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Moral values formation in schools axiological, philosophical, and psycho-pedagogical review

Formación de valores morales en la escuela revisión axiológica, filosófica y psicopedagógica

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Abstract This theoretical and documentary study examined the philosophical, psychological, and pedagogical foundations that support the development of moral values in contemporary education. The objective was to analyze axiology as a key discipline for understanding values and to highlight the role of schools and teachers in building ethical and committed citizenship. A qualitative and hermeneutic methodology was applied, critically reviewing relevant academic sources in moral philosophy, developmental psychology, and ethics education. The results revealed three main findings: the progressive and relational nature of moral values; the axiological crisis in contemporary school contexts, marked by the dissonance between institutionally promoted values and those imposed by the socioeconomic environment; and the strategic role of schools and teachers as ethical mediators in the development of autonomous moral judgment. The conclusion was that values education cannot be conceived as an accessory content but as a cross-cutting axis of the educational process. Its conscious incorporation is essential to foster thoughtful, caring citizens committed to justice, respect, and human dignity.

Keywords axiology; values; contemporary education.

Resumen El objetivo fue analizar la axiología como disciplina clave para la comprensión de los valores y resaltar el papel de las escuelas y los docentes en la construcción de una ciudadanía ética y comprometida. Se aplicó una metodología cualitativa y hermenéutica, centrada en la revisión crítica de fuentes académicas relevantes en los campos de la filosofía moral, la psicología del desarrollo y la educación ética. Los resultados revelaron tres hallazgos principales: la naturaleza progresiva y relacional de los valores morales; la crisis axiológica en los contextos escolares contemporáneos, marcada por la disonancia entre los valores promovidos institucionalmente y aquellos impuestos por el entorno socioeconómico; y el papel estratégico de las escuelas y los docentes como mediadores éticos en el desarrollo del juicio moral autónomo. Se concluyó que la educación en valores no puede concebirse como un contenido accesorio, sino como un eje transversal del proceso educativo. Su incorporación consciente es esencial para formar ciudadanos reflexivos, solidarios y comprometidos con los principios de justicia, respeto y dignidad humana.

Palabras clave axiología, valores morales, Educación contemporánea.

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Introduction

Developing moral values in education is a central concern in contemporary societies. The growing axiological crisis is evident in schools, where the loss of traditional ethical references and the weakening of the formative role of fundamental social institutions—family, school, and church—have generated an urgent need to rethink the place of moral education in shaping integral, responsible, and autonomous individuals. This phenomenon has been analyzed by educators, philosophers, psychologists, and sociologists, who agree that education cannot ignore its ethical dimension if it is to contribute to integral human development and the consolidation of democratic coexistence.

In this context, universal, national, and civic values are consolidated as essential components of the educational process. Among the fundamental objectives of education are strengthening awareness of nationality and sovereignty, appreciation for freedom, national symbols, and national institutions, fostering love for one's homeland, international solidarity, and appreciation for diverse cultural traditions. Furthermore, promoting a common language without detriment to indigenous languages and respecting cultural diversity are part of a pluralistic conception of education that recognizes the importance of shared values for social cohesion. In the words of García (2020), education must enrich and disseminate the values of universal culture and foster the practice of democracy as a form of government.

From a humanistic perspective, Guillén de Romero et al. (2022) emphasize that personal growth encompasses physical, aesthetic, moral, affective, character, psychomotor, intellectual, and occupational dimensions. For these authors, human beings occupy the highest place on the evolutionary scale and represent the most noble and dignified manifestation of life, so respect for their dignity is essential, regardless of their social role. Dignity, understood as biopsychogenetic potential, constitutes the foundation upon which human development is built, allowing individuals to deploy their capacities to unsuspected limits. True humanity, they affirm, is achieved when the other is recognized in their otherness, accepted as they are, and encouraged to develop autonomously.

In this context, axiology emerges as a key discipline for understanding the nature and function of moral values. Derived from the Greek terms "axios" (worthy, valuable) and "logos" (treatise or study), axiology constitutes the study of that which is useful, that which deserves to be esteemed. With the suffix "ia", which indicates quality, the term refers to the valuable quality. It is recognized as a branch of philosophy that examines values and value judgments made by individuals. Cortina (2001) recalls that before becoming fully aware of our valuations, human beings already learn to appreciate or reject elements of the environment, and from there, we construct value hierarchies that guide our choices

and behaviors. This process, widely studied by philosophers of classical Greece under the notion of "practical philosophy", has led to the inclusion of axiology within ethics, given its normative, public, teleological, and universal dimensions (Liza & Nieto, 2023).

In this sense, various educational, political, and cultural strategies have been promoted to rescue moral values in contexts marked by violence, discrimination, bullying, and other expressions of social deterioration. According to López and Rodríguez (2023), peace education aims to develop conscious, ethical citizens committed to the highest human values. Values education is thus presented as a pedagogical, axiological, and social tool to counter the problems of today's world.

Values regulate human behavior, acting as socially shared meanings that guide action. Their determination is objective and subjective, as they are expressed in the unity of cognitive and affective factors that influence behavior. Each structure of their value system is based on their needs, interests, experiences, and educational influences (Infante & Gálvez, 2014). Therefore, teaching values cannot be imposed; it requires a prolonged process of internalization that, according to Piaget, begins at school age when moral conscience emerges.

This process requires developing the capacity to value, be critical, reflect on ethical dilemmas, and make sound moral judgments. Only in this way can values become authentic guides for conduct and not mere external norms. As Báxter (1988) and Fabelo (1996), cited in Infante and Gálvez (2014), indicate, the formation of values must be based on the problematization of contextualized ethical dilemmas, which fosters their meaningful internalization.

In light of the above, this research examines moral values education's philosophical and psychological foundations, emphasizing axiological, psycho-pedagogical, and sociocultural approaches. It also seeks to describe the role of the school, the curriculum, and the teacher in moral education, as well as the implications of this education for personal development, civic coexistence, and the construction of a more just, supportive, and peaceful society. Through this theoretical review, we aim to contribute to the debate on the transformative role of moral education in the 21st century.

One of the fundamental pillars for understanding values education is axiology, the philosophical discipline dedicated to studying values. This branch of philosophy investigates the nature of value and the value judgments made by individuals in the process of social interaction and knowledge construction. The word "axiology" originates from two Greek terms: axis, which means "worthy of what has value", and logos, which translates as "treatise or study". By adding the suffix "ia", which indicates quality, the term becomes the

study of what is worthy or valuable (Cortina, 2001).

Today, axiology is recognized as a branch of philosophy investigating the essence of values and the value judgments made by individuals. This science is not limited to simply classifying what is valuable but delves into analyzing how individuals decide, prioritize, and construct their value systems. In this sense, Liza and Nieto (2023) emphasize that, before being aware of our valuations, human beings have already learned to appreciate or despise the objects, people, and situations surrounding us, guided by cultural and social patterns. Over time, we become aware of these valuations and acquire the critical capacity to question and redefine them.

This process has been widely discussed since the practical philosophy of ancient Greece and, in contemporary thought, has been inscribed within ethics due to its normative, public, teleological, and universal nature. Although some theorists have considered that axiology could belong to metaphysics—because it deals with aspects linked to being—its location within ethics prevails precisely because of its orientation toward human action, the regulation of behavior, and the public dimension of values (Liza & Nieto, 2023).

Historically, the term "axiology" was first coined by the French philosopher Paul Lapie in 1902 and later revived by the German philosopher Eduard von Hartmann in 1908. Since then, axiology has evolved as a relevant field in philosophy and other humanities, expanding its scope to include education, psychology, sociology, and anthropology. In the 1930s, mathematician Robert S. Hartmann developed axiology as a formal system for identifying and measuring values. His work was instrumental in establishing axiology as an applied approach to understanding how people assign value to things, prioritize situations, and make decisions about what they consider "good" or preferable, influenced by their personal experience and learning.

One of the questions that structures Hartman's thinking is profoundly illustrative of the contemporary moral dilemma: Why are people so good at organizing evil but so bad at organizing good? This question corresponds to another underlying concern: Do we act more out of moral conscience or because we genuinely want to do good? Both questions refer to the tension that exists between individual desire, ethical normativity, and the structure of internalized values. From this perspective, moral values are an inseparable part of the complexity of human beings and, therefore, become an indispensable focus of analysis for fostering healthy and non-violent interpersonal relationships through the articulation of values, education, and peace education.

This theoretical framework has been taken up by governments, non-governmental organizations, pedagogues, philosophers, anthropologists, and educators, who seek alternatives to address the phenomenon of the deterioration of the moral fabric of society. The most visible social problems—such as violence, crime, discrimination, and bullying—are directly associated with a social perception of a loss or crisis of values, which demands responses from the educational sphere. For López and Rodríguez (2023), the main objective of peace education is to develop responsible citizens capable of upholding the highest human values, contributing to a more equitable, supportive, and harmonious society.

From this perspective, values represent social meanings that act as motives and guides for human behavior, playing a crucial regulatory role in interpersonal relationships and the construction of subjectivity. These values have a dual determination—objective and subjective—since they are expressed as a unity between the cognitive and the affective, directly influencing behavior. As Infante and Gálvez (2014) affirm, each person forms their system of values based on their life circumstances, interests, needs, points of view, experiences, and educational environment. Therefore, teaching values cannot be understood as a mechanical or imposed process; it requires a long process of internalization that fosters critical judgment, moral autonomy, and personal coherence.

In this way, axiology is presented as a theory of value and an essential educational tool for developing human beings capable of ethical discernment in complex contexts. The relationship between axiology and moral education allows us to understand that ethical education is not an appendix to the curriculum but a transversal and integrative axis of all educational, social, and cultural processes. Its conscious and critical incorporation is necessary for developing reflective, responsible citizens committed to human dignity.

Universal and civic values are indispensable in structuring social life and forming the moral individual. These values, inscribed at the foundation of human culture, act as normative principles that guide individual and collective behavior, enabling the construction of more harmonious, supportive, and just communities. In the educational field, these values serve a dual function: on the one hand, they guide students' personal development; on the other, they offer tools to foster democratic coexistence and respect for diversity in multicultural contexts.

In this sense, the educational system aims not only to transmit knowledge but also to develop citizens who are aware of their identity, culture, and rights and capable of exercising active and committed citizenship. Among the values promoted from this perspective are awareness of nationality and sovereignty, appreciation for freedom, national symbols, and national institutions, love for the homeland, the development of international solidarity, respect for cultural and regional traditions, and appreciation of Indigenous languages within the framework of strengthening a common language (García, 2020).

This integrative educational approach seeks to preserve

the richness of local cultures and enhance national identity in a globalized context. In this context, education is seen as a process of citizenship building that promotes shared values and strengthens democracy as a form of government and a way of life. García (2020) argues that education should "enrich and disseminate the benefits and values of universal culture" and "promote the knowledge and practice of democracy".

Likewise, values are presented as structuring elements of personality and behavior, acting as internal guides that regulate human behavior. Infante and Gálvez (2014) argue that values have objective and subjective determinations, expressed in the unity of cognitive and affective factors that directly influence behavior. These values are also internalized based on the individual's life circumstances, personal experiences, interests, and sociocultural context.

The importance of teaching values from childhood has been widely documented in specialized literature. However, this teaching cannot be based on imposition or merely transmitting external norms. As Infante and Gálvez (2014) state, "teaching and instilling values, in general, are processes that cannot be directly imposed; instead, they require a long internalization process". This process requires the development of a critical capacity that allows the individual to make autonomous ethical judgments, avoiding the adoption of double moral standards or dependence on external criteria.

In this context, ethical reflection is of central importance. According to the approaches of Báxter (1988) and Fabelo (1996), cited in Infante and Gálvez (2014), values education should foster the discussion of contextualized ethical dilemmas, enabling students to confront real-life problems and develop a deep understanding of the meaning of values in social life.

In addition, developing a solid system of moral values allows individuals to give meaning to their lives, value themselves, and establish mature and balanced relationships with others. This axiological foundation contributes to harmonious civic coexistence, facilitates goal-setting and the effort to achieve them, reduces interpersonal conflicts, and generates an environment conducive to personal and social growth. As Infante and Gálvez (2014) state, values help individuals make decisions consistent with ethical principles and resist negative environmental influences, thus promoting the consolidation of autonomous, responsible, and independent personalities.

The crisis of values that characterizes many contemporary societies has been analyzed from various perspectives. Coombs (1985) argues that this crisis originates in the sociocultural transformations that Western civilization has undergone since the 19th century. Progressive urbanization and industrialization have relaxed the moral control traditionally exercised by the family, schools, and churches over children and youth, without new institutions having effectively succeeded in taking their place (García, 2020).

Added to this is the impact of new ideological, scientific, and cultural currents that, since modernity, have questioned traditional forms of authority and inherited belief systems. In this sense, Fernández (2009) argues that the excessive optimism placed on scientific thought, together with the expansion of material well-being, hedonism, and consumerism, has fostered an individualistic mentality, disconnected from traditional moral values, which tends to relativize ethics and replace it with subjective and immediate criteria of personal satisfaction.

These changes have had dramatic repercussions on the school system, where there is a constant conflict between the values promoted by humanistic pedagogy—such as solidarity, love of neighbor, honesty, and justice—and those imposed by the current socioeconomic system, centered on individual success, power, consumption, and competition. Fernández (2009) highlights this contradiction by stating that "the values of Christian democracy […] are radically opposed to a socioeconomic system that rewards greed, dissimulation, fraud, corruption, and the lust for power".

Faced with this situation, various educational proposals have been promoted to restore the values of education's central role. Since the 1970s, the United States has implemented programs focused on "values clarification", a theory developed by Raths and colleagues. It aimed to help students identify, explain, and demonstrate their values through formal and informal activities. This approach quickly spread to other countries, such as Germany, where educational reforms emphasizing axiological education were also promoted to respond to the conflict and confusion generated by new social phenomena (Guillén de Romero et al., 2022).

In Spain, during the democratic transition, the "Education for Coexistence" program was established at the Basic General Education level as a means of transmitting fundamental rights and freedoms. Subsequently, the Organic Law on the General Organization of the Education System (LOGSE, 1990) explicitly institutionalized education in moral values through attitudinal content and cross-cutting themes, which were to be developed in an integrated manner across all curricular areas (García, 2020).

These cross-cutting themes—which include moral and civic education, peace education, gender equality, environmental education, sexual education, and consumer education—have been considered essential for the comprehensive development of citizens. Together, they form a pedagogical framework that fosters the internalization of values such as freedom, tolerance, mutual respect, solidarity, and responsible participation.

As Bermúdez (2020) states, schools must include in their programs the emerging values that characterize contemporary society and those considered the common heritage of humanity. Furthermore, they must promote debate with students about the social and individual consequences of adopting specific values, thus fostering an ethic of dialogue, responsibility, and commitment.

Developing moral values in human beings is a complex process that cannot be understood exclusively from a philosophical or educational perspective. It is also necessary to integrate the psychological foundations that explain how individuals internalize values, construct their moral conscience, and regulate their behavior based on ethical principles. In this sense, psychology provides fundamental keys to understanding axiological formation as a dynamic, gradual, situated process profoundly influenced by subjectivity, social interaction, and the cultural environment.

For Guillén de Romero et al. (2022), humanist perspectives consider personality to be the highest expression of the subjective world of human beings, with a concrete historical nature and socially determined indirectly and mediately. This view recognizes that the multiple educational influences do not directly impact the subject's characteristics, that is, through their subjectivity. This subjectivity manifests itself in behavior as an external expression of deeply structured internal qualities. However, human behavior should not be interpreted literally, as it can be simulated. Therefore, it cannot be assumed to be the sole indicator of moral development. Behind the visible manifestations of personality are qualitative regularities organized systematically, in which affective, cognitive, and volitional phenomena converge.

From this perspective, personality is a stable organization of psychological contents and functions that regulate and self-regulate behavior. According to González (2014), within the framework of this self-regulatory function, there are different levels, the highest being that at which the individual consciously and actively participates in determining their behavior, guided by personal reflections, transcendent goals, and ethically grounded decisions. At this level, morality becomes an internal guide for behavior, not imposed from outside but assumed autonomously.

Learning, understood as an inherent human activity, occurs continuously throughout life and has been formalized by states based on the social needs of each era. This process has evolved historically, adapting to the political, economic, scientific, and technological interests of the time (Parra, 2003). As a result, various psychological theories of learning have emerged that seek to understand and optimize teaching and the moral development of individuals.

Behaviorism was one of the first currents of thought to address values education, which focused on studying observable behavior and reactions to environmental stimuli. For behaviorists, learning is associated with behavioral changes that occur in response to specific stimuli, independently of internal processes such as thought or motivation. From this perspective, moral values can be viewed as behavior that can be reinforced or weakened through stimulus-response mechanisms, depending on educational and social objectives (González, 1998).

Later, cognitivism provided a more complex view of learning, considering higher mental processes such as problem-solving, concept construction, information processing, and decision-making. This school of thought posits that learning involves an active restructuring of knowledge, guided by the teacher, through the meaningful use of information. In this framework, moral values are not simple behavioral habits but cognitive constructs that develop through interaction with the environment, allowing for a critical evaluation of one's and others' behavior (Sampedro, 2018).

In cognitivism, the student is not a passive recipient but an active subject who organizes, interprets, and stores information based on their mental schemas. Feedback is crucial in reinforcing correct mental connections and fostering lasting learning. Values are mental categories that guide moral conduct based on personal understanding and judgment.

For its part, constructivism introduced a radically different approach, proposing that knowledge and values are not directly transferred but actively constructed from the student's meaningful experience. In this perspective, learning is a process of individual meaning-making based on the interaction between prior knowledge, new experiences, and relevant cultural contexts. In this approach, the teacher facilitates the process, providing spaces, resources, and learning situations where students can interpret reality and construct their values (Farías, 2004).

This paradigm uses Piaget, Bruner, Ausubel, and Vygotsky as theoretical references. In particular, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasizes that learning occurs at the social level and is then internalized individually, which is key to forming values. From this perspective, moral values are constructed through interaction with others, but they require mental structures that allow individuals to appropriate shared meanings and regulate their behavior accordingly (Velázquez, 2003).

The humanistic approach, developed primarily by Maslow and Rogers, focuses on the self-realization and personal growth of the student, understood as a unique, creative, and free being. This approach deeply values subjective experience, self-esteem, and intrinsic motivation. In this framework, learning is not merely an accumulation of knowledge but an experience that transforms the perception of reality and contributes to the integral development of the human being. From this perspective, moral values cannot be imposed from the outside without considering the individual's happi-

ness. Morality, therefore, must be integrated into the individual's life plan and not hinder self-realization.

Maslow (1968) proposed his well-known theory of the hierarchy of needs, according to which individuals must first satisfy their basic needs (physiological, safety) in order to meet higher needs (affiliation, esteem, and self-actualization). Value formation falls within this higher level and is associated with full psychological development and emotional well-being.

González (1998) summarizes the psychological foundations of the socio-constructivist approach, highlighting the following principles:

- The student is an active subject and is responsible for his learning.
- The teacher acts as a guide, advisor, and mediator.
- Learning involves the integration of the cognitive and the affective.
- Self-awareness and self-esteem are essential.
- Communication plays a decisive role.
- The student's development potential and cultural context are valued.
- Personal meanings are central to understanding values.

From this perspective, the teacher plays a key role as a mediator in the teaching-learning process of values. It is not about imposing norms but guiding the discovery and construction of moral judgment, allowing the student to construct an autonomous and coherent axiological system. Social interaction, ethical discussion, and the teacher's support allow children or young people to move from a heteronomous morality—where they comply with norms imposed by external means—to an autonomous morality, in which they evaluate the validity of norms based on their intrinsic value.

Vygotsky's theory (1978), cited in González (2014), highlights the role of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), understood as the distance between what the child can do alone and what can be achieved with the help of others. In this zone, transformative educational action is located, which turns potential into reality through the mediation of adults. The acquisition of values, from this perspective, is possible thanks to the interaction with others and the use of language to internalize norms, habits, and cultural meanings.

In short, the psychological foundations of values development show that morality is neither innate nor acquired but progressively constructed through learning, reflection, interaction, and self-regulation. Values education, therefore, requires a comprehensive approach that considers the student as a biopsychosocial being, constantly evolving, capable of internalizing ethical principles through intentional, critical, and humanizing educational processes.

As a social and educational institution, the school plays a fundamental role in forming values. Far from being a neutral space, it represents a privileged setting where values that shape students' personality, identity, and behavior are transmitted, reproduced, negotiated, and transformed. In this context, the teacher's role transcends the teaching of disciplinary content to become a mediating agent of meaningful axiological experiences. In other words, the teacher informs and provides ethical and moral formation through their discourse, behavior, attitudes, and, above all, the consistency between what they say and what they do.

Moral education, a cross-curricular dimension of the school curriculum, has been incorporated into various educational systems to respond to the crisis of contemporary societal values. García (2020) argues that moral education must cease to be part of the hidden curriculum—taught without being made explicit—and become an explicit, organized, and evaluable dimension of the educational process. Thus, with the Organic Law on the General Organization of the Education System (LOGSE, 1990) in Spain, a reform was promoted that operationally introduced values education through attitudinal content and cross-curricular themes that are part of all curricular areas.

These cross-cutting themes include moral and civic education, peace education, gender equality education, environmental education, sexuality education, consumer education, and road safety education. Being interdisciplinary and socially relevant, these contents allow values to be addressed from multiple perspectives and contexts, fostering their comprehensive understanding and critical appropriation by students. As Bermúdez (2020) points out, there is a general tendency to focus values education on those principles that favor democratic coexistence, such as freedom, mutual respect, tolerance, solidarity, and responsible participation.

The teacher's mediation in this process is irreplaceable. It is not simply a matter of "teaching values" in conceptual terms but of generating meaningful experiences that allow students to confront their value systems, discuss real ethical dilemmas, and construct an axiological scale consistent with human dignity. The teacher's authority, in this case, does not stem from their hierarchical position but from their moral authority: their ability to inspire, guide, accompany, and serve as an example. As López and Rodríguez (2023) affirm, students must confront conflicts of social values and learn to resolve them by strengthening their moral conscience.

Along these lines, communication about values becomes an indispensable tool in the classroom. Velázquez (2003) emphasizes that to educate in values, it is necessary to establish a type of communication that fosters the recognition of emotions, empathy, and respect for differences. In childhood, this communication should generate a space of emotional security where children can understand their own and

others' emotional world; in adolescence, it should be open to debate, ethical dialogue, and the critical confrontation of ideas. Affective and rational communication with the teacher and among peers is a privileged path for building responsible, supportive, and reflective attitudes.

The school-home relationship is another essential component. Value education cannot depend solely on the school institution. There must be continuity between the values promoted at home and those taught at school, as inconsistencies can weaken students' ethical development. Moral education, in this sense, must be assumed as a shared task between family, school, and community, not as the teacher's exclusive responsibility or the school curriculum.

Teachers' ethical and educational commitment is key. It is not enough for them to teach content; they must also be aware of their role as ethical role models. According to García (2020), teachers need to internalize values to integrate them into their daily teaching practice, thus facilitating students' assimilation. Initial and ongoing teacher training should include modules on ethical reflection, personal development, communication of values, and conflict resolution so that educators can play their mediating role effectively and sensitively.

Finally, international organizations such as UNESCO and the World Commission on Culture and Development have proposed that values education should have a universal dimension oriented toward the spirit of harmony, peace, recognition of human rights, democracy, intergenerational equity, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. This vision posits that schools should educate for work and individual success, coexistence, solidarity, and constructing a more just world.

In short, teachers constitute an essential axiological mediator who, through their pedagogical practice, actively contribute to students' moral development. For its part, the school becomes a privileged space for ethical reflection, intercultural dialogue, and the development of citizens committed to humanity's fundamental values.

Methodology

This paper is part of a theoretical and documentary research project with a qualitative and hermeneutic approach aimed at critically interpreting the philosophical, axiological, and psycho-pedagogical foundations supporting moral values formation in contemporary education. The article's structure follows the logic of a scientific essay, based on a thorough review of relevant academic and theoretical sources, to construct a reasoned, coherent, and articulated reflection on the phenomenon studied.

The methodology employed is characterized by the interpretive analysis of primary and secondary sources, such as specialized books, scientific articles, institutional reports,

theses, and regulatory frameworks, all of which are academically valid and relevant. The document selection criteria were based on three fundamental principles:

Theoretical relevance: Priority was given to authors with broad recognition in moral philosophy, axiology, pedagogy, developmental psychology, and ethical education.

Current and relevant: Recent publications (last 10 years) were included without discarding fundamental classics necessary for the theoretical basis (such as Cortina, Hartman, Vygotsky, Maslow, and Piaget, among others).

Educational relevance: The texts had to directly address the relationship between moral values and educational processes, whether from a normative, formative, or experiential perspective.

The methodological procedure consisted of a critical reading, categorization, and analytical synthesis of the texts to identify standard conceptual cores, divergent positions, and educational proposals. The emerging categories were organized around four analytical axes that structure the article: (1) axiology as a theoretical foundation; (2) universal and civic values in education; (3) the psychological foundations of moral development; and (4) the role of the school and the teacher as axiological mediators.

The analysis was based on a hermeneutic-comprehensive approach, which seeks to interpret the deeper meaning of theoretical discourses about educational practice. This perspective does not aim to arrive at statistical generalizations but rather to understand the meanings and significance that moral values acquire in pedagogical discourse and current sociocultural frameworks.

This methodological approach is justified by the nature of the object of study—moral values and their formation, which requires a comprehensive, ethical, and reflective approach, going beyond quantifiable empirical approaches. The quality of the analysis was guaranteed through cross-referencing of sources, theoretical triangulation, and constant critical review of the content included.

Results and discussion

The critical review and interpretation of the axiological, psychological, and pedagogical foundations present in the literature on moral education allowed us to identify various dimensions that demonstrate the complexity of the value-based phenomenon and the urgent need to address it intentionally and transversally in educational processes. Based on the analysis of the texts, three significant unifying results stand out: the relational and constructive nature of values, the crisis of moral axiology in school contexts, and the strategic role of the school and the teacher as agents of ethical mediation.

One of the most significant theoretical findings is the' progressive and socially constructed nature of moral values. Contrary to an essentialist or innatist view, contemporary axiology maintains that values are not fixed entities but human constructs that emerge, develop, and transform based on historical, cultural, political, and educational contexts.

Authors such as Cortina (2001) and Liza and Nieto (2023) affirm that values are discovered in interaction with others and the environment and are gradually internalized as the individual develops their moral conscience. In this sense, axiology—a branch of philosophy that studies what is valuable—is also an epistemological tool that allows us to analyze how ethical judgments and value preferences are constructed. Cortina proposes that values are qualities that enrich the world and make it more habitable and human, and establishes three conditions for something to be considered a moral value: it must depend on human freedom, it cannot be attributed to non-human beings, and it must be universalized as an ethical principle. Thus, freedom, justice, solidarity, and honesty are essential for a dignified life.

According to García (2020), Hartman contributes to this approach from a formal perspective, conceiving axiology as a logical system of organization and hierarchization of values. His concern about why people are so effective at organizing evil and so ineffective at promoting good reveals a fundamental tension in forming a moral conscience: the distance between ethical knowledge and its practical application. This dilemma has also been addressed by authors such as Guillén de Romero et al. (2022), who insist that human beings possess a psychogenetic potential that can be directed toward ethical development if properly stimulated.

Therefore, the development of values must be understood as an educational, relational, and gradual process in which the individual constructs criteria for judgment and behavioral guidelines that allow them to orient themselves ethically. Infante and Gálvez (2014) point out that these values are formed in the dialectical unity of the cognitive and the affective and are expressed as regulators of human behavior. They are not mere knowledge but dynamic structures that allow us to make decisions consistent with personal dignity and social coexistence.

Another notable finding is the diagnosis shared by various authors regarding the profound crisis of the system of moral values in modern societies. Coombs (1985), cited by García (2020), places the origin of this crisis in the social transformations that began in the 19th century, which weakened traditional mechanisms of moral socialization—such as the family, school, and church—without the emergence of new institutions capable of assuming their formative role. The advance of scientism, hedonism, consumerism, and the progressive loss of the sense of transcendence has intensified this process.

Fernández (2009) argues that this crisis is dramatically expressed in the school context, where contradictory values coexist: while altruism, honesty, peace, and cooperation are promoted, the social environment rewards individual success, greed, competition, and power. This contradiction generates moral dissonance in students, who receive opposing ethical messages from different spheres of their experience.

Socas et al. (2021) identify the turning point of this crisis in the student protests of the 1970s, which demonstrated a rejection of traditional forms of authority and promoted a critical review of institutionalized values. Since then, it has been necessary to rethink moral education not as indoctrination but as critical, dialogical, and pluralistic training capable of facing the ethical challenges of globalization and multiculturalism.

With this crisis, educational proposals focus on rebuilding the moral fabric from a critical perspective. López and Rodríguez (2023) insist on educating citizens with strong convictions, capable of resisting the trivialization of values and acting from an ethic of responsibility. To achieve this, education must abandon an exclusively cognitive approach and recover its axiological, affective, and spiritual dimensions. This approach is also linked to the view of Sampedro (2018), who believes that educating in values is not an additional task but an essential core of educational work.

A third key finding is recognizing the irreplaceable role of schools and teachers in forming values. While values can also be learned in other social spaces, they can be taught systematically, reflectively, and critically in schools. As García (2020) argues, education must explicitly incorporate the ethical dimension at all curriculum levels, leaving behind the invisibility of values in the so-called "hidden curriculum."

For example, Curriculum design in Spain has made progress by introducing attitudinal content and cross-cutting themes such as peace education, equality, respect for diversity, health, the environment, and democratic coexistence. Bermúdez (2020) emphasizes that these values should not be addressed as isolated content but integrated into all knowledge areas through participatory, dialogic, and contextualized methodologies.

In this task, the teacher becomes an axiological mediator, a facilitator of formative experiences that allow students to build their system of values. Their authority should not be based on imposition but on the coherence between their discourse and their example. Velázquez (2003) affirms that communication is key in this process: educating in values implies establishing authentic relationships based on empathy, listening, mutual recognition, and respect for differences. The teacher's words, attitude, and emotional availability are as important as their teaching content.

Schools, then, must not only teach values but also live and

practice them in their structures, relationships, norms, and dynamics. As De la Hoz (2023) points out, it is necessary to educate students who are reflective, critical, committed, and coherent, which requires teacher training that includes ethical, pedagogical, and communicative tools. Furthermore, it is essential to strengthen the connection between school and family to ensure axiological continuity in educational processes.

Finally, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural approach offers powerful keys to understanding how values are internalized through social interaction. His Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) concept allows us to understand that values are not learned through simple exposure but through the mediation of significant adults and participation in shared cultural practices. In this sense, ethical learning occurs first at the social level. It is then internalized as personal regulation of behavior, a process in which the teacher plays a key role as guide, interlocutor, and reference point.

Conclusions

Moral education requires a multidimensional approach that recognizes the' dynamic and socially constructed nature of values. The study highlights the need to go beyond traditional cognitive approaches through pedagogical strategies that integrate axiological, affective, and experiential dimensions. This requires transforming educational spaces into environments that teach values and structurally embody them. The resulting proposal emphasizes a critical, dialogical, and situated moral education, where teachers, as models of ethical coherence, facilitate the internalization of values through meaningful interactions. There is an urgent need to rethink teacher training and curriculum designs to address ethical dimensions systemically. By connecting schools, families, and communities, education can cultivate reflective and engaged citizens capable of meeting the challenges of multicultural societies. Ultimately, moral development must be understood as an active and collaborative process that nurtures personal integrity and social responsibility.

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