

# TODAY'S EDUCATIONAL VALUES AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN THE LANDSCAPE OF EVERYDAY INDIVIDUALISM AND EXTREMISM

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**ABSTRACT:** Today's educational values and religious pluralism in the landscape of everyday individualism and extremism.

In a time of the „clash of civilizations”, issues of cultural and religious diversity are becoming increasingly evident. As societies become more ethnically, culturally and religiously complex, contemporary education needs to focus on building a collective consciousness based on tolerance. At the same time, education should not be limited to academic knowledge, but should also develop critical thinking skills and the ability to resolve conflicts through dialog. The ability to understand and navigate diversity is not just a theoretical tool, but a practical necessity, given the political and social challenges facing modern societies.

**Keywords:** educational values, contemporary education, individualism, extremism, religious pluralism.

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## **Motto:**

*„Nimeni nu se naște urând pe altcineva din cauza culorii pielii, a trecutului sau a religiei sale. Oamenii învață să urască, iar dacă pot învăța să urască, pot fi învățați și să iubească.” Nelson Mandela*

In an increasingly globalized and interconnected world, issues of cultural and religious diversity are becoming more and more evident. As societies become more ethnically, culturally and religiously complex, contemporary education<sup>1</sup> needs to focus on building a collective consciousness based on

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1 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, “Current Values of Education and Culture”, in *Proceedings of the 23th International RAIS Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities*, August 15-

tolerance, respect and understanding between different social and religious groups. In this context, recent studies emphasize that education can play a key role in promoting social cohesion and reducing prejudice. According to a 2020 UNESCO report, diversity education not only supports the integration of marginalized groups, but also contributes to reducing social polarization while building trust between different ethnic and religious groups (UNESCO, 2020).

At the same time, the growth of individualism and the threats of everyday extremism are significant challenges, which impose on education not only the task of imparting academic knowledge, but also of developing critical thinking, coping and problem-solving skills, essential for preventing radicalization.<sup>1</sup> A 2020 UNICEF report emphasizes that active citizenship education, which includes learning about human rights, diversity and tolerance, is crucial in preventing violent extremism. In today's context, education is becoming a fundamental tool for shaping responsible citizens capable of combating extremist ideologies and actively participating in society (UNICEF, 2020).

Modern education plays an essential role in shaping responsible citizens who are aware of their rights and obligations in a democratic society. According to the OECD's 2020 report, education systems must encourage not only the acquisition of knowledge, but also the development of skills essential for navigating in a world characterized by diversity and ideological conflict.

Among the fundamental values that must govern today's education are tolerance, respect for diversity, the ability to objectively analyze information, human dignity<sup>2</sup>, mutual understanding, solidarity and fairness.<sup>3</sup> In an increasingly fragmented social landscape, it is crucial for education to support dialogue between cultures and social groups, promoting the idea that diversity is not a dividing factor but an opportunity for a common future. Recent studies show that schools that encourage learning about

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16, 2021, Princeton, NJ, United States of America, pp. 87-92.

1 OECD, *The Future of Education and Skills: Education 2030*, OECD Publishing, 2018.

2 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, "Plea for Human Dignity", *Scientia Moralitas. Human Dignity - A Contemporary Perspectives*, The Scientia Moralitas Research Institute, Beltsville, MD, United States of America, 2016, 1, pp. 29-43.

3 I. Ilie, "Dialogul interreligios și educația pentru toleranță", *Revista de Teologie și Educație Religioasă*, 23 (2), 2017, pp. 99-112.

diversity help young people develop essential skills to live and work in a pluralistic society (World Bank, 2021). Thus, young people must learn to accept pluralism and understand that diversity of beliefs can coexist harmoniously in a democratic society. These principles are fundamental for the formation of citizens capable of appreciating differences and constructing opinions based on balanced and accurate information.

Pluralism as an educational value means recognizing and appreciating differences of opinion, culture, religion and identity. In an interconnected world, education can no longer be seen merely as a means of transmitting a set of knowledge, but as a process of cultivating critical thinking and openness to human diversity. An OECD study in 2021 shows that education that emphasizes critical thinking contributes not only to an informed citizenry, but also to reducing polarization and countering extremism. Pupils must learn not only to accept differences, but also to understand, appreciate and transform them into a source of learning and innovation.

In many contemporary societies, individualism is a dominant value that encourages autonomous personal development and self-assertion. It is an important aspect of education, promoting independent thinking, freedom of choice and self-determination.<sup>4</sup> However, in today's context, individualism can lead to social isolation and fragmentation of human relationships, and in some cases can lead to a lack of empathy towards others.<sup>5</sup> The 2021 OECD report warns of the risks of excessive individualism, particularly in the educational context, where the focus on individual performance can undermine collaboration and social cohesion. In education, this tendency is often reflected in competition between students and an emphasis on individual performance at the expense of collaboration and social cohesion.<sup>6</sup> If students are taught to focus too much on their personal success, instead of cultivating values of the common good, this can reduce their ability to work as a team and to understand the complexity of social

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4 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, "A look at how the concept of human rights has evolved over time", în *Journal For Freedom of Conscience (Jurnalul Libertății de Conștiință)*, vol 11, nr.2 (2023), pp.825-874.

5 M. Schweisfurth, "Global Citizenship Education and the Role of Schools", *International Journal of Educational Development*, 33 (6), 2013, pp. 523-532.

6 Institutul de Științe ale Educației (ISE) (2018). *Educația pentru cetățenie activă în școlile din România*.

issues. Moreover, promoting extreme individualism can undermine solidarity and responsibility towards the community.

Extremism is another threat affecting education today. In different corners of the world, including in democratic societies, political, religious or ideological extremism has gained ground, fuelled by social polarization and retreat into a shrinking circle of ideological safety, also supported by the echo chambers of the internet and social networks. A study conducted by the EU Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) in 2021 highlighted that everyday extremism manifests itself in hatred, intolerance and violence, visible in public discourse as well as in individual and group behaviour. Everyday extremism manifests itself in hatred, intolerance and violence, visible in public discourse as well as in individual and group behavior. In education, it can occur through incitement to hatred and discrimination between pupils on the basis of ethnicity, religion or other differences. Extremism can also affect relations between teachers and pupils or between parents and teachers, creating an atmosphere of mistrust and conflict.

To combat extremism, education must focus on promoting the values of tolerance<sup>7</sup>, mutual respect and intercultural understanding. Schools must be places where students learn to appreciate diversity as a source of enriching human experience rather than a threat. In the face of these challenges, education must not be limited to imparting knowledge alone, but must develop social and civic competences, teaching young people to live and work together in a pluralistic and democratic society. Education for active citizenship is becoming essential, including not only knowledge about rights and duties, but also about the importance of being involved in a community, understanding diversity and developing critical thinking capable of combating extremist ideologies.

Education must also promote lifelong learning and adaptability. In an ever-changing world, where technology and information move fast, the ability to learn and adapt is essential. The OECD 2020 report underlines that education for adaptability is essential to prepare young people to face future challenges, including the risks of polarization and extremism. Schools must produce not only academically well-prepared students, but

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7 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, *Om-Demnitare-Libertate*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Risoprint, 2019, pp. 201-215.

also individuals capable of navigating in a complex world characterized by pluralism of values and ideological conflicts.<sup>8</sup>

The values of modern education<sup>9</sup> need to respond to the challenges of an increasingly diverse society in which pluralism, individualism and extremism are becoming more and more evident. Education must produce not only competent professionals, but also responsible citizens capable of contributing to building a future based on respect and solidarity. By creating an open space for dialog between cultures, identities and ideologies, education can combat social fragmentation and foster mutual understanding, thus preventing the rise of extremism. Education plays a key role in shaping a tolerant society that respects religious and cultural diversity, promoting fundamental values such as tolerance, critical thinking and mutual respect.

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