



STUDY ON THE ELEMENTS OF MORAL EDUCATION INCLUDED IN THE CURRICULUM DOCUMENTS FOR PRESCHOOL EDUCATION IN ROMANIA (2000-2022)

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Abstract: The particularly complex issue of the curriculum for preschool education remains an open one, given the rapid social changes of the current period, but also the results of research in educational sciences and psychology. All of these force reconsiderations from multiple perspectives, especially related to the cognitive training-development and from the perspective of the child's moral education. The present research aimed to analyze the editions of school programs, the curriculum and methodological benchmarks, official documents approved by the Romanian Ministry of Education, from 2000 to 2022, considering the moral aspects they include. At the same time, a series of comparative analyzes were carried out, at the level of trends, purposes or approach, with similar documents from other countries. The conclusions show that in Romania moral education is not addressed in preschool education as a distinct subject, with its own objectives and contents, some of its own elements are found in other areas addressed by these documents, and the moral model is very little addressed in these documents. Under these conditions, teachers are forced to draw up their own reference documents for the didactic activities they carry out in relation to this classical dimension of education.

Key words: moral education; intercultural education; curriculum; school programs; preschool education.

1. Introduction

Moral education in a person's life most often begins in the family, is formed during kindergarten, primary school, secondary school, develops during high school and continues through an accumulation and transformation of values, models, attitudes and norms throughout life.

The need for the foundations of moral education in the formation of moral behaviors of the individual to be laid in kindergarten is supported by various theories of human development and the stages of moral development proposed by Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg. Thus, in the second stage of moral development in Jean Piaget's conception, called the stage of moral realism (5 - 7 years), the idea of respecting the rules imposed by others appears, children do not question the authority of important mature people in their lives, parents and teachers, and the rules imposed by them are respected, children evaluating moral situations only from the perspective of their consequences and objectives. In the description of moral development proposed by the American psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg, preschool matches to the first level of preconventional morality (3 - 7 years) which includes two stages: orientation through punishment and compliance and that of naive instrumental hedonism: payment for a benefit (Harwood, Miller, & Vasta, 2010).

Recent analyzes propose two perspectives on moral values. The biblical one, supported by the revealed origin of the religious structures that generate them, and that of the behavioral and social sciences, for which the values are promoted and selected in relation to the representative models for a certain historical era, with social development and with the wishes regarding the formation of the students' personality (Opriș, & Opriș, 2015). These represent the two essential benchmarks in the

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design of curriculum documents, with a presence within the school curriculum that depends on the defining set of values promoted at the official level and accepted at the societal level.

2. Research objectives and methodology

The present work aims to present, from the perspective of moral education, an analysis of official documents, school programs, curriculum editions for preschool education from the beginning of the 3rd millennium until now: the school curriculum from 2000, the school curriculum from 2005, the curriculum from 2008, the RFIDT document from 2010, the curriculum from 2019, the methodological letter from 2019 and the national project "Play, respect and joy" from 2022, from Romanian preschool education.

The research approaches the period after the year 2000, given the changes that have occurred: in terms of substance, terminology, but also some new content approaches regarding moral education, in general, respectively the use of the moral model, in particular. Following the analysis of preschool education programs, curriculum editions and some guidelines for their application, we propose to highlight some defining aspects regarding the approach to moral education and especially the moral model, in Romanian preschool education, in the new millennium.

3. Research results

3.1. Aspects regarding moral education in the "Program of instructional-educational activities in kindergarten and Preschool Education Regulation" – 2000

The first document published in Romania in the new millennium is the one from the year 2000, called "The program of instructional-educational activities in the kindergarten and the regulation of preschool education" elaborated and approved by the Ministry of National Education, in accordance with the Education Law no. 84/1995, which states that the educational ideal of Romanian education is "the harmonious development of the individual, free and integral, thus leading to the formation of an autonomous and creative personality, based on the aspirations of Romanian society and contributing to the preservation of national identity" (Parlamentul României, 1995).

Within this program, moral education is not presented as a distinct subject, but we find within the Education for Society subject, a more varied and complex range of its elements, compared to the program and curriculum editions that followed. Among these elements we specify: knowing and respecting the norms of behavior in society, protecting one's own life, but also that of those around; educating the skills to relate to those around; acceptance and compliance with the rules of group coexistence; collaboration with others; self-evaluation of one's own behavior in relation to social norms, situations or characters in stories; adapting behavior to various situations; awareness of the positive or negative consequences of his behavioral acts, on himself, but also on those around him; showing disagreement with the negative attitudes of destruction, disorder and neglect; showing confidence, sincerity and courage in relation to oneself and to others; accepting the diversity of opinions and developing tolerant attitudes towards children of other faiths or other minority categories. A special framework objective is aimed at preschoolers' knowledge of the elements of history, geography, religion, defining elements for the Romanian people. The examples of behavior offered within them deal with the early development of patriotism, through the expression by preschoolers of positive attitudes towards the country and the people, of knowledge of the signs and some particularities of the country, but also of the locality where they live (Preda, & Dumitrana, 2000).

3.2. Analysis of the document "Program of instructional-educational activities in kindergarten and legislation and regulatory documents" - 2005

The next regulatory document for preschool education, developed by the Romanian Ministry of Education, was the "Program of instructional-educational activities in kindergarten and legislation and regulatory documents", published in 2005 and having the same coordinators as the previous edition (Viorica Preda and Magdalena Dumitrana). In this edition, elements of moral education can also be found in the subject "Education for society", focusing mainly on the preschooler's behavior in society, observing the rules of living in a group, social norms, relating to others, forming a positive attitude

towards oneself and towards others. Among the moral behaviors pursued within this subject, we mention: the preschooler's awareness of the positive or negative consequences of his behavioral acts on himself, but also on others; self-evaluation of behavior from the perspective of social norms; knowing one's own responsibilities in the group one belongs to, acquiring autonomy in the daily routine; showing disagreement about the negative attitudes of destruction, disorder, negligence; promoting tolerance for children belonging to other confessions, minorities, or with special needs, but also for different opinions. Regarding the feeling of patriotism, this edition of the program also proposes the same behaviors, with almost identical formulations (Preda, & Dumitrana, 2005).

It can be observed that there are no differences between the two editions of the program regarding the subject Education for Society, in relation to the elements of moral education mentioned within them.

3.3. Analysis of the document "Curriculum for preschool education (3 - 6/7 years)" – 2008

In 2008, the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth developed the "Curriculum for preschool education (3 - 6/7 years old)", which was valid until 2019 (when the curriculum according to which preschool and ante-preschool education operates in present appeared).

The changes are mainly in terms of terminology, organization and very little in content, compared to the previous curriculum developed in 2005. The main novelties appear in the approach of the activities in an integrated manner and in their organization by experiential domains - child development domains. Regarding moral education and the integration of the moral model, there is no clear delimitation, elements of moral education are found within the Human and Society Domain, especially in the subject Education for Society, integrated in this domain (Ministerul Educației, Cercetării și Tineretului Ministerul Educației, Cercetării și Tineretului, 2008).

An analysis of the editions of programs and curriculum for preschool education is presented in the paper, "Project curriculum for the training and development of social and emotional skills in preschoolers", which addresses the formation of social and emotional skills in preschoolers. The work brings to the attention the fact that, in the curriculum edition published in 2008, the contents specific to the field of child development from a social and emotional point of view are found more in the field of Man and Society. In the other fields, they are encountered only sporadically or not found at all. At the same time, the need to introduce these contents into the other experiential fields and formulate a wider set of goals regarding the training and development of social and emotional skills in preschoolers is emphasized (Trifan, 2019).

In this edition of the curriculum (2008), the interest in developing the same moral attitudes and behaviors in preschoolers, presented in the previous curriculum, which focuses on social and individual development, is observed. Emotion education behaviors appear as new elements. For example, the behavior through which the preschooler must show tolerant attitudes towards the emotional reactions expressed around him, even if they are opposite to his own experiences. The way of expressing feelings, ideas, thoughts and behaviors manifested in relation to them is aimed. The development of human values in interdependence with artistic values is suggested, but no examples or clarifications are presented in this regard (Ministerul Educației, Cercetării și Tineretului, 2008).

Although, even in this Curriculum, moral education is not clearly delimited in relation to the other fields, it does not have its own structure, objectives and related contents, it is not presented distinctly, this is the document in which this classic dimension of education appears somewhat more explicitly and more complex, both in relation to the previous curriculum, but also in relation to the Curriculum published in 2019.

A presentation, though very brief, of some moral attitudes and behaviors within the Curriculum elaborated in 2008 can be found in the description of the field Man and Society, considering that the kindergarten represents the optimal formative context for the coordination of principles and moral actions, for the preschoolers' understanding of concepts such as justice, equity, kindness, truth, observed in the behavior of the adults around them. At the same time, kindergarten is considered the optimal formal setting for discussing other moral education topics or for practicing them in different contexts (Ministerul Educației, Cercetării și Tineretului, 2008).

3.4. Analysis of the document "Fundamental benchmarks in early learning and development of the child from birth to 7 years" (RFIDT) - 2010

Analysis of the document RFIDT - "Fundamental benchmarks in the early learning and development of the child from birth to 7 years", developed in 2010 (by a team of authors coordinated by Dr. Mihaela Ionescu) and published on the official website of the Ministry of Education. In the RFIDT document we discover some elements of moral education within the field of Socio-Emotional Development, which is divided into the subfields: social development and emotional development. With regard to social relations, it is stated that the preschooler should be able, at the end of preschool education, to use appropriate politeness formulas in different contexts and it is suggested that the teaching staff provide him with his personal model in these encountered or specially created situations. It is also suggested that he help the child learn to ask adults before deviating from the known rules; include him in adult discussions and discuss with him the mistakes made and the lessons learned from them. The novelty factor is the insistence on the need to eliminate "gender stereotypes", the suggestions in this regard for the teaching staff are to involve girls in the boys' game, or vice versa, specifying that "grouping children according to gender has the right consequences of the strengthening of traditional gender behaviors", even going so far as to insist on giving children responsibility both in the group and at home, offering them tasks that "contradict gender stereotypes", for example "the boys should help with cooking" (Ionescu et al., 2010, p. 34).

Teachers are urged to cultivate in preschoolers respect for linguistic diversity, to help them accept different physical characteristics and preferences as aspects of identity; to help them distinguish between incorrect and correct behaviors, to respect the rules in the microgroup they belong to, or in the community, and the teacher to provide them with a personal model in this regard. The integration of children who differ in appearance, ethnicity, special educational requirements, behavior or social status, by group mates, in their play, is a desideratum presented within the support practices of this field (Ionescu et al., 2010).

Among the indicators for achieving benchmarks in this field and among related support practices, we find elements aimed at the socio-emotional development of preschoolers, recognizing personal emotions, but also those of other people in various contexts, discussing emotions, anger control, the verbalization of feelings, successive behavioral actions and the causes that led to them. At the same time, the authors of the RFIDT document suggest that educators also teach preschoolers about assuming responsibilities, participating in decision-making, encouraging them to resolve conflicts, avoiding labels, blaming colleagues, giving them positive reinforcement every time they successfully overcome a frustrating situation, verbalizing their actions, encouraging self-evaluation and avoiding comparisons between children, insisting on strengthening the positive image of the preschooler by highlighting his qualities and the good deeds he has done. It is also briefly stated about the need to familiarize preschoolers with models of behavior, by discussing examples from poems, stories and films, or using everyday situations to show them models of remediation. The development of preschoolers' empathy is encouraged, by discussing the emotions of others, by comforting colleagues in situations that require this, teaching preschoolers to know when to offer help without acting instead of the one in need (Ionescu et al., 2010, p. 37).

3.5. Analysis of the documents "Curriculum for early education" and "Methodical letter" - 2019

In the context of the alignment of Romanian education with the European one, the Ministry of National Education elaborates, in 2019, the document "Curriculum for early education", which includes ante-preschool education (from 0 to 3 years) and preschool education (from 3 to 6 years). It is found, after studying the content, that this curriculum is in close correlation with "Fundamental marks in the learning and early development of the child from birth to 7 years" (RFIDT).

As it was mentioned later in the Methodical Letter for the year 2019-2020, an official document of the Romanian Ministry of Education, in the development of this curriculum the provisions of the documents promoted at the European level were correlated, such as: the Communication of the European Commission and the Conclusions of the Council of the European Union on early education and care; Report of the European Commission Working Group on Early Childhood Education and

Care 2014 and Council Recommendation on high-quality early childhood education and care systems 2019 (Ministerul Educației Naționale, 2019b).

With the appearance of the National Education Law no. 1/2011, there are also changes regarding the educational ideal of the Romanian school, which, in addition to the previous approach regarding the free, integral and harmonious development of the individual, the formation of the autonomous personality, brings as a novelty the assumption of a system of values necessary for personal fulfillment and development, for the development of the entrepreneurial spirit, for active citizen participation in society, for social inclusion and for employment on the labor market (Parlamentul României, 2011). In the context of Romania's integration into the European Union and the increasingly significant presence of multiculturalism in curriculum documents, it can be observed in the Curriculum for early education - 2019 a shift in the focus of the Romanian educational ideal from the need to preserve national identity and the focus on the aspirations of Romanian society, to the development of social inclusion skills, the development of the entrepreneurial spirit regarding the facilitation of employment on the labor market. Preschool education, aligning itself with these trends, registers in this edition of the curriculum elements regarding the approach to multiculturalism, the active participation of the preschooler in social life and even the primary development of his entrepreneurial spirit.

Compared to the curriculum developed in 2008, the 2019 edition brings a novelty in the approach to the fields of early education, adopting their organization from RFIDT - a fact mentioned later in the Methodical Letter for the 2019-2020 school year - thus in it we find some elements of moral education in the field of socio-emotional development. We could observe some content changes, but also the terminology, the organization of the contents. Regarding the approach to the elements of moral education, it is noted that its specific terminology is missing. The focus is on the development of the emotional sphere of preschoolers, on the recognition of emotions and the contexts in which they can appear, observing a focus on the individual as a unique person, on the self-concept, the promotion of self-image and positive self-esteem. Regarding the relational sphere with those around, with the microgroup of which it is a part, this edition of the curriculum offers few behaviors that must be achieved by children at the end of the preschool period: respecting the rules and understanding their consequences; practicing negotiation skills; the assumption of age-specific responsibilities, the emphasis placed mainly on tolerance and respect for the diversity of people around (Ministerul Educației Naționale, 2019a). A new approach can be found in the development of this curriculum, following the trends of the current society towards multiculturalism, diversity and the self-centeredness of the individual. Since the document is official and mandatory for preschool teachers, we consider its contents very succinctly presented, in relation to previous documents and the expectations of teachers, with few examples of behavior for all the areas approached.

In the description of the Socio-emotional Development field, social relations are presented from the perspective of the interaction between children, of the child with adults, but also of the way children see themselves. At the same time, emotional development is explained from the perspective of children's perception of emotions, both their own and those around them, the way they are expressed in various contexts and the development of the child's self-image (Ministerul Educației Naționale, 2019a).

The content analysis also highlights the fact that the RFIDT document includes a wider range of examples of behaviors that the child should have developed when completing ante-prepreschool education and preschool education, in relation to the "Curriculum for early education" from 2019; also, RFIDT additionally includes examples of indicators and support practices for teaching staff, in relation to all the studied fields (Ionescu et al., 2010).

The Methodical Letter from 2019, although inferior in importance to the Curriculum, shortly after its appearance presents some reconsiderations of the content of the Curriculum, among which we mention: the elimination of examples of behaviors and contents on each annual study theme; eliminating the details of the "Morning Meeting", which remains a very important moment in the daily schedule of activities in kindergarten, related to self-knowledge, the development of empathy, decision-making. The authors justify their lack by the fact that female educators already know these elements, which have become a routine over the years (Ministerul Educației Naționale, 2019b).

Following these observations, we can state that the authors of the 2019 curriculum documents only partially took into account the non-negligible number of novice teachers, who enter the education system every year and who need extensive guidance in the optimal implementation of the education process, of the didactic approach, including through an official document developed by the Ministry of Education.

3.6. Analysis of the National Educational Program of Education for Values "Play, respect and joy" – 2022

At the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year, the Ministry of Education, through the General Directorate of Pre-University Education, requested the implementation of the National Educational Program of Education for Values "Play, respect and joy", developed in the context of the evolution of society and the reform in education. Its authors justify the need to carry out such a project through the need for a change at the attitudinal level and the behaviors of children, but also of their parents, teaching staff, as well as society in general. The need for benchmarks and valuable models is highlighted and the need to create learning communities that can provide example of conduct and support in the training of future generations. The need to implement a new curriculum that relates to universal, ethical, moral, spiritual, social, humanistic values in the context of competence-centered education is supported. All this, given that, currently, preschool education is not centered on skills, but is correlated around the behaviors that must be acquired by preschoolers, at the end of each level (Ministerul Educației, 2022, p. 4).

The "Play, respect and joy" program is structured according to the classic formula of a project, having formulated objectives, purpose, the description of the program on several components, a calendar with deadlines for the realization of the project activities, a list of the values that can be followed in this project, to which can be added some others that the teachers consider important and, last but not least, an appendix with general examples of activities that can be carried out in the application of this program. The list is quite extensive, including a number of 36 values, among which we exemplify: goodness, empathy, respect, traditions, family, fairness, honesty, truth, patriotism, love, courage, altruism, faith, solidarity (Ministerul Educației, 2022). In the context of the present research, we consider the launch of this project as a real chance to support the achievement of the goals of moral education in Romania, and the content of the program as a way to compensate for the elements that are missing or that are much too succinctly included in the Curriculum.

3.7. Moral education in official documents from Canada and the Republic of Moldova

Given the complexity of the issues associated with the moral dimension of education in contemporary education, the frequent change and significantly new elements of the official documents in Romania, we present, from a comparative point of view, the ways of approaching moral education in Canada and the Republic of Moldova, states located on the axis on which, from this perspective, Romania also moves.

The official documents for early education in Canada, the state of Ontario, include in the current early education curriculum a much more comprehensive approach than those in Romania, with numerous examples of activities and practices to support teachers, in all existing fields.

Another official Ontario document that formed the basis for the current curriculum is the ELECT document, created by a team of education experts and promoted by the Canadian government. The document also includes, in addition to the explanations of the concepts used, the presentation of the stages of children's development, a series of examples of activities and support practices in achieving the proposed objectives (Bertrand, 2007).

As far as moral education is concerned, none of these documents place it in a distinct field, nor do they name it specific concepts, but elements of it can be found in the Social and Emotional fields. These are particularly aimed at preschoolers' social relations, integration into the collective, respect for social norms, integration into multi-ethnic and cultural diversity. At the same time, great emphasis is placed on the personal development of preschoolers, as unique, independent persons, and on increasing their self-esteem. It also aims to eliminate stereotypes (Ministry of Education, Ontario, 2016).

Regarding the documents from the Republic of Moldavia, a country with predominantly traditional moral values and a developed culture of moral-religious traditions and customs, the analysis of the current early education curriculum highlights a special concern for the moral development of children, from multiple perspectives. Although it does not include a distinct field dedicated to moral education, elements regarding this dimension of education are included in the chapter "I, the family and society", within the existing fields of activity in this learning unit: "Personal development" and "Education for society". In both fields, a great emphasis is placed on the development of honesty in preschoolers, honor, patriotism, respect for social norms and values, the promotion and preservation of the traditions and customs of the people, through respect and appreciation of the values of the national culture, the manifestation of politeness in family and society, demonstrating responsibility towards oneself and towards those around. It is also aimed at preschoolers to be able to recognize their personal identity in various situations, to show self-confidence and independence, to demonstrate a positive attitude in demonstrating emotions related to people or events (Ministerul Educației, Culturii și Cercetării al Republicii Moldova, 2019a). Both within the curriculum for early education, but especially within the "Standards of learning and development of the child from birth to 7 years", a document related to the curriculum of the Republic of Moldova, a series of moral values that preschoolers must acquire during this period are presented, such as empathy, patriotism, honor, altruism, fairness, together with examples of activities specific to them and support practices (Ministerul Educației, Culturii și Cercetării al Republicii Moldova, 2019b), both for teachers and for parents of preschoolers or other adults who are in charge of their education. Great importance is given to the family of preschoolers, the development of the child's feelings of belonging within his family, respect for the rules of the family and of the school group, in extension of society, is pursued.

4. Conclusions and discussion

Following the analysis of Romanian school documents, programs, curriculum editions and other official documents published after the year 2000, after the instructional-educational process in preschool education is organized, several defining aspects are highlighted in terms of moral education at the preschool age and the use of the moral model at this stage. Thus, it can be seen that in Romania moral education is not approached as an autonomous subject, and over the years elements within it have been integrated into fields with a wider range of contents. The approaches to the elements of moral education, the examples of moral behaviors that preschoolers must demonstrate at the end of the preschool period are brief and insufficient, from all these documents presented, only in the RFIDT document we can find a somewhat broader approach to some of them. The situation is similar in terms of examples of activities and support practices for educators, to achieve these indicators of achieving the targeted behaviors. The use of the moral model is not specified in these official documents, with the exception of RFIDT, but also here, very briefly.

Another minus of these school documents, in relation to the field of moral education, is the complete absence of some suggestions or elements of religious education, which could support the achievement of the goals of moral education. Moreover, at the level of preschool education in Romania, religious education is found sporadically, in some kindergartens, as an optional subject.

Compared to the official documents for preschool education in Romania, which are valid, the official documents from Canada, the state of Ontario and the Republic of Moldova are much more explicit, they include a varied range of support practices, they address all areas more detailedly, with more examples of supporting activities and practices regarding elements of moral education and intercultural education.

As the need for the harmonious development of the preschool child, both socially and emotionally, is increasingly addressed, we consider the current need to revise this latest edition of the curriculum for preschool education (from 2019), which is valid in Romania, with the possibility of adding more elements of supporting moral education within already existing fields, or even the formation of a distinct field/discipline of moral education, with various examples of moral behaviors and their corresponding activities, as well as appropriate support practices.

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