Teacher of Social Sciences and Post-Pandemic Challenges. Considerations Regarding the Moral-Civic Education of Students

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Abstract: Some of the social changes caused by the effects of the pandemic, expected right from the beginning of this episode with a major impact on humanity, are felt both in personal value systems and in interpersonal relationships infiltrated by axiological redefinition. It is difficult, at this moment, to realize how each individual reoriented his values and what is the direction of social transformation, but we are at a time of questions and challenges: how teachers will manage the influences of the social environment in moral-civic education (a process, moreover, challenging in the pre-pandemic period), which categories of values will dominate in these influences, how much of the "old pedagogy" can be applied in the context of a "different world" and how does this world actually look like? Do we tend to become more individualistic by activating the conservation instinct, or more oriented towards others in a developed, pandemic civility, through solidarity? Maybe a little more than the others, because their role is to facilitate the understanding of this dynamic, social science teachers are faced with a new responsibility: to calibrate the value orientations between two worlds, to find ways for continuity, but also for becoming. For some of them, these approaches can be facilitated by experience, but how students – future social sciences teachers - receive such challenges, is contained through the results of a research in this article.

Keywords: Education; value; future; teachers; society

1. Introduction

The year 2020 marked a global threshold of transition and redefinition: of relationships, communication, values and trust in many social and institutional mechanisms. The health crisis generated by the pandemic has dislodged operating principles, routines and beliefs from various systems that have been adapted and reintegrated into new systems. While in the general social system, for example, communication channels have obviously multiplied and been perfected to compensate for the limitations of human

interactions, in the individual axiological system, by the nature of its diversity and uniqueness, common redefining tendencies are more difficult to identify. However, some expressions used in the last two years, including in social media, the frequency of which has increased as a result of the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine and other social movements, concern "life before 2020", "the world that will never be the same", "the fracture between two worlds", "the unrecognised happiness before the pandemic". In this context, it is to be assumed that many people may be faced with value disorientation, and may find it difficult to choose between individual or social axiological springs. Certainly, at least two values have been taken up in many individual systems or repositioned in the hierarchy: health and peace. Under these circumstances, since education has, by definition, an axiological foundation, the questions are natural: how will teachers manage the influences of the social environment in moral and civic education (a process, incidentally, also challenging in the pre-pandemic period), which categories of values will dominate in these influences, how much of the 'old pedagogy' can still be applied in the context of a 'different world' and what does this world actually look like? Of course, any teacher, regardless of the subject they teach, should reflect on the answers, but social science teachers are the ones who direct the process of moral and civic education explicitly towards the formation of students' value systems.

2. Education and values in the context of social change. The role of the social science teacher

The concept that "civic culture is pluralistic, combining traditional and modern culture, based on communication, a culture of consensus and diversity, which allows but also shapes change" (Ursu, 2005), encompasses the current social reality. Traditional culture, fundamentally created axiologically by means of general-human values, is developing, in line with social development and the challenges it poses, values adapted to the modern world. This reconfiguration mechanism, which is natural and intrinsic to evolution, can lead to disorientation, confusion and sometimes a crisis of values at individual, micro- and even macro-social level. The benchmarks to which people relate are important because " the adopted system of values determines the structure of a human's life, a correct hierarchy helps fully answer the questions about the meaning and goal of one's existence" (Zubrzycka-Maciąg & Goliszek, 2020).

If we refer to students, who go through the period of personality formation, axiological benchmarks are all the more important, as they

constitute the core of the development of character traits. Teachers, by the nature of their profession, are role models, mentors, builders of confidence and personality, facilitators of understanding and of in-depth analysis. They are among those who actively participate in the creation of students' individual axiological field, therefore ”it is the task of educators to help their pupils not only to discover moral values, but also to show their connection with the meaning and purpose of human life; to allow pupils to understand that values are arranged in a specific system and have an objective hierarchy” (Zubrzycka-Maciąg & Goliszek, 2020). On the other hand, the evolution of science, technology, communications, lifestyle, can create areas of low adherence when it comes to shared values between teacher and pupils/students. Of course, the solution lies in adapting to generational characteristics, bearing in mind that young people are more oriented towards pragmatic values, are more anchored in virtual life, in self-education with the help of online sources. Even so,”technologization and digitalization should not be approached as a goal in themselves; digital transformation processes should be based on universal human values and preserve the unique sociocultural code of a nation” (Gordienko et al., 2016). Harmonisation between traditional and modern values should not necessarily mean giving up some values, replacing them, creating others. The preservation of the social or individual axiological system can be ensured by relating values to new contexts, by adapting them to change. This is why the task of moral and civic education is not an easy one for social science teachers, who bear a large part of the responsibility for this harmonisation. The effects of the social earthquakes that began in 2020 further emphasise the need that” teachers must be enlightened about the content and scope of the values taught directly in social studies courses”(Celikkaya & Filoglu, 2014). In addition, a moral and social education adapted to these transformations is a good support for learning for life, for continuous adaptation to more or less predictable changes: ”when the learning process is truly oriented to the lives and learning of the students, the boundaries of the school become much more open to the surrounding community, and education becomes a social rather than a mechanistic process” (Senge, 2016). Whereas ”the purpose of moral-civic education lies in the formation of the individual as a moral subject who feels, thinks and acts in the spirit of the requirements and demands of social morality, as a good citizen, with an engaging civic behaviour” (Barna & Antohe, 2006), a goal valid in any society, it is essential that the value axis is directed individually-socially, traditionally-

currently, and that the bridge between the "two worlds" (before and after 2020) is built axiologically.

3. Aim and objectives of the study

The aim of the study was to identify sets of values that social science students consider relevant to their future teaching profession, and how they relate to the relationship between these values and social transformations in recent years.

The objectives aimed to activate a reflexive process in relation to the value coordinates of moral-civic and social education, to investigate professional-axiological dominances in the group under investigation and to analyse some trends in how future teachers will manage change from a value perspective.

4. Sample and research methodology

The observational-descriptive research was carried out between June and October 2022 on a sample of 57 social science students (History, Sociology, Social Work) enrolled in the psycho-pedagogical training programme for the teaching profession. By using the questionnaire survey, the students participating in the study were directed to choose sets of values representative of the self and/or the society and to engage in a reflective process on the relevance of these values in situations of social change. The research instrument included items to facilitate the quantification of results through both objective and qualitative assessment: *Should a social science teacher reflect more than teachers of other subjects on the values underlying education?* (Yes, because moral-civic or social education specifically requires a solid axiological basis./No. Every teacher, regardless of the subject taught, must reflect deeply on values, because every teacher educates.); *Do you think that a social science teacher should be guided, in particular, by:* Personal values (health, success, religion, social recognition, family, etc.);/ Sociocultural values (truth, freedom, respect, democracy, justice, diversity, responsibility, etc.)/ Moral values (generosity, modesty, altruism, loyalty, honesty, etc.); *Which of the following sets of values best represents you in relation to your future profession?* (Flexibility, tolerance, diversity, adaptability, novelty./ Correctness, thoroughness, study, tradition, sustainability./ Kindness, joy, friendship, cooperation, communication.); *Do you think that before March 2020 you would have chosen another set of values in response to the previous question?* (Yes/No/Don't know); *Do you think that:* A lot has changed in the last two years and the values you

were brought up with should be reconsidered or replaced; / The changes of the last two years should not influence the axiological direction, because values are constant at all times; *How prepared do you feel to face the professional challenges that are triggered by social transitions?* (Very prepared./ Quite prepared and I am confident that I will adapt along the way./ There have been major changes in the last two years and I have some doubts./ I don't feel prepared, I still don't know which values are the right ones for education now and in the future). The examples included in the questionnaire items were intended to guide and clarify the respondents, without aiming to induce them the answers. The results of the study were interpreted both quantitatively and qualitatively, containing a description of how the future social science teachers in the group researched relate axiologically to their professional mission: the moral-civic and social education of the students they will train in the future.

5. Results and discussion

With reference to social science teachers it is often said that they are the main shapers of students' personalities, since they teach subjects that contribute to a large extent to the formation and development of their personalities, especially the character component. From a curricular perspective, if we consider subjects such as civic culture, moral and civic education and social education, this is true, as the explicit value content is easier to identify in school curricula than in other subjects. However, every teacher, regardless of the subject he or she teaches, is responsible for axiological education, even if some of the methods and means used are implicit. The students participating in the study agreed with this reality to a significant extent (63%), choosing the answer: every teacher, regardless of the subject taught, must reflect deeply on values, because every teacher educates. In order to achieve an optimal moral and social education, it is necessary for social science teachers to have a core of values in their personal value system, which allows them to be multiplied in the educational area and to be authentically highlighted in the process of school modelling. Ideally, a teacher's personal value system should also include moral and socio-cultural values, even though personal values, which are unique in the way they are combined and prioritised, can also personalise educational approaches. The choices of the students in the group investigated for the set of socio-cultural values (truth, freedom, respect, democracy, justice, diversity, responsibility, etc.), in 66% of cases, express maturity and understanding of the fact that individual development depends on relationships with others, on the smooth

functioning of society, on the adaptation to the demands of social morality; "in fact, the content of moral education develops active links with society, with its characteristics and demands regarding the formation of the ethical profile of the personality" (Bontaș, 1998). This percentage of responses indicates an orientation towards education for society, which cannot be lacking in moral values (generosity, modesty, altruism, loyalty, honesty, etc.), which were chosen by 25% of the students. Even personal values (health, success, religion, family, etc.), chosen by a percentage of 9%, are relevant in educational relationships, because "we cannot imagine sincerity, fidelity, respect and others, except as an orientation towards another, from which we should not move away at any moment, it being about the value solidarity of human actions: the behavior of responsibility for others, subject to the value requirement" (Călin, 1996).

For the answers to the question *Which of the following sets of values best represents you in relation to your future profession?*, three coordinates were set: 1. Change-adaptation (flexibility, tolerance, diversity, adaptability, novelty) - 40%; 2. Tradition-stability (fairness, thoroughness, study, tradition, sustainability) - 37%; 3. Educational climate (kindness, enjoyment, friendliness, cooperation, communication) - 23%. Because the choice of one coordinate should not exclude the others (some students said they found it difficult to mark only one set), the question included the wording "best" so as to determine the preference for a style of working with students and not a unidirectional value orientation. Change-adaptation does not mean giving up tradition and stability, just as a stimulating educational climate, based on good communication, can be created regardless of the choice for one coordination or another. This explains the balance between the percentages of choice for the first two sets of values, with respondents giving them equal importance. Given the social transformations that the pandemic has brought about, including the value reordering that its effects have brought about, students were asked to reflect on whether they would have chosen the same set of values or the same coordinate before March 2020. A majority of respondents (67%) said "yes", which confirms that a reassessment of values does not necessarily mean giving up some of them, and that students were already in a process of education for change in 2020. The 79% choice of "The changes of the last two years should not influence the axiological direction, because values are constant at all times" confirms the relative stability of the individual value system. This percentage reinforces the belief that the bridge between two worlds can only be built axiologically, a belief that could be scientifically reformulated as a hypothesis

in a broader research. In response to the question *How prepared do you feel to face the professional challenges that are triggered by social transitions?* the majority of respondents (65%) declared themselves to be optimistic, confident in their ability to adapt. 12% of respondents felt very prepared for change, 16% had some doubts about the future and 7% felt unprepared, probably at a stage of individual axiological reconfiguration. Again, these results lead us to believe that the students in the group investigated, part of the current generation, have adapted more quickly and effectively to the challenges of recent years, and that the much talked and written about pandemic fault line is less evident in their perception. Thus, with a solid set of values in their personal structure, they can optimally carry out the process of moral and civic education of the students they will have in their classrooms.

6. Conclusions

Moral and civic education remains one of the chances for social health and can have good effects in spite of general and particular contexts that reflect tensions, antisocial behaviour and deterioration of interpersonal relations. "Perfected, the content of moral-civic education can contribute to the improvement of some social components" (Bontaş, 1998). Even if a single teacher cannot change the world through his or her education, he or she can shape from an axiological and character-behavioural perspective the development of a group of pupils, who will in turn become part of society. Social science teachers have a key role to play in this, as some of the subjects they teach are explicitly oriented towards education through and for values, morality and the harmonisation of the self with society. The students carrying out the initial training for the teaching profession, even if they have recently experienced the transformations brought about by the pandemic, are confident in their own axiological construction. These transformations have not led to the dissolution of axiological landmarks, but to re-assessments, doubts, confusions that can be managed through education and self-education. In practice, nothing has changed in this respect compared to the pre-pandemic period, education being, even then, the main resource for social and individual development. The "old pedagogy" with its traditions and stability, in the view of the students interviewed, can be in a good balance with current pedagogical paradigms, adapted to both social developments and the individual needs of students.

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