



ORIGINAL PAPER

Catching-Up Axiological Education: Charting the Present Educational System

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Abstract

The present study proves the importance of education in the human becoming, in shaping and developing his personality. The postmodern human being, seen as the result of the interaction of heredity – environment – education, presents, at a low level, what the history of human culture and civilization describes, at a high level, as the human evolution. The aim of the present research is to highlight the role of education in shaping and developing the personality of the post-modern human being, especially on the moral-axiological dimension. Nowadays, the axiological education is less studied in the context of the rapid changes which take place in the society. The target group, which allowed us to prove certain ideas and theses on the importance of (present) postmodern education, especially in a society marked by diversity and cultural, religious, axiological eclecticism, was made up of students – future teachers, from different specializations of the University from Craiova and “Babeş-Bolyai” University from Cluj-Napoca. We have intended to identify the role of these future teachers in moral-axiological shaping of youngsters. The reason for choosing this target group has been that these students will be the ones who will form and shape personalities according to the inherited cultural heredity and/or acquired through education. The methodology of the present research was made up of an opinion questionnaire and a (focus-group) interview, which were applied to students. We have looked for the students’ opinion on the role and place of the postmodern axiological education seen as a result of the blending between the inherited and acquired cultural heredity. The results highlighted a certain relativism regarding the judgment and interpretation of both modern and classical values. We have also noticed a tendency of expanding the national axiological values towards the universal ones.

Keywords: *cultural heredity, postmodernism, values theory, values/non-values, axiological system*

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Postmodernism and values theory. Educational implications

The postmodern human being appears as a product of the cultural inherited heredity (without ignoring the biological side) to which the one acquired throughout his postmodern existence is added. The present culture and civilization are almost equally indebted to the culture and civilization of the Antiquity, Middle Ages, Renaissance, Modern Ages (from the Enlightenment to the Industrial Revolution), Modernity and even Post-modernity. The postmodern human being lives in a spiritual maze based on thousands of years of human culture and civilization.

Postmodernism has emerged as a reaction to modernism, being characterized by dualism, namely turning back to the past, on the one hand, and transcending the present, on the other (Jencks, 1987). As U. Eco (1994) stated, postmodernism acknowledges the past but cannot destroy it because its destruction would be equivalent to silence; for this reason, the past must be revived, but using irony and not in an innocent way. The paternity of the term is attributed to J. Fr. Lyotard, who published in 1979, *La Condition Postmoderne* (The postmodern condition, 1984), but his precursors are considered to be Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and Heidegger. The attempts to define postmodernism and postmodernity are numerous. Some authors, though, (Aylesworth, 2005) are skeptical when it comes to the possibility to define postmodernism as it is considered a truism, a set of critical, strategic and rhetorical practices that use concepts such as difference, repetition, tracks, simulacrum and hyperreality, whose aim is to destabilize other concepts such as presence, identity, historical progress, epistemic certitude and univocalness of meaning.

But what kind of society is the postmodern society? Is it a postindustrial society (a postindustrial economy, respectively) (A. Touraine), a postcapitalist society (P. Drucker), an informational society (M. Castells), a digital society (N. Negroponte, D. Tapscott), a knowledge-based society (L. Thurow), a consumption society (D. Lyons), a service-based society (O. Giardini), a transparent society (G. Vattimo), or an open society (G. Debord), placed in a globalization process (Sandu, 2010). Slattery (Ulrich, 2007: 18) considers that postmodernism/postmodernity can be understood from at least 11 different perspectives: historical period following the industrial and technological modern epoch; esthetic style in art and architecture, being characterized as eclectic, kaleidoscopic, ironic and allegoric; social criticism unifying social and economic organizations such as liberalism and communism; philosophical movement which aims at pointing out the internal contradictions of metanarrations by deconstructing the modern notions of truth, language, knowledge and power; cultural analysis criticizing the negative impact of new technologies on both the human psyche and environment while promoting the building of an ecologically supported global community; a radical eclecticism and a bi-vocal speech that accepts and critiques at the same time, because the past and the future are both constructed and deconstructed; a movement whose purpose is beyond the materialistic philosophy of modernity; acknowledgement and valuation of the other especially in terms of race and gender; historical period marked by a change of paradigm transcending the fundamental proposals, operation models and cosmology of the previous modern epoch; ecological perspective on the world tending to pass beyond the modern obsession of dominance and control; post-structural movement in terms of decentralization and orientation towards extremities, edges and not towards the center like in the case of modernism.

Preoccupied with outlining the main characteristics of postmodernism, many authors (Leicester, 2000; Macavei, 2001: 16-19; Cheek, Gough, 2005; Ishiyama,

Breuning, 2011; Ekanem, Esikot, 2013) have elaborated listings of characteristics, mostly in comparison with the particularities of modernism (apud Mogonea, Mogonea, 2014). Thus, *modernism* has the following specific characteristics: rationality, logical rigor, strict delimitation, determination, certitude, specific style, conformism, linearity, control, fixity, permanence, imitation, continuity, centralization, unity, convenience, certitude, and cultural nature. Metanarrations, meta-speech acts, as well as metacritics are characteristic to the modern paradigm.

On the other hand, *postmodernism* is characterized by: alternatives, variants, giving up limits, borders, indetermination, ambivalence, mixture of styles, dispute, rebellion, mobility, ephemeral and immediate nature, originality, discontinuity, decentralization, fragmentation, tolerance, incertitude, skepticism, intercultural relation, different perspective of each individual on the systems of values, disappearance of the unique moral, eclecticism, valuation of multiple perspectives, indeterminance (a concept formed, according to Ihab Hassan's opinion, from indetermination and immanence). Postmodernism capitalizes on the post-analytical and post-structural thinking which is not confident in the possibility of valorizing metanarrations. As a cultural paradigm, the main characteristic of postmodernism is deconstruction (Sandu, 2010). Also, it promotes reflection and playful practices (Usher, Edwards, 2003). Postmodernism states that significances are socially constructed with the possibility of multiple realities coexisting simultaneously (Popkewitz et al; Wallace, Wolf; Giddens, Kieran, 2006). In the educational field, there are authors (Joița, 2009) who consider postmodernity as an essential paradigm for the evolution of the field. Joița establishes, comparatively, a few characteristics of modernism/modernity and postmodernism/postmodernity, respectively, for the educational field (2009: 191). Hence, modernism has the following specific particularities: priority of rigorous information, objectivity of interpretations, domination of the experiment, predominance of quantitative interpretations, elaboration of theories, especially deductive ones, excessive promotion of conceptions without their complex verification which is specific to the field. On the other hand, postmodernism is characterized by: orientation towards the internal specific of the field approached through intra-, inter- and transdisciplinary correlations, primary critical and constructive study of the educational practice with its typical and untypical facts and determinations, valuing subjectivity and the social, flexible approaches of different aspects, phenomena, elaboration of interpretations, multiple reflections and complex and contextual explanations.

One of the most important objectives of the current postmodern education must be the promotion of the moral education, namely the axiological education (Rajshree, 2012). Also, preparing teenagers for an intercultural society, for acceptance of diversity, opinions and ideas of the others, developing a tolerant attitude towards the others or an attitude towards the appreciation of cultural values as well as towards the understanding of social factors that help individual and social modeling, are also objectives of the present education (Haghighat, Sajjadi, Naeini, 2013). We should also mention several other topics of the postmodern education (Rajshree, 2012): promoting critical thinking, promoting research, valuing cooperation in learning, encouraging the differentiated teaching.

As a result of an analysis carried out on the Romanian learning system, Ulrich establishes several weaknesses such as (Ulrich, 2007): placing the accent on the transmission and reproduction of knowledge and not on the production and use of the knowledge by the students, rigorous disciplinary separations and poor interdisciplinary approach, limited possibilities to achieve individualized training processes, egalitarianism,

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centralism, usage of local or national standards in the context of knowledge globalization, emphasis on the general qualifications, encyclopedic projection of development as expansion. Starting from one of postmodernism's characteristics, namely the decentralization one, Stan talks about the teacher's path towards the "edges" and the students' path towards the "center", that is to say the inversion of the relation between the object and the subject of education as a necessity of the present school in which, states the author, "teachers are modern and students are postmodern" (Stan, 2004). The current educational paradigms place the student in the center of the instructive-educational process, namely the learning activity. On the other hand, although it no longer represents the "center" of power and authority, the teacher multiplies his roles in the classroom.

Tomar (2014: 52) mentions some characteristics of the present society, which are closely related to the axiological training and orientation and which can be considered significant for the Romanian society and educational system: changing the axiological system within the family, even to the nuclear/elementary one, due to the fact that parents spend less and less time with their children; the educational system promotes superficiality; the rapid evolution of technique and technology, emphasizing the importance of the material leads to a decrease of the cultural and moral standards; the negative influence of mass-media in the axiological orientation of youngsters, by means of the models and violence that it promotes and which have a negative effect on the children and youngsters; the excessive urbanisation has a negative effect on the cultural and authentic values, including here socialization.

Considering the described characteristics of postmodernism, at present, the problem of the axiological education of students is more and more debated despite the fact that we are witnessing both a mixture of these characteristics as well as the downfall of absolute values and their variation. In this respect, we remind the theory of Gergen regarding the saturated self (Ovadia, 2003), which is based on the idea that the new communication technologies that facilitate the relations between people affect perception of self-consciousness, due to a "saturation" of the individual who has been exposed to an increase in the number of social interactions, as a consequence of the rapid development of communication technologies. Gergen's theory is based on two causal relations. First of all, the progress in the field of technology has given the opportunity for many persons to be exposed to different cultural systems. Secondly, the increase in the exposure to different sets of values and ideas in these cultures has led to the development of a "postmodern self", characterized by the simultaneous increase in the number of values which are considered to be important for the individual and by the abandonment of the modernist idea according to which some universal truths can be found among many ideas and values that the individual "absorbs" from his cultural exposures. The personality of the present man has to have as essential attributes innovative potential, cultural creativity and the ability to accomplish an efficient dialogue with nature (Taranenko, 2014).

The specialists in the field of education insist on the necessity to form the axiological autonomy and competence as the latter are goals of the values education (Cucos, 2000). Both the education and teaching must relate to principles such as: the principle of the universality of the axiological criterion, the principle of the correlation between education, self-education and permanent education, the principle of the tripartite relation individual-group-community (Macavei, 2001). Certain current educational paradigms make possible the achievement of these desiderates. We mention, within this context, the constructivist paradigm which implies construction and deconstruction, reflection, the promotion of the autonomy of both critical and creative thinking, the

acceptance of different opinions and interculturality, the stimulation of cognitive and metacognitive factors as well as of non-intellectual and personality factors and last but not least the valuation of mistakes as a source for learning (DeVries, Zan, 2005; Joița, 2006; Cook-Sather, 2008; Cubukcu, 2009).

Tomar (2014: 52-53) suggests some ways that can contribute to the axiological education of the youngsters by: involving all the members who belong to the school community (students, parents, teachers, community, other members); respecting the same value system in all that concerns the school activity, namely to harmonise the school mission with the objectives and the value system; the school politics; the behaviour of the “actors” implied in the educational field; the Curriculum and the materials for all the school subjects, the teaching – learning process, the methodologies; the school culture and the school environment; accepting and respecting the idea that a good education can be accomplished only by a good cooperation between the school and parents; taking full advantage of the real potential of each student; exploiting the students’ experience and the concrete situations for learning certain values and for training the appropriate behaviour; pedagogical interventions such as: exploiting group activity, giving equal chances to all students, encouraging and motivating them, creating opportunities for building the knowledge by means of collaboration, which facilitate learning, the preoccupation for training skills, for empowering students, for gaining independence and autonomy, encouraging reflection and self-evaluation, developing a superior level of critical thinking, exploiting the methodologies which can best adapt students’ possibilities and potential; developing a specific culture for each institution, based on authentic values; creating an open, flexible and creative environment, based on fundamental values; implying students in different programmes which contribute to the understanding and respecting the specific cultural values and traditions; stimulating self-discipline and the sense of responsibility, based on a strong inner motivation; developing the sense of responsibility has to be accomplished within the local, national and global context; promoting certain values such as: compassion, correctness of decisions, honesty at work; offering students the possibility to learn and to evolve by their active involvement, which meets the community needs; encouraging students to help the others to learn and to accept themselves as being different.

The training and development of personality, on the moral-axiological dimension may encounter a series of difficulties or risks confirmed by the educational practice (Dracinshi, 2012): 1. when setting up operational objectives, in terms of observable and measurable behaviors (being well known the fact that the attitudinal dimension is more difficult to be made operational); 2. when adapting the curricular contents specific to the development of the personality; 3. when choosing the strategies, the most suitable methods and techniques and the most efficient action modalities; 4. when allotting enough time in the general context of the curriculum. The axiological dimension represents an important component of the teacher’s competence profile. The (post)modern society needs teachers characterized by a holistic vision over the world, by professionalism, a high personal and professional culture and whose activity is based on respect in what it concerns certain significant professional values which are universal (Bondarchuk, Pecherska, 2013).

Research methods

In order to investigate the importance of the axiological component in building the personality of the future teacher, we conducted an empirical research whose aim was

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to identify some concrete ways to promote and carry out the axiological education in school.

The pursued *objectives* were the following: investigate the subjects' opinion on the importance and content of values education within the general context of stimulating all education's dimensions in order to build a harmonious personality; find out the ways to achieve the axiological education and to form the axiological competence of the young, in the general social context characterized by relativity when perceiving values; identify efficient ways in the initial training of teachers regarding the axiological education, following the analysis of the Curriculum of the Program of didactical professionalization.

The research hypotheses were the following: 1. from the perspective of the values education, the training of students as future teachers can also be a premise for the practice of didactical competences necessary for the education of teenagers, from an axiological point of view; 2. the constructivist paradigm in education promotes educational ideas and practices specific to postmodernism.

The focus group consisted of 104 students – future teachers, within the University of Craiova (Faculty of Letters and Faculty of Economic Sciences) and Babeş-Bolyai University, from Cluj-Napoca (Faculty of Psychology).

The research methods used were: a survey containing 7 items (annex 1) applied to students and a focus group interview containing 4 questions (annex 2).

The survey included closed questions with multiple-choice answers and aimed at finding out the subjects' opinion on the axiological education of teenagers, namely its importance in building personality in relation with other dimensions of education (either traditional or new ones) (items 1-2); the role of educational factors in developing the axiological competence and autonomy of teenagers (item 3); the role of the teacher in the axiological education of teenagers (item 4); sharing material values and moral values respectively, in teenagers' axiological system (item 5); the extent to which the preference for different categories of values influences the teenagers' school and professional options (item 6). The last item of the survey required students to express their opinion on the outline of postmodernism's particularities in education.

The interview guide included four questions which aimed at the following: conducting an analysis of the Curriculum of the Didactical Professionalization Program, from the perspective of the axiological education's possibilities of being achieved; suggesting several efficient ways for the training of teachers; harmonizing the educational paradigms with the demands of society; elaborating optional disciplines to achieve the axiological education.

Findings and discussions

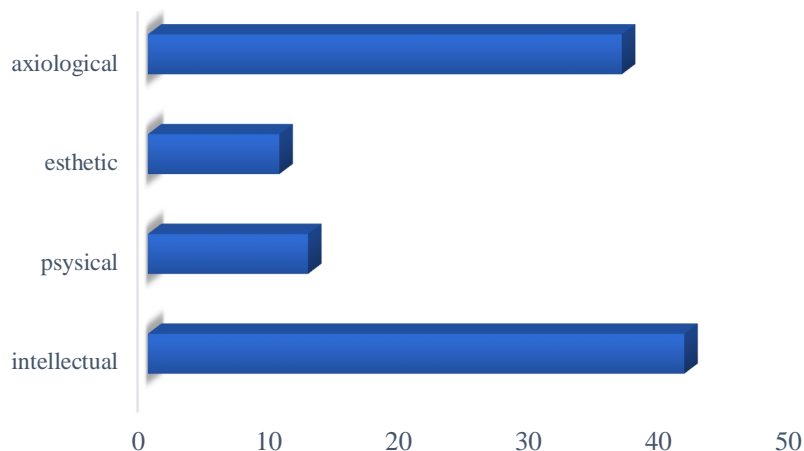
The use of the two research instruments has led to certain results.

Hence, the survey has given access to the subjects' opinion on the issue of education in school, seen from the future teachers' perspective.

The first item of the questionnaire asked the subjects to prioritize, according to their importance (4 the most important, 1 the least important) the following dimensions of education: a) intellectual education; b) physical education; c) aesthetic education; d) axiological education.

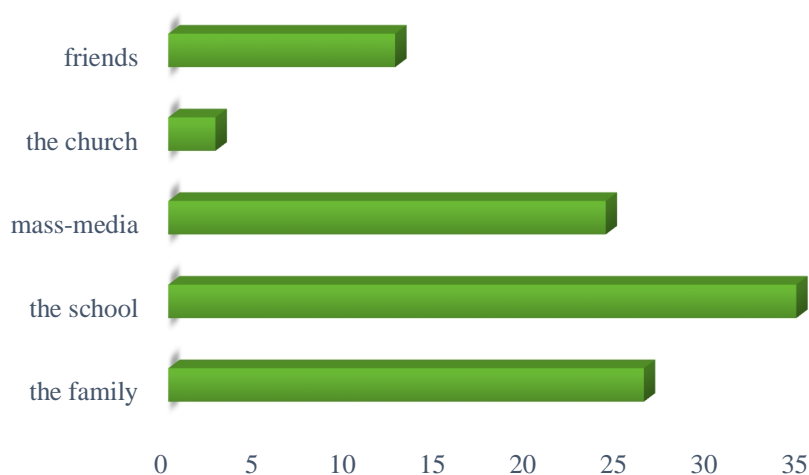
The answers given by the subjects on the first item of the survey have underlined the great significance attributed to the axiological education (being the second, after the intellectual education) as one can also notice from graph no.1.

Graph 1. The opinion of future-teachers students on the importance of the dimensions of education



The second item investigated the subjects' opinion on the importance of the education for values in shaping a harmonious personality, the response options were: a) yes; b) no; c) cannot appreciate. Most of the respondents (71%) appreciate the importance of the axiological education in the training of teachers. Regarding the influential factors, from an axiological point of view, the young, the school and the family are faced with a strong competition from mass media (graph no. 2).

Graph 2. Students' opinion on the factors influencing the axiological education of the young

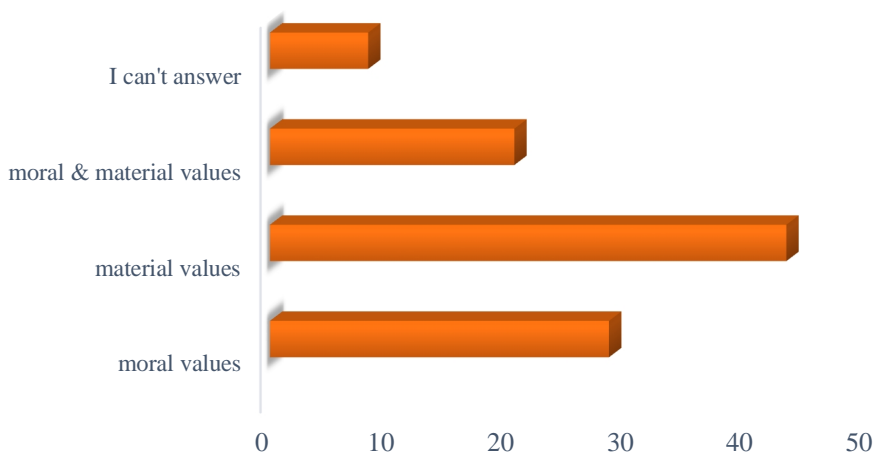


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Item no. 3 asked the students – future teachers to prioritize, according to their importance (5 - the most important, 1 – the least important) the following factors which influence the axiological education of youngsters: a) family; b) school; c) mass-media; d) church; e) friends.

The answers revealed that in what it concerns the factors which influence the youngsters from the axiological point of view, school and family are strongly competed by mass-media (graph 2). Given the age period we are referring to (adolescence), the group of friends plays an important role as well. Nevertheless, the school, namely teachers, continues to account for main reference point in building one's own system of values. Regarding the question about the possibility of the teacher to decisively influence the youngsters' axiological training (with the response options: a) yes; b) no; c) cannot appreciate), most of the subjects (73%) sustained this possibility. Item no. 5 investigated the subjects' opinion on the hierarchy of the values in the axiological system of youngsters, namely: a) moral, spiritual values; b) material values; c) both categories; d) cannot appreciate. According to the opinion of a large number of students (43%), material values are more appreciated by the teenagers of our days in comparison with the moral and spiritual values (28%).

Graph 3. Students' considerations regarding the categories of values preferred by the young



Closely related to this hierarchy of values, the penultimate question asked the students' opinion on the possible relationship between the axiological system of youngsters and their school or professional option, the response options were: a) yes; b) no; c) cannot appreciate.

The answers revealed that the preference for these values influences to a great extent the teenagers' school and professional options, as we can see from the answers to the penultimate question of the survey. The subjects were also questioned on the postmodernist traits of education (item no. 7 of the questionnaire). Students' considerations on the particularities of postmodernism in education are shown in table 1.

Table 1. Students' considerations on the particularities of postmodernism in education

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Appreciating diversity</i>	86.3
<i>Encouraging multiple interpretations</i>	72.4
<i>Situational, contextual learning</i>	67.3
<i>Promoting reflection</i>	34.5
<i>Capitalizing on the individuality</i>	78.1
<i>Eclecticism</i>	76.6
<i>Encouraging alternatives, variants</i>	45.1
<i>Deconstruction</i>	64.8
<i>Playful practices</i>	21.1
<i>Social learning</i>	35.6

As one can notice, the characteristics considered to be representative for the spirit of postmodernism are the following: appreciation of diversity; eclecticism; encouragement of multiple interpretations, of individuality as well as of situational, contextual learning. In order to establish the significance degree of these particularities in relation to the general ones, specific to postmodernism, we employed Pearson correlation coefficient. In table 2, one can find the characteristics which obtained significant values at the 0.01 significance level.

Table 2. Values of Pearson correlation coefficient

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Pearson correlation coefficient</i>
<i>Appreciating diversity</i>	,232**
<i>Encouraging multiple interpretations</i>	,214**
<i>Situational, contextual learning</i>	,203**
<i>Capitalizing on the individuality</i>	,214**
<i>Eclecticism</i>	,212**
<i>Deconstruction</i>	,201**

Most of these particularities also characterize the postmodern constructivist paradigm in education. Following the interview conducted with 26 students selected from the group of 104, several considerations were expressed regarding the training of future teachers from the perspective of the axiological education. The first question of the interview guide pursued an analysis of the educational Plan of the Program for the didactic professionalization and mentioning the disciplines which can help the training of future teachers to accomplish the axiological education. The analysis of the Curriculum of the Didactical Professionalization Program pointed out the existence of limited situations, contexts and issues with respect to the carrying out of the axiological education. Except for Pedagogy I that deals with the dimensions of education (including the axiological education), there are no direct opportunities in this respect. In addition, students

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experience the deficiency of the pedagogical practice in general, and in particular, as it concerns the axiological education, they feel the need for situations in which they could practice the skills specific to the didactical profession. The second question gave students the possibility to formulate certain opinions on the modalities which are considered to be the most efficient in training the teachers' ability to accomplish the education for values in school. Another question asked to the respondents was bound to the concordance between the present educational paradigms and the needs and expectations of the society. The students' answers showed a discrepancy between the two dimensions, namely between the social needs, materialized in competence profiles and educative practices, which are sometimes discrepant or uncompetitive. Of the most efficient ways for the development of teacher competence in order to achieve values education within school, students mentioned insistently the teaching models that promote situational, contextual learning. Acquiring competences is best done by putting the learner in real situations similar to those he will come across in the real world. This is one of the reasons for which students appreciated the constructivist paradigm as being one of the educational paradigms in accordance with the demands and exigencies of the society. Constructivism promotes and capitalizes on the critical thinking, reflection, situationism and contextualism as well as interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity, multiple interpretations, and last but not least the correlation between personal experience and the experience of the group members, which are characteristics promoted by postmodernism. Another problem taken into discussion with the students was the following: "within the context of the school-based curriculum, which are the appropriate school disciplines for the education for values?"

Students also elaborated suggestions for optional disciplines that can contribute to the education of students, in the spirit of authentic values: *Values education; My axiological system; Values and non-values in art; The kitsch and the authentic values; Classic and modern* etc. They also mentioned other means that can contribute to the development of personality on its axiological dimension: harmonizing the educational finalities with the curricular contents, from the perspective of axiological education; using certain strategies, methods and techniques appropriate for the shaping of the value system, according to the age; extra-curricular activities which promote the authentic values, correlated with the curricular ones; volunteering activities, which can stimulate the development of certain character traits and of certain social adequate attitudes; different educational partnership made between the school and community or between the school and socio-cultural institutions; organizing different contests, scientific, cultural or sports events; implying in projects or programmes related to the theme of values; implying in actions which aim to improve personal development, school and professional orientation, according to the possibilities, aptitudes and interests of the student.

Conclusions

Having initially emerged in art and architecture, postmodernism expanded into all fields of the scientific, cultural and social life. The characteristics and ideas promoted by this trend are also felt in the way education is conceived and carried out. Connected to society, education must adjust to changes that are emerging and must come up with solutions to solve crises. One of its dimensions, determined and dominated by the postmodern conception, is the axiological education. In a world dominated by eclecticism, uncertainty and diversity, the young people feel disoriented, trying to find their way in life

and build their axiological system. The current educational paradigms try to solve this problem by offering methods to prepare the young to cope with these situations.

The present study investigated the opinion of the students – future teachers on the importance of the axiological education and of training the axiological consciousness and behaviour of youngsters, according to the theory of values. The importance of this educational dimension is admitted within the present social, cultural and economical context. But students consider that the present curricula of the Program for teacher training promotes only tangentially the axiological education by a number of themes (which are not many) from the school curriculum. They formulate concrete proposals bound to the curricular options and certain curricular elements (as the educational finalities, contents or strategies), which can be improved.

The constructivist paradigm is considered to be efficient in promoting this dimension of education, by its specific procedural and actionable means, such as: shaping a specific way of seeing reality, according to the individual traits, but then made relative through the influence of the opinion of the belonging group; the implications of the non-cognitive personality factors in interiorizing the values and in creating the necessary motivation for respecting these values; practicing the specific behaviours, as a reflection of the interiorized values, by placing students in various educational situations, similar to those from the real life. These examples and suggestions represent a plea for promoting the axiological education, as an essential dimension of the (post)modern man.

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Annex 1. Opinion survey

1. Please grade the following dimensions of education depending on their importance (4 – the most important; 1-the least important):
 - a) intellectual education
 - b) physical education
 - c) esthetic education
 - d) axiological education
2. Do you consider important the values education in developing a harmonious personality?
 - a) yes
 - b) no
 - c) couldn't say
3. Please mention, according to their importance (5-the most important, 1-the least important), the following factors that influence the axiological education of the young:
 - a) family
 - b) school
 - c) mass media

- d) church
- e) group of friends
- 4. Do you reckon that the teacher can decisively influence the development of the axiological education of the young?
 - a) yes
 - b) no
 - c) couldn't say
- 5. In your opinion, which category of values within the axiological system is the predominant one:
 - a) moral, spiritual values
 - b) material values
 - c) both categories
 - d) couldn't say
- 6. The young people's school or professional options are influenced by the importance of these values:
 - a) yes
 - b) no
 - c) couldn't say
- 7. Please choose the specific educational characteristics of postmodernism from the list below:

Characteristics	
Appreciating diversity	
Encouraging multiple interpretations	
Situational, contextual learning	
Promoting reflection	
Capitalizing on the individuality	
Eclecticism	
Encouraging alternatives, variants	
Deconstruction	
Playful practices	
Social learning	

Annex 2. Focus group interview

1. By analyzing the Curriculum of the didactical professionalization Program, please mention the disciplines whereby the training of future teachers can be carried out in order to achieve the axiological education.
2. Which are the most efficient ways to develop the teachers' competence in order to achieve values education within school?
3. Do you consider that the current educational paradigms are in accordance with the needs of society regarding the promotion of values?
4. In the context of the school's curriculum, what are the disciplines that you consider appropriate for the values education?

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