

## PROMOTING ETHICAL VALUES IN THE UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENT

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### **Abstract:**

*The mission of the universities is to build the infrastructure of the social mind, and to provide directions for the evolution of the society, and the promotion and realization of the process of internalizing ethical values are priorities in this particularly complex and important endeavor. The work we propose underlines the importance that must be given to values in order to build an ethical culture in the university environment and the accents that ethical education can put on to eliminate vulnerabilities, to change mindsets, to build benchmarks for normality and to provide support for moral evolution at the social level.*

**Keywords:** *ethics; ethical values; university environment; ethical education;*

Understood as a "center of culture, of knowledge, of research" (*Magna Charta Universitatum*, 1988), the university cannot fulfill its mission - that of "serving humanity" - outside the ethical framework. (see D. Jeder, 2018, 65-108) Exerting a fundamental role at the social level, the university "reproduces, but also produces cultural capital, cultural value plus." brightness of the fortress. In a period of acceleration, it is, in particular, the truly indispensable factor of development. Without a university, there is no potential, no well-being, no greatness. ". "(Berger, G. apud. L. Antonesei, 1996)

We observe that ethical demands have been becoming increasingly important lately; "Everywhere the revitalization of values and the spirit of responsibility are invoked as the number one imperative of the era: the ethical sphere has become the privileged mirror in which the new spirit of time is deciphered. (...) "*The 21st century will be ethical or not at all.*", Says G. Lipovesky. Considering that the actions carried out in the academic space are predominantly of a non-religious nature, we consider these natural accents. We recall that the ancient Greeks understood through the idea the idea of "filling, soul-filling, awakening of a wonderful inner virtue", a connotation that was not surprised by the Roman conquerors: see wide. *educare* / *educere* = to get something out of . The Greeks believed that through *paideia* man gains deity, approaches the condition of the gods (*ibidem*), in other words, approaches perfection, perfection. (Negreț Dobridor, 2001) Or, the perfection to which he aspires is first of all moral. Thus, what is meant by the act of conduct is carried out in a moral framework, because education itself bears the imprint of the good, of the positive. ( see D. Jeder, 2018)

Today, we are all witnesses of changes of accent in many areas, including in education: these are mainly due to changes in the social, technological, political, etc. Always in

transformation, in evolution, society imposes new demands on which university graduates should be able to respond with confidence and courage. Do I do it? Is this a problem involving ethical dimensions? How do universities respond to these needs? What about the teachers? Some answers seem to be coming out.

It is the duty of universities and teachers to reconfigure their vision of their mission, strategies and ways of acting to support these pressing needs. It is about duty, respect and care for the student and his or her future.

Studies in recent years in the field of education sciences emphasize that student-centered education results in long-term academic results, superior to those obtained through the traditional model. And in the Romanian universities this model is adopted by the teachers who understood that student centeredness implies changing the focus on the activity for and with the students.

In the universities centered on the student the teachers select their contents according to the interests, abilities but also of the students' resources, stimulating them in active learning activities which, in turn, support a deep and lasting learning, based on understanding. (Ești, 2015) And it is well known that understanding is fundamental in this process. In his papers - *The unschooled Mind and The disciplined mind*, Professor Howard Gardner advocates what he calls "teaching for understanding". Starting from the results of research that illustrates a truth almost hard to believe - that "even the best students (nn students) do not understand much of the curricular content", the author asserts that teachers are often an obstacle in the way of understanding.

Gardner's studies also refer to students of elite universities like Massachusetts Institute of Technology and John Hopkins, and their results show the same thing: that the students' minds "remain fundamentally uneducated." Therefore, the ethics of teaching and supporting learning, as well as honest assessment, are hallmarks of a quality education process.( ibidem)

The mission of the universities and their professors is to provide directions of evolution to the society. We affirm with Simion Mehedinți that "the educator has the most valuable social power" and his professional performance "is the ethical talent at the superlative." (S. Mehedinți, 1992)

Unfortunately, we are witnessing a phenomenon that seems difficult to control: lately, under the pressure of the social, in education are especially valued "peak performance, because the promotion - whether it is social or professional - no longer has to do with morals, but with academic excellence "(F. Roșoga, 2017, 9); there is thus a tendency to disregard authentic values, exemplary human characters, and the negative consequences are increasingly visible in society.

School, in general, and universities in particular, through the values they promote, can do much to change this reality.

Through the cultural function, education "engages the education of the educated to the cultural values taken pedagogically from all fields of human knowledge: science, technology, art, philosophy, morals, religion, politics, economy, etc. The Law of National Education in

Romania (2011) emphasizes the fundamental role of values in the educational process. We illustrate this through several paragraphs of Article 2:

"(1) The mission of the law is to promote education based on values, creativity, cognitive abilities, volitional and action capacities, fundamental knowledge and knowledge, skills and skills of direct utility, in the profession and in society.

(2) The mission assumed by the law is to train, through education, the mental infrastructure of the Romanian society, in accordance with the new requirements, derived from Romania's status as a member country of the European Union and from functioning in the context of globalization, and of sustainable generation of a resource. highly competitive national human beings, capable of functioning effectively in today's and future society.

(3) The educational ideal of the Romanian-Romanian school consists in the free, integral and harmonious development of the human individuality, in the formation of the autonomous personality and in assuming a system of values that are necessary for the fulfillment and personal development (Eși, 2010), for the development of the entrepreneurial spirit, for the active citizen participation in the society. , for social inclusion and for employment in the labor market. "(LEN, 2011)

Therefore, the Romanian education is based on values such as freedom, harmony, autonomy, personal fulfillment, civility, responsibility, etc. The axiological dimension is the core of the entire educational process, regardless of the level of education of the educators or the training institution. The values are selected and transmitted for the purpose of their internalization by the educated, so that they can finally be found at the operative level of the concrete behavior. The internalization of values is the key to the whole process of educational changes and is perhaps the most complex and lasting process.

As we already know, there is an increased interest in ethical issues both in the academic environment and among the public opinion. In this regard "international and national guides have been drawn up that regulate ethical aspects in the research activity, especially, but also with a wider spectrum, with reference to the academic environment: Code of practice for Research (2009) United Kingdom, Singapore Statement on Research Integrity (2010) etc. ", or The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (2017). In Romania, every university has established, in this year, in the design of the master and doctoral studies programs the courses of Ethics and academic integrity.

The codes of ethics, which are generally guided by institutions, so also universities, are structured according to sets of values, principles and moral norms.

Values have a role in building self-esteem and self-esteem and give meaning to actions taken. They appear as "patterns, forms in which the mental space where the decisions take place is shaped. They constitute the privileged directions of communication, establish a hierarchy of opinions and the practice of the members of the group. They deeply mark the relationships between them, color ideas and expressions, filtering everything that comes from outside. (Moscovici, S. Doise, W. apud. C. Cucuș., 1995) From the perspective of the modern paradigm, educators appear as the authorized transmitters of universal values, and the most important are rationality and progress. From a postmodern perspective, education should help

students / students build their diverse and useful values in the context of their own culture. The important values that are worth transmitting are now valuing diversity, tolerance, freedom, creativity, emotions, intuition. (Bujorean, E., 2017, Cozma, C. 1997, 1996, Emandi, E. M, 2014, Eşi - Posteucă, 2019)

In order to transmit and internalize the values, the teacher himself must believe in them. Moreover, "moral ideas are those that concentrate and express moral values", and these "ennoble the person, giving him a note of choice between his peers." They are not static, but they are transformed and consolidated in time. with the accumulation of life experiences.

Romanian philosopher Petre Andrei considers as fundamental values of the academic space human love, love for students and freedom Today, educational institutions are identified by their own values that define them as entities with distinct mission and vision. For example, the Ministry of National Education of Romania establishes its mission: to create "an educational environment that will ensure the harmonious development of all its beneficiaries, by promoting excellence and ensuring equal access to education. And the values that are guided are: Integrity, Ethics, Transparency, Collaboration, Involvement, Responsibility. "(See [www.edu.ro/mision-vision-values](http://www.edu.ro/mision-vision-values)) Universities establish at the level of the University Charter and the Code of ethics sets of values and principles with which it is identified; here are some examples: freedom of thought and expression, seeking and promoting the truth, integrity, equity, social responsibility, respect for diversity, intercultural cooperation, academic autonomy, academic freedom, responsibility, equity, transparency or "promoting a culture of knowledge-based action. systematic and innovative "; "A culture of personal and moral development"; "Lifelong and innovative learning"; of the proactive attitude, "of participation, multiculturalism", "intercultural and inter-denominational dialogue" (Charter of Babeş Bolyai University, Charter of the University of Bucharest) et al.

Do we need these landmarks? Surely. Man is a contradictory being, with luminous parts, but also with dark parts; from him also spring "the most human love, but also the most inhuman hatred" (Z. Baum, 2000, p. 98). We believe in the support offered by such ethical benchmarks.

We note that we do not find a consistency in the level of ethical values that Romanian universities adhere to, but their core consists of common, universal values, which are also recorded at the level of the National Education Law (2011), within a set of " principles that govern education ": academic freedom, autonomy, transparency, ethics of the relations of the academic community, respect, care and tolerance, justice and equity, professionalism, the primacy of meritocracy, professional and social responsibility (see the codes of ethics of the Romanian universities. among them: moral responsibility, respect, care and tolerance, justice and fairness - but without hierarchyizing or inducing the idea that only these are important. ( see Jeder, 2018, 65-108, Caciuc V. T, 2014, 2015)

### **Moral responsibility**

In the educational space, the value of moral responsibility is in the attention of the trainers, especially since they are "responsible for the very responsibility" of those who educate them. We present a model of moral responsibility, as illustrated in the work of the French

philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas - Between us. An attempt to think of the Other, where the author appreciates that man's moral fulfillment is given by over-concern for the Other. Such a model of moral personality is built on the asymmetry of the self-other relationship: "The condition of responsibility is selflessness: in the Bible called love for our neighbor, love without Eros, mercy, unconditional love, disinterest represents the founding moment for any moral consciousness. "(E. Levinas, 2000, 110) And as you cannot be disinterested in your own person (assuming one's destiny belongs to existence), the author states that only assuming the destiny of the other belongs to the ethic: I" am responsible for his own responsibility - for the other , but without expecting reciprocity - even before caring about your own person, you must be responsible for the other. "(idem). From the height of such models of moral thinking, brave ideals can also be built: for example, Dimitrie Gusti thinks that "a nation in which every inhabitant would have a responsible soul would be a happy nation" (D. Gusti. 1969 , 301)

In university education the codes of ethics invoke the responsibility of the members of the academic community regarding multiple aspects: from the orientation of the study programs, but also of the research to the needs of the students and the community, to aspects centered on the intellectual property, but also to those regarding the truthfulness, the correctness. the data presented both with regard to study programs or teaching staff, as well as in studies, research, etc. Sanctions are proposed in case of denigration, slander, spreading of false information, including regarding free observations involving lack of collegiality, professionalism or academic spirit. Some codes intervene with details such as the following: they are subject to the sanction "veiled, vague accusations, insinuations, imprecise and uncontrollable suggestions, etc. designed to create an atmosphere of suspicion, but without allowing the clarification of things and which contravene the university deontology. "(*Code of ethics of the University of Bucharest*, art. 22)

### **Respect, care and tolerance**

These values are based on the principle of human dignity - which "emphasizes the special, superior status of the human being in nature. The dignity of the human being is given by its freedom, autonomy (the capacity of moral self-regulation, after Kant) of the ability to reason, the ability to be responsible."(V. Mureșan, 2009, 136) Respect implies appreciation, appreciation. , considers and excludes any form of violence, even the symbolic one called "mild violence" or "invisible violence" (see P. Bourdieu, 2001, 43), which has been increasingly spoken about lately.

Caring for the needs of the other implies respect, empathy, altruism. The results of the research on pro-social behavior are encouraging, suggesting that we, "human beings, despite our weaknesses and failures, are capable of profound selfish care for our fellow human beings." (D. S. Batson, eds. Peter Iluț, 2004, 195).

Caring for others could be translated by the expression "to care for you," says Professor Mihaela Miroiu in her work *Convenio*, meaning by this term "a form of empathy (of intermingling) that does not necessarily require neither love nor pleasure. , often no clearly delimited interests, but rather participation in other lives, because they are lives like yours, so with needs, with sufferings, with interests. "(M. Miroiu, 2002, 119). Openness, understanding,

tolerance towards others are interconnected values, constituting comprehensive axiological structures.

The idea of tolerance is well captured in Voltaire's words: "I disagree with what you say, but I will defend your right to say the word to your death." Why choose tolerance? Because intolerance gives birth to suffering, to cause suffering means to violate the dignity of the other.

Being tolerant means not agreeing with what the other person is saying or doing, without imposing your disapproval, respecting his / her way of being, thinking, and living. Acceptance as a waiver is excluded; you accept the other without trying to impose your own opinions, without trying to change it. As necessary benchmarks of the tolerant mentality, Professor S.T. Maxim calls the flexible spirit, the love for others, the humor:

"Humor understood as an elevated way to rectify the states of unwanted things and not the free, wicked irony, is a form of intelligence, of the attitude that stands under the sign of affection for people, not at all holy beings, who do not even aspire to holiness but who, as a whole, strive, with more or less success, to give the measure of humanity in us." (S.T Maxim, 2004, 62)

Universities promote respect, care and tolerance as fundamental values of the academic community, and the codes of ethics use them multiple times, demanding from all members of the institution, a spirit of collegiality, mutual respect, confidentiality, respect for language differences, religion, values, etc., tolerance. towards opinions, beliefs, intellectual preferences, respect for human dignity, maintaining harmonious relationships between members of the academic community etc.

Following the non-observance of the principles underlying these values, the codes of ethics provide for the sanctioning of the facts that harm the university and the teachers / faculty, the abuse of power, misinformation, slander, denigration, plagiarism of the results of the research or publications, the making of the research results, the introduction of false information, irreverent language, insulting behavior, humiliation, contempt, assault on the person, any form of harassment (including "harassment caused by rivalry for power" - see Code of ethics - University of Bucharest).

### **Justice and fairness**

The issue of justice (lat. Directus-right, without a detour) was first analyzed by Plato, then by Aristotle: the latter considered - in his work *Nicomachean Ethics* - "perfect virtue" (Aristotle, 1998, V.1129. A5 ), moreover, the philosopher asserts that "justice concentrates in it all virtue" (idem, 1129.b.30) and is the only "one of virtues that seems to be good for another" (idem, 1130.a. 5) ; we find here the idea of equality, equity, altruism, fairness.

Justice is closely linked to equity (see the debates in the works of J. Rawls, A. MacIntyre, R. Nozick, etc. and the theory of justice as equity) and is embodied in:

- "the recognition and respect of the legitimate human rights;
- the fight for their defense;
- receiving rights in relation to the fulfillment of appropriate duties;

- the merit of work and creativity;
  - what is appropriate by the rules of inheritance, of free and responsible donations;
  - what has been acquired through the exchange of equivalences or by mutual agreement, etc.
- ”(I. Grigoraş, 1999, 115)

The term fairness means, according to the *Explanatory Dictionary* "justice, impartiality, honor, humanity", but also "ethical and legal principle that underlies the regulation of all social relations in the spirit of justice (Posteucă, 2005), equality and justice, cooperation and mutual respect." as we have already seen, it corresponds to justice, impartiality, fairness, equality, equality of opportunity - acceptance of diversity, etc. and implies the elimination of discrimination, exploitation, incorrectness, etc. International student organizations are concerned with how students are prepared to argue and find the means to eliminate inequities in universities; of these we mention those regarding students from poorer backgrounds, those from immigrant families, ethnic minorities, those with disabilities, those who work, those who have children, those over 35 years of age, etc. (see *Equity Guide. What is the contribution of student organizations to equal opportunities in higher education*)

The non-observance of the principle of justice and equity is illustrated at the level of the codes of university ethics through the phenomena of discrimination, exploitation in various forms, persecution, favoritism, nepotism, abuse of power, conflicts of interests, corruption and others.

As we have seen, the list of values that the universities adhere to is consistent and will certainly know in time, extensions and transformations. At present, it is important that these values not only remain inscribed in the institution's documents, but that they represent real benchmarks for the entire institutional activity, to be internalized by the members of the academic community and thus to cause changes in the mentalities (D. Jeder, 2008, 2014); “we might learn to improving our education –by priority, the self-education and lifelong education –in view to become able to upheaval what is wrong into right, and to manage the serious problems of a world in crisis and of stressful times; in which just the solidarity around the authentic values can unify (and not divide!).” (C. Cozma, 2019)

## Conclusions

The internalization of values is a complex and lasting process for which perseverance, consistency, belief and optimism are needed. Exploring the space of values, together with the concern for ethical education at university level is a first step to eliminate vulnerabilities in the academic space, to change mentalities, to build benchmarks for normality and, we believe, to support moral evolution at the social level.

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