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Is there an axiological background favoring the initial training in the didactic career for the primary and preschool didactic career?

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Abstract

By applying a questionnaire-based inquiry we have investigated a group of 40 subjects, students in the 1st year at Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education, Faculty of Sciences, “Vasile Alecsandri” University of Bacău. The values that students believe in have not constituted, so far, the object of a direct research in Romanian higher education. The existence of an outlined set of values shared by the students in the 1st year at Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education may constitute an interesting issue from several perspectives. The formative, curricular and managerial ones come across as decisive in favoring a successful initial training in the field. The results obtained and their analysis has highlighted a series of interesting aspects that we shall present in the study. Also, they open generous perspectives in conducting a longitudinal study on the same topic.

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1. Introduction/Problem Statement

The *beginning* of professional academic training is decisively influenced by the students' *cognitive-action and value-attitudinal former acquisitions*. Whereas the first aspect is regarded as a selection criterion and evaluated during admission exams, the second aspect is not even declaratively taken into consideration (with few exceptions, during the selection interview for didactic career training). Nevertheless, from a psycho-pedagogic standpoint, there is knowledge and acknowledgement of the *correlation between the set of values-attitudes and school performance*, respectively the entire professional evolution. School performance, although epistemologically relying upon the interdependence between knowledge and skills, cannot be ensured without an axiological orientation. Studies show that “*one's own system of values provides the foundation for one's personal and professional judgments and choices*” (Ursery, 2002, p. 1). Some authors (Raths, 2001) believe that one of the key questions that may trigger a

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reconsideration of teachers' training could be to introduce evaluation of beliefs and values as one of the admission criteria. All those opting for didactic career training have graduated at least high-school education, having a school experience of at least 13 years. Kennedy (1997) considers that, based on that, they have already learnt how to be teachers through their entire life as students, through a process called *apprenticeship of observation*. Bruner (1996, p. 46) reaches a similar conclusion when referring to a *popular pedagogy* that reflects certain "deeply rooted beliefs and tendencies" (apud Raths, 2001, p. 1). In this way, they have built certain solid beliefs regarding the role of education, school performance, what is good or bad in the classroom, what the existence of certain values and preconceptions in this respect implicitly means.

On the other hand, students who are the object of this study are professionally located in two hypostases at the most: they either work in education or they have just started training for this purpose. If there is already a set of values correlated with their becoming teachers, formed through prior school experience, this is supplemented by a new distinction resulted from their professional experience. For this reason, we expected that the values they hold should be different. For those who have attended no pedagogic studies, the values may have been highly dispersed and, perhaps, even difficult to identify. Regarding those who are already pre-school or primary teachers there is, according to the literature, another risk. Kennedy (1997) suggests that this could be the setting in of a certain routine in teaching, a kind of self-sufficiency, a lack of confidence in the university's ability to teach them something new in relation to their former training.

In both situations, the results of the study may generate a major benefic result. By that we refer to the beginning of the process that is called "*values clarification*" (Raths, 2001, p. 3; Raths, Harmin, & Simon, 1966). Practically, it means a trajectory of *full examination* of one's own beliefs. These should be known and recognized, analyzed and accepted, including in terms of the implications they determine in one's life to be eventually turned into values. The experiments conducted by the quoted authors have highlighted the fact that the values clarification process is slow and not always successful. The interrogation regarding the values that students in the 1st year believe in may constitute the beginning of this process.

2. Purpose of Study

This study aims at identifying the set of values shared by the students in the 1st year from the Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education specialization and at analyzing them.

General objectives:

- Identifying a structure of values characteristic of 1st year students that have chosen the career of primary and preschool teacher;
- Hierarchizing the values within one's own system of values;
- Identifying essential differences between the students' values in relation to the independent variables.

Specific hypothesis: The former teaching experience influences significantly the students' system of values.

Independent variables:

- Age
- Former teaching experience

Dependent variables: the system of values

3. Methods

Using a questionnaire-based survey, we have investigated a group of 40 subjects, students in the 1st year from the Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education specialization, the Faculty of Sciences, "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacău.

The research was conducted in the university centre of Bacău during the month of October 2012, being a qualitative type of research. We have applied a questionnaire that included 8 open-ended items. For the items that required a hierarchization of the respondents' answers, the score of each value was established as follows: 3 points for the value placed on the first position, 2 points for the value placed on the second position, 1 point for the value placed on the third position.

After centralizing and analyzing the data, we have found that there is no relevant data for two of the age categories (18-25 and over 35 years), a reason for which we eliminated the variable age and continued the data

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