-emotional skills development in students", in *Revista de Științe Socioumane*, 34(2016), no. 3, p. 8-13.

<sup>14</sup> M. G. S. Brief, "School Climate and Socio-emotional Systems of Support." <http://www.doe.mass.edu/ccr/massgrad/EvalBrief-2016schoolclimate.pdf>, accessed 3.09.2017.

<sup>15</sup> L. López-Mondéjar, L. T. Pastor, "Development of Socio-emotional Skills through Cooperative Learning in a University Environment", in *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 237 (2017), p. 432 – 437

<sup>16</sup> A. D. Manea, "Coordinates of Lifelong Education", in *Astra Salvensis*, V (2015), p. 171.

<sup>17</sup> I. M. Morariu, "An Orthodox Perspective on Political Theology," in *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, vol. 17 (2018), no. 49, p. 156. Cf. Iuliu-Marius Morariu, "Aspects of political theology in the spiritual autobiographies of the Orthodox space? New potential keys of lecture," in *Astra Salvensis*, V (2017), no. 10, p. 129.

### **Conclusions**

Educational policies may facilitate the reaching of the educational ideal as materialized in the construct of independent and responsible personalities by generating valid solutions at a strategic, educational and didactic level (e.g. CRED-Relevant curriculum, open education – national project of Lifelong learning for teachers in primary and secondary education.) Human personalities associated to educational aims bring forth the labeling as a good person, meaning a person who is deeply involved and responsible in the self-transformation and self-forming process, a sociable person capable of capitalizing on opportunities, answering requests, facing inter-personal pressure, making compromises in order to promote truth and freedom.

At the same time, the moral values attached to the educational models presented to students trigger reflection, questions and answers on their side. Being initially known, and afterwards adopted, ethical and moral values help to the building of socio-emotional skills. They are responsible for producing extra value for scholar and professional performance. Moreover, some changes must be made in the attitude towards cognitive skills, namely moving the focus from the quantity of the skills to the quality they enable.

The meeting point of the three dimensions of the educational ideal, namely the social, psychological and pedagogical dimensions, divided into goals and objectives, refers to the level of the educational-educational process. Educational duo: trainer-formable is expected to use intellectual resources and psychosocial behavior that meet the requirements of today's and future society, to promote a personality characterized by dynamism, flexibility and adaptability.