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
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
analysis only with the independent variable former teaching experience. The structure of the group was as follows: 13 students (32.5%) have had former teaching experience and 27 students (67.5%) have had no former teaching experience.

4. Findings

We shall further synthetically present the results obtained for each separate item.

The results obtained for Item no. 1 – The first three values that I believe in most, in order of relevance – reveal a hierarchy of the values in which the rank I values are 2 values that are not shared by the two subgroups. Different as names but close, if not identical, in content, they are under the same area of moral values, equity, 20 p., for the students without teaching experience and truth, 14 p., for the students with experience. Rank II is illustrated by the same value, good, with almost similar scores for the two subgroups (14, respectively 12 p.) and rank III consists of 2 different values, sincerity, 10 p. for the students without experience, respectively seriousness, 7 p., for the students with experience.

The analysis of the results obtained for Item no. 2 – In relation to my work, the value that concerns me most is... did not allow the identification of a shared value for any of the ranks, for the two subgroups. We have marked the rank I value with the highest number of options, responsibility, for the students without experience and the values of professionalism, equity and truth, with 2 options, for the students with experience. Among the other rank II values there are highlighted good, education, knowledge, equity with 2 options for the students without experience and success, perfection, constant education, seriousness, good, training, empathy with one option for the students with experience.

Analyzing and systematizing the data obtained for Item no. 3 – The most important value for the activity of a student is... leads to a majority of different values, but also to one shared value. For rank I, the students with no experience believe that will, with 5 options, is the most important value, whereas the students with experience believe in study, 3 options for the students with experience, and in seriousness on equal positions with truth, 2 options for the students with experience. Also for rank III there have been identified different values. The students without experience cherish two psychological dimensions, perseverance and motivation to the same extent, 3 options, whereas relevant for the students with experience are scrupulosity, perseverance and realism, 1 option each. The value of studying comes across as a value shared by the 2 subgroups, although on different ranks. Besides these, personality volitional, character and motivational traits are also appreciated.

The results obtained for Item no. 4 – I believe that, in today’s world, the most dangerous counter-values (Name 3 counter-values in order of relevance) ... allowed us to establish a hierarchy of the most rejected counter-values. It is interesting that the values regarded as rank I values by the students of the 2 investigated subgroups (malice, 23 p., the students with no experience, respectively deceit, 24 p., the students with experience) should occur as inverted for rank II, deceit, 22 p., the students with no experience, respectively malice, 9 p., the students with experience), which means that although with different scores and in different orders, they repudiate the same values. Rank III is slightly represented by the counter-value of irresponsibility, 6 p., for the students without experience, and cowardice, 4 p., for the students with experience. All the values invoked are of a moral order.

The analysis of the data collected for Item no. 5 – I believe that the main values that higher education should inculcate to students – future teachers are ... (Name 3 values in order of relevance) highlights a set of 6 values: rank I, professionalism, 18 p., for the students with teaching experience, responsibility, 16 p., for the students without teaching experience; rank II patience, 14 p., for the students without teaching experience and seriousness, 6 p., for the students with teaching experience; rank III equity, 10 p., for the students without teaching experience and respect, 5 p., for the students with teaching experience. All these are converted into aspects of the teacher’s personality profile.

The advices noted for Item no. 6 – If we had our last class tomorrow, I would like to hear from my professors, as a last message, the advice... allow us to highlight the students’ expectations regarding their future professional evolution. We shall here present some of these pieces of advice, which highlight the same focus on moral values:

Students without previous teaching experience – Never give up what you want to do in life! Be yourself and always move forward! Teach from your heart! Be tolerant and never give up in front of difficult trials! Be dignified for what you are doing and always aim higher!
Students with previous teaching experience – Good luck to you and never give up your values! Be good professionals in what you are doing and do it with dedication! Take great care of your students! Do not give up your dreams! Do everything that you do with passion!

The data collected for Item nr. 7 – I believe that the value that will always preserve (save) humankind is... did not allow for the identification of any shared value for either of the subgroups. There is, for the whole interval, a certain dispersion of values. For rank I, with the same number of 5 options, there is love for the others, for the students without experience and truth, for the students with experience. The rank II values are good, with 4 options for the students without experience and love for the others, good, with 2 options for the students with experience. For rank III there are designated 8 values, among which the values shared by all the students are the values of education and equity.

The answers obtained for Item no. 8 – The future society needs the following 3 values (in order of relevance) lead to the systematization, with rather close scores, of the following 5 values: rank I, love for the others, 13p., for the students without experience, respectively truth, 12p, for the students with experience; rank II with the same score, 10p, the values of respect, for the students without experience and equity; rank III, the same value, good, with different scores (12p, respectively 8p).

Comparatively, the final image of the values obtained for each rank and for each subgroup of investigated students is shown in Graph no. 1:

Graph no. 1 – comparative synthetic presentation of the data obtained
5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The results presented and analyzed above allow us to highlight the following conclusions:

1. We were able to identify a set of values on the level of 1\textsuperscript{st} year students who chose the teaching career for primary and preschool education (according to Graph no. 1);

2. Based on the results, we were able to identify differences among the students’ choices of values in relation to the variable teaching experience, even more so as the subgroup of students without teaching experience is twice as large as the subgroup of students with teaching experience. According to Graph no. 1, the students without experience include in their system of values: rank I: good, equity, love for others; rank II: truth, good, patience; rank III: good, equity, responsibility. Taking into consideration only the first value from each rank, we reach an axiological set dominated by the values of good and truth. The students with experience include in their system of values: rank I: truth, professionalism; rank II: good, equity, patience; rank III: good, seriousness, respect. Taking into consideration only the first value from each rank, we reach an axiological set dominated by the values of truth and good;

3. This means that on the level of the group of students, there are no significant differences between the students’ axiological options, leading us to invalidate the hypothesis of the study. With or without didactic experience, the investigated students place good and truth at the basis of the profession for which they are training;

4. In terms of the set of values, out of all the values identified, in relation to the shared axiological options, we were able to draw a final hierarchy of the values for the investigated group (as shown in Graph no. 2);

Graph no. 2 – The set of values shared by the investigated group of students

The results obtained are important precisely because they influence the actions, involvement, study and, implicitly, the entire personal and professional development of students, future teachers in primary and preschool education. Based on this, we intend to follow the evolution of these values throughout the 3 years of study and to perform successive comparative analyses.

References

