

## Communicating human dignity in education (Notes on Romanian education system)

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### Suggested Citation:

Pop, I. M. & Baias, C.C. (2018). Communicating human dignity in education (Notes on Romanian education system). *Contemporary Educational Researches Journal*. 8(2), 57–65.

Received from September 15, 2017; revised from December 26, 2017; accepted from May 14, 2018.

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Deniz Ozcan, Near East University, Cyprus.

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### Abstract

The basic assumption of the paper is that the Romanian curricula reflects the opportunities created at the social level to embrace the values—principle of human dignity and to defend it as a defining value of contemporary civilisation. Firstly, looking for the curricula where the value is a topic and secondly, to interview the graduate students on what they learned in their education on the human dignity. Only some of the higher education syllabi in the programmes such as political sciences, theology, law and bio-ethics for medicine or philosophy open some windows to understand the deep implications of the value in our concrete life. But, even here, the human dignity's communication is incoherent. These programmes do not share a basic meaning and conclude into comparable recommendations. The human dignity's communication is also out of a project, systematically conducted, reported and adapted to the community's needs. The education must take action in doing it.

**Keywords:** Human dignity, communication, curriculum, education.

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## **1. Introduction: On the needs for human dignity's communication and its meaning**

The concept of human dignity is frequently invoked in the daily's speech and classrooms; yet, a proper understanding of the idea by teaching the subject at various universities' programmes is not to be found in the Romanian curricula, at the first glance. Similarly, it is hard to find someone who is able to propose an operational meaning of it.

The concept itself is crucial in communicating the professional and general exigencies of a proper social behaviour, based in the respect of human dignity principle. At least, the politicians, the educators, the specialists in law implementation, the doctors and nurses, the priests must be specifically trained to pay attention and to guard the human dignity in the society and provide models of human dignity in order to educate the public at large in the spirit of the value-principle.

The present paper is assuming that the culture of human dignity does not relay out the educational process. There are the communicational efforts and results done in the education that could rapidly improve the state of human dignity in a concrete society.

The aim of this paper is to describe how the specialists understand the need for communicating such a value in their professions' and furthermore to the society, via education.

To communicate human dignity is to assume politically the value-principle and to display it as a long time conducted educational for a more accurate perspective on the socialisation agents' theory there are to be considered at least six categories of agents (of socialisation): family, education, peers, media, market, and virtual communities (Monnier, 2009).

As an educational process, it supposes a coherent concept on what the human dignity is and an accurate view on what should be the results of the specific education for it.

The concept of human dignity is a fluid umbrella concept, in the varieties of writings devoted to the subject or put under such a title. By being fluid, it is to understand that in different approaches it takes different meanings and that in different epoch it became the issue of different forms of human knowledge or beliefs. By being an umbrella concept it is to consider that many different principles reunite under this term, and different sciences or disciplines decipher different principles, that make not easy to recognise it under its varieties of forms, meanings and requiring. It is also to accept that it is not clear when it is a simple normative concept, and when it becomes a factual one.

Communicating the human dignity, through higher education specifically devotions, means to assume politically the values of the self-respect. It is estimated the level of a person morality as pre-moral, moral, post-moral, each of them with two levels and the other people respect for each human subject (Bargel, 2009; Kohlberg, 1958; Piaget, 1932/1980) in the major fields of human life. It is also to promote human dignity institutionally—in the curricula or at least in some syllabi—and to measure them in the efforts made, as in the results obtained. The results could be considered the professionals' direct reference to the concept or to some illustrative examples and the stages of development reached by an individual. Pre-dignity, dignity and post-dignity could theoretically be considered as stages of education for human dignity in parallel with the Kohlberg stages, or they could be considered a degree of community awareness referring to human dignity.

In this article, the concept of human dignity will be considered under its minimal political meaning—the meaning provide in the European Charter..., and the measurement shall aim to know if there are in today Romania institutional efforts to educate for human dignity, and whether or not, some results could be noticed.

## **2. An operational concept of human dignity**

A common definition of human dignity appears to be constructed in the general philosophy and in the philosophy of a morality and moral. From this point of view, the human dignity could be

considered as an individual capacity to distinguish what is worth and what is undignified. It also implies a long excursus into the universal philosophy and into the peculiarities of the community's culture, which sometimes conflicted with the universal meanings. That is why a definition which enumerates the basic social rules in ensuring the human dignity protection in a concrete community is necessary to be considered. Such type of definition is a political definition. It establishes the principles to be introduced in the main legal codes, meant to ensure the protection of the human person in any European Unions' (EU's) member state. It is supposed that from the legal codes they are to be transferred The French philosophy of law is underlining that the 'idea of law' inspires the positive regulations of communities. Without this initial idea, these rules, no matter how positive, don't work, aren't respected and promoted in the community as defining values (Damamme, 1966). The main document that explains this concept is the Charter for Fundamental Rights of EU and it defines the concept of human dignity as follows (EU Charter, 2015):

## DIGNITY

### Article 1: Human dignity

Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected.

### Article 2: Right to life

- i Everyone has the right to life.
- ii No one shall be condemned to the death penalty, or executed.

### Article 3: Right to the integrity of the person

- i Everyone has the right to respect for his or her physical and mental integrity.
- ii In the fields of medicine and biology, the following must be respected in particular:
  - a. the free and informed consent of the person concerned, according to the procedures laid down by law;
  - b. the prohibition of eugenic practices, in particular, those aiming at the selection of persons;
  - c. the prohibition on making the human body and its parts as such a source of financial gain; and
  - d. the prohibition of the reproductive cloning of human beings.

### Article 4: Prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

No one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

### Article 5: Prohibition of slavery and forced labour

- i No one shall be held in slavery or servitude.
- ii No one shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour.
- iii Trafficking in human beings is prohibited (EUR LEX, 2015).

The Charter... have been adopted in 2000 as a fundamental document of the EU and became part of the Functional Treaty of EU, in 2010 (EU Treaty, 2015) Treaty on the EU and Treaty on Functioning the EU. Accordingly with it, the human dignity, refer to five basic norms and it is in correlation with other values as liberty, human rights, solidarity and justice. In the treaty of EU, the part referring to the values recommend to the member state to respect human dignity, democracy, equality, the rule of law plus human rights of the person belonging to minorities.

The member states must act to warrant politically this constellation of values, but they have also act to educate and promote the society values as pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between man and women. Basically, the values of the two sources are coherent.

Reflecting on the functioning of the values in the society, there is to notice that the values are to be promoted (educating society for their respect, knowing their content and to respect them). The question of this study is; 'in what degree the educational system in Romania promotes the values of human dignity?' namely if there are specific syllabi where the knowledge of the content is the main topic, if the professional consider they have enough training to respect the value, if the general public is aware of the meaning of the concept and of the rights to which it entitled them.

### **3. What are the social efforts and results to educate for the respect of human dignity in Romania 2015**

Our desk and field researchers explored the main areas of education, where the concept of human dignity should be taught, as part of curricula or only as a specific part of some syllabi. It also looked for the results of such peculiar education on the knowledge of some group of professionals. The results indicate that the concept of human dignity is not a special part of an academic specific programme in Romania 2015. There could not be identified an academic programme reserving the room for a syllabus with the name human dignity, at least, it is out of being published on line. An inquiry in the Romanian Universities' Programmes and Curricula—as they are published on the internet, October 2015—did not result into a positive answer.

As of now, there are no programmes issued by the Romanian Agency for Insuring the Quality in the Higher Education (ARACIS) that especially target human dignity. The interviewed colleagues—some ARACIS members—were directly asked whether or not they were lectured about it or heard of this subject in their curriculum and they all answered negatively.

For all that, there are three different cases that introduced in the academic curricula human dignity as a topic. First, there are cases where the topic is entirely covered as in the European Charter but as a part of broader approach connected with the studies on the EU. Second, there are cases where the content of the Charter ... is partly covered among the others issues. In the third case, one of the Charter... the article became an independent topic. For all three categories, it could be found in the Programmes in the University of Oradea's faculties. In the first situation, as an illustrative example could be considered a Master degree's programme in political sciences: Public European Policies, which, according to with the syllabi, specifically and extensively study the Charter... in two courses: European Values and Liberties, and in the syllabi of Public European Policies. For the second case, the topics mentions in the Chart... are topics among the others in some syllabi in the Law Faculty. Examples should be considered: the Constitutional law (Constitutional Rights and Liberties, human dignity included); Criminal Law (Prohibition of torture, of degrading treatments and punishments; Prohibition of slavery, Trafficking in Human Beings); Civil law (norms to be respected in the organs' donation) ... For the third case, a special part of the Dignity as it is conceived in the Charter ... became the unique content of one syllabus. It is the case of the bio-ethic, studied in all the Romanian faculties of medicine for the past 6 years as stated by one of the professors interviewed by us. This subject is crucial for medical students in particular, in order to understand the challenges of ethical behaviour. Old age and terminal patients are a common subject in bio-ethics often debating human dignity (Goudenhoft, 2010).

On the other hand it is right, that the perspective is an ethical perspective, which operates with the category moral-immoral-amoral, and not with the legal pair legal-illegal, just-unjust. Although, it also contributes to raise the awareness on the human dignity meaning in the community, and 'to impose' the meditation on the responsibility of the professional confronted with issues of human dignity.

In terms of the professionals' education, the specific formation for respecting human dignity results into awareness on what human dignity implies, obvious in the more concrete responses that the professionals trained after 2010 formulated in our interviews. By contrary, the answers of the generations trained before 2009, the entering into action of the Lisbon Treaty, 2009, were more vague and interpretative.

It terms of case in law, judicial responses for the patient's consensus there was some cases in law, mediatised, which contributed to educate the Romanian society, in general, regarding persons right to the respect for his/her dignity.

In spite of the theoretical efforts and of the results at the professional's level, the general public remains largely unaware of the rights related with persons' dignity and even more, they did not seem interested. In Oradea, the attempts to involve ordinary citizens in discussions on some specific topics comprised in the section Dignity in the Charter ... completely failed. People simply refused to participate. (November 2015, five attempts). The attempts (three) to organise a focus group, the same (three attempts)!

#### **4. How the professionals see the human dignity's social role**

The human dignity's role has been seen as the major corrective toward 'the medieval remains' in the contemporary behaviours of Romanians or towards the lack of the cultural incentives to act as an autonomous and responsible subject.

First, the human dignity should be a principle to orient the professionals' education—basic, master and Ph.D. degrees. The synchronisation of professionals' practice in Romania with the professionals' practice in the most developed EU countries starts in their education to act according to with the principle of treating the man as the aim, never as a tool.

With nuances, the interviewed persons—graduates of the higher education and except two cases with significant professional experience—expressed their discontent on how the principle works in our society. For them, as the interviews demonstrated, it is obvious that our society needs more respect for human dignity. Some of them evoked (three) that there are incredible cases of barbarism reported in Romanian media. Others (six) that the large proportion of the cases of desperate appeals to emergency number in Romania 112 are the cases: of domestic violence; of assaults. An interviewed person draws the attention that all the selling of persons' cases (children included), selling to a pimp for prostitution, the trafficking of human being are cases of severe offense against the principle of respecting human dignity. Another considered the correct approach in the gynaecological act as vital to respect the person intimacy. An oncologist accentuated the need that the professional need to be trained to respect the people in final sufferance, dyeing people and the corps too. An academic (Theology) underlined the possible contribution of his field and the multi-disciplinary scientific conferences.

That is why, except a single interviewed person, all the professional (20) expressed their conviction that it is enough room to educate the regular Romanian citizens for the respect of the human dignity, as the self-respect and mutual respect in the society at large; for teaching about what it is worthy and what it is undignified, unacceptable humiliating. Several answers (six) directly underlined that the education for human dignity should be a subject in the higher education addressed to all the students. Maybe it should find a locus in curricula in the syllabi as general philosophy, ethic, deontology ... Somebody detailed that there is according to with the social pedagogy to start from the top, in order to create models, to encourage others people to imitate them. She also considered that it is the best way to address structurally human dignity's scarcity as a societal principle in Romania. In discussion, she agrees that the Justice which convicts the cases of criminal acts—which are violations against the human dignity—send stronger messages to respect human dignity in the social layers where the crime is not infrequent. But, she considers that this negative societal pedagogy, is more costly and less effective for society at large, because it draw the attention to the horrific violations preventive, letting out the common but less severe ones.

Others (four), by contrary, considered it as a matter of communication ... For them, the barbarism must be targeted with public communication techniques ... All the future professionals which should

work with the people must be trained to not breach the principle and to provide a model of approaching the human persons within a contemporary manner, more westernised.

The law professionals (eight) considered that the law study offers multiple opportunities to concretely learn how to defend human dignity. The interpretation of the norms according to with the principle is the result of the professional experience, including cases' study, short-term training or scientific events all of them matters of internal policies in the justice system.

Second, the education for human dignity must reach all the layers of Romanian society. The general cultural atmosphere in Romania with Romanians being far from the proud of themselves, of being self-critiques and non-confident in our common being, culturally promoted and media constantly supported, did not encourage the culture of respect for dignity, in general, human dignity or common dignity.

The experience with the failed attempts to interview regular people proved the limited interest to debate the topic, to meditate what it means and where it is respected, and where not in Romanian society. It also confirmed the cultural general atmosphere.

It could results—as some of the interviews pointed out—from the imitation of the models provided, from specific work of education done publicly by the professionals.

An incentive for the public to 'read' the model and experts' 'lessons' as opportunities to improve the human dignity respect in the country, it is to be planned and improved. The introduction of such topics in curricula, the specialised trainings for the Journalists and the Communication's students—at least—to get involved in the process seems to be immediately necessary.

## **5. Conclusions and recommendations**

The research unveiled the fact that the human dignity's communication is scarce and incoherent even in the education system. It is limited because there is only one curriculum where part of the topic is introduced after 2009. Currently in Faculty of Medicine, human dignity elements are studied within the bio-ethics course. Since Romania signed the Lisbon Treaty, human dignity is being studied at the Political Sciences and Law Faculties during the constitutional, civil and criminal law as well as human rights courses. Besides the quantitative limits, there is a lack of comprehensiveness and cohesiveness in what it is done.

The programmes do not share a basic meaning in exploring the value, does not use comparable sources and does not conclude into comparable recommendations.

The human dignity's communication is out of a project, systematically conducted, reported and adapted to the community's structural needs.

The results of the empiric research are likely to confirm the hypothesis on the lack of communication of the value mentioned. Although, it is notable, there are notable efforts to do it. Not enough, but there are and it is a promising start.

The results support the idea of the launching of a national programme—strictly correlated with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights—to instruct, to mediate and to largely debate, in the educational framework, the value of dignitas and its concrete meanings (law, medicine and ethics).

The programme must be a communication programme mainly, conducted by communication's professionals. It should imply measurements of the attitudes change, of the new contemporary values embraced. That is why there are the professionals that are to assume the responsibility to implement it.

It could be supported by additional support projects in researching the topic.

Such projects could open the communication associated with concrete and current social and individual dilemmas.

Their lack blocks for many generations the opportunity to construct attitudes grounded in the value of human dignity.

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Nr.	Category	Initials	Profession	Age	Work experience/ conferences	Learning/teaching about HD in school	The use of HD concept in professional life	Educating HD
1	A	AC	Prosecutor	32	9 years	—	—	Humanities
	B	MT	Doctor	52	34 years Yes conferences	Bioethics	Yes, terminal patients, physical challenged patients	All schools
	C	SB	Ph.D. Professor	49	20 years Yes conferences	MA in Political Sciences	—	Political Sciences, Philosophy, Law, Engineering
	C	CV	Ph.D. professor	60	27 years	Law School	—	Law School, sociology
	A	CA	Layer	27	3 years	- Civil Law	Yes 98%	All schools
	B	PRG	Doctor	32	7 years, No	Bioethics, at Medical School everything started with BIO	Never	I believe that HD should be thought at home and then in primary school. We lead by example.
	A	BI	Legal adviser	28	4 years	Maybe Humanitarian Law	In the firm NO	Don't know
	B	CP	Ph.D. in gynecology	63	35 years Yes, bioethics conferences	Ethics and deontology	All the time	Law School, Medicine, Sociology, Psychology
	A	BA	Legal adviser	24	1 year	Constitutional Law	-	Law school
	B	VIM	Doctor	35	Yes,	Bioethics during residency	All the time	All schools
	B	VA	Doctor	15	37 years	Bioethics during residency	Yes	Medicine
	B	VA	Doctor	53	30 years	Philosophy	Yes	All schools
	C	HBV	Ph.D. assistant	32	11 years	Evolutionism, Anatomy classes	No	Theology
	A	COV	Lawyer	33	5 years	European Law and Human Rights	No, in our firm we do not have malpraxis cases. HD was used in divorce and custody case.	Social Sciences Schools and International Relations
	C	TP	Ph.D. professor	44	20 years	At Orthodox Theology Faculty there is a very important chapter that	Yes, I participated to several conferences that debated HD theme from a	Theology, History, Social Sciences, Law and Medicine Schools.



					treats HD in the Moral class.	religious point of view.	
C	GG	Ph.D. lecturer	48	25 years	Constitutional Law, European Law and Human Rights	Yes, I have participated to several conferences and summer schools on HD	Social Sciences, Law School, Political Sciences, Medicine, Theology
A	MG	Layer	12	33 years	Constitutional Law, Civil and Criminal Law European Law and Human Rights	No	Law School
C	LP	Ph.D. professor	35	63 years	European Law, European Institution, Law, Political Science,	Yes, I have participated to several conferences and summer schools on HD	All schools
C	PA	Ph.D. professor	30	62 years	No	No	Social Sciences and Law School
A	MM	Layer	6	33 years	No  I didn't participate or heard about any courses or conferences that deal with HD topics.	Yes, I see HD cases in my practice.	Law School, Sociology, Political Sciences, Medicine, Theology

A, law; B, medicine; C, education.