MORAL UPBRINGING THROUGH A VALUE - ORIENTED PEDAGOGICAL MODEL BASED ON ARTISTIC EXPRESSION IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

Dr. Avi Abner[*]

Burgas State University "Prof. Dr. Assen Zlatarov", Republic of Bulgaria

Corresponding Author: **Dr. Avi Abner** (Burgas State University "Prof. Dr. Assen Zlatarov", Republic of Bulgaria)

Abstract: Moral upbringing in middle childhood necessitates approaches that transcend cognitive instruction by engaging pupils in ethically meaningful experiences. This article presents an original pedagogical model aimed at the formation of moral awareness in primary school pupils through creative-educational activities based on artistic mediation and structured group cooperation. At the core of the proposed concept lies the understanding that moral education at school age cannot be reduced to declarative knowledge transmission, but must actively involve the imagination, emotional insight, and the child's ability to participate in socially meaningful situations through role-play and dialogic interaction. The model consists of four methodologically defined stages: team formation with distribution of educational roles; collective creation of a moral tale or fable; presentation through puppet theatre; and pedagogically guided reflection with ethical argumentation. The study was conducted through a classical pedagogical experiment involving both an experimental and a control group (n = 44), composed of pupils. The aim of the intervention was to assess the educational impact of the authorial model on the development of moral sensitivity, empathetic thinking, and the capacity for morally motivated decision-making. The experimental group participated in four sequential pedagogical stages, while the control group continued their education according to the standard curriculum. The empirical findings revealed statistically significant improvements in favour of the experimental group following the implementation of the model. These results are interpreted within the framework of the cultural-historical theory of development, constructivist pedagogy, and contemporary approaches to moral upbringing, all of which emphasise the role of symbolic action, dialogic engagement, and experiential learning within a psychologically safe educational environment. The authorial model developed by Dr. Avi Abner proposes a pedagogical framework that integrates artistic forms with social interaction to cultivate enduring moral dispositions. This approach demonstrates strong potential for implementation in early primary education, where the need for ethical orientation and formative depth calls for innovative strategies that combine role-play, collective creativity, and moral reflection as vehicles for value internalisation. The article contributes to the theory of upbringing by affirming the significance of aesthetic environments, imaginative engagement, and pedagogical interactivity as key drivers of moral development in childhood.

Keywords: *Moral upbringing, Value-oriented pedagogy, Artistic expression in education, Moral development in middle childhood, Creative pedagogical model.*

Introduction

The development of moral awareness in students during middle childhood requires pedagogical approaches that transcend explanatory moral instruction and create conditions for inner experience and value discernment. Psychological and pedagogical research on moral formation during school age emphasizes the significance of the artistic context, collaborative interaction, and play-based formats as key environments for the interiorization of virtues and the development of personal reflection (Narvaez, 2006); (Killen, M., Smetana, J, 2022); (Tomasello, 2019). This study is grounded in the conceptual assumption that moral choice is shaped through dialogue with concrete situations represented in symbolic, culturally meaningful form. Within this framework, creative-pedagogical methods are not merely seen as supplemental to the process of moral upbringing, but as integral to its internal logic - through which the student develops the capacity to identify, interpret, and justify moral positions. Fairy tales, theatrical improvisation, and guided group discussions are employed as structured pedagogical strategies aimed at fostering moral reflection, empathy, and social sensitivity. The aim of this study is to analyse the educational effectiveness of a model in which artistic expression and group creativity are integrated into a logically coherent methodological system. At the core of the research lies the question of whether it is possible, through play with cultural and creative character, to activate in students sustainable moral attitudes that manifest in personally motivated ethical decisions. This requires an in-depth examination of the pedagogical mechanisms through which moral awareness is cultivated within an educational environment founded on cooperation, artistic engagement, and dialogic interaction.

Discussion

Moral education in primary school age requires pedagogical forms that engage the student's personality while conveying ethically meaningful messages. Education in virtues cannot rely solely on externally prescribed norms and rules; rather, it must create conditions for internal engagement and conscious moral choice. In this context, the creative-pedagogical approach emerges as a comprehensive educational strategy grounded in aesthetic experience, moral reflection, and the active participation of students in the creation of meaningful content.

According to Hagerman and Rundgren, the development of so-called "ethical creativity" within the school environment entails the integration of artistic, linguistic, and digital tools through which students collaboratively create stories with moral content together with their peers (Hagerman, F., & Rundgren, C., 2022). It is precisely within this creative process that pupils' capacity to interpret moral conflicts, construct ethical standpoints, and articulate them persuasively in front of their classmates is cultivated. The creation of original moral tales and fables with a didactic message, presented through puppet theatre, functions as a pedagogical mediator for value-oriented behaviour. Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development situates social interaction and the experiential engagement with ethical dilemmas at the core of moral growth. Through these encounters, the pupil gradually transitions towards actions grounded in personal conviction (Kohlberg, 1981); (Lifton, 1982). It is precisely the experience of moral situations within a protected environment such as that offered by theatrical play that creates the conditions for reflection, identification, and responsible choice. In the practice of so-called process drama, a pedagogical approach developed by Heathcote and Bolton, pupils actively participate in the construction of imagined worlds where moral conflicts are not merely observed externally, but enacted from within, through role-taking and empathetic engagement (Heathcote, D., Bolton, G, 1995). At the core of the creative-pedagogical approach to moral upbringing lies the understanding that moral attitudes are not acquired through mechanical reproduction but are formed within the context of joint, culturally mediated activity. This concept finds its theoretical grounding in the cultural-historical theory of L. S. Vygotsky, who posits that higher psychological functions, including moral consciousness, emerge and are internalised through social speech, cooperation, and guided activity. In the context of children's play where the child voluntarily adheres to internally accepted rules the foundations of moral self-regulation and the capacity for ethical decision-making are cultivated (Vygotsky, 1978). Contemporary scholars such as Newman and Holzman, Darcia Narvaez, and Michael Tomasello further develop this paradigm by emphasising that moral reflection emerges precisely within dialogic and cooperative interactions, in which children jointly construct meaning, resolve conflicts, and affirm values (Newman, F., & Holzman, L, 1993); (Narvaez, 2006); (Tomasello, 2019). In this context, creative pedagogical methods such as dramatisation, role-play, original storytelling, and moral vignettes become essential educational instruments that cultivate moral sensitivity and personal responsibility. The aesthetic dimension of the approach is reinforced by its playful nature. According to empirical studies, learning through play holds significant potential for fostering moral empathy, cooperation, and a sense of justice (Zosh, J., Hopkins, E., Jensen, H, 2017). When pupils create and enact a narrative in which someone is deceived, punished, or redeemed, morality ceases to be an abstract concept and becomes a lived event. This is precisely why narrative-based instructional methods, such as the storyline approach, enable moral dilemmas to unfold in a form that resonates with the students' everyday logic and life experience. Ultimately, the creative-pedagogical approach to moral upbringing must be evaluated not solely for its innovation but for its pedagogical validity. It does not supplant classical educational methods; rather, it builds upon them by introducing experience, imagination, and active emotional engagement as key instruments for the internalisation of virtues. When a pupil crafts a tale in which falsehood leads to isolation and truth to friendship, they not only comprehend this moral dichotomy cognitively but also live it, evaluate it, and choose it. This encapsulates the essence of moral education not merely to transmit knowledge, but to cultivate inner resilience and ethical orientation. In this regard, there emerges a need for a coherent, pedagogically structured model through which the creative-pedagogical approach to moral education may be implemented in a clear, applicable, and replicable manner. In response to this need, the present study introduces an original educational model developed by Dr. Avi Abner, aimed at fostering moral development in middle childhood through teamwork, puppet improvisation, and the collective creation of original moral tales. The model combines the construction of moral messages through collaborative imagination, artistic improvisation, and social reflection. It is grounded in the principles of constructivist and humanistic pedagogy and integrates methods that simultaneously promote emotional sensitivity, moral reasoning, and group solidarity.

Figure 1. Model

The creative-pedagogical puppet storytelling model for moral education (CPPS Model - Dr. Avi Abner)

Source: Conceptual model developed by Dr. Avi Abner. All rights reserved.

Stage I: *Structuring the Group and Assigning Educational Roles* - The first stage aims to establish a sense of belonging, mutual respect, and the development of cooperation within the group. Pupils are organised into teams that are expected to bring together diverse personality traits, social experiences, and cognitive development levels. Each group is provided with a set of theatrical puppets, which may include animals, fairy-tale creatures, folklore characters, or human figures. Within the group, pupils autonomously assign responsibilities and roles such as storyteller, author of the moral message, puppeteer, set designer, coordinator, or dramaturge. This process activates the creative potential of each participant and lays the foundation for interpersonal trust and reciprocity. The teacher assumes the role of facilitator, ensuring equality, mutual respect, and active involvement of all team members

Stage II: *Collective Construction of a Moral Story or Fable* - In the second stage, pupils engage in the collaborative creation of a story or fable that contains a clearly articulated moral conflict. The creative process unfolds through free imagination and ethical reasoning. Participants construct a narrative in which the

puppets come to life through voices, character traits, and behavioural motivations. The plot must follow a coherent sequence: introduction, emergence of a moral dilemma, development of the conflict, resolution, and a clearly formulated moral lesson. The story should include elements of symbolism and metaphorical representation of universal moral values such as honesty, compassion, responsibility, forgiveness, and respect. Collective creativity at this stage supports the development of moral reflection and provides conditions for the emotional internalisation of values within the context of social interaction.

Stage III: *Performing the Story through Puppet Theatre* - The third stage involves the presentation of the created story before an audience of classmates. The performance itself is realised through elements of puppet theatre: manipulation of the puppets, vocal interpretation, and the use of a stage environment. The goal is for participants to experience the story not only as authors but also as performers within an aesthetically enriched setting. The audience plays an active role by interpreting the content, identifying the virtues, and emotionally engaging with the moral message. This stage is essential for the social validation of the moral choices made and enables the internalisation of virtues through lived experience and shared emotional engagement. It is precisely at this point that imagination is fused with the educational potential of artistic expression.

Stage IV: *Guided Reflection and Ethical Justification of the Moral Message* - The final stage is dedicated to pedagogical reflection and moral reasoning. After each performance, a teacher-guided discussion is organised in which the characters' behaviour, their motivations, the consequences of their moral choices, and the meaning of the moral message are analysed. The teacher poses questions such as: What happened in the story? Who faced a choice? What would we have done? – all of which encourage critical thinking and moral autonomy. The group that created the story is invited to defend and clearly justify the chosen moral lesson. Through this process, students learn to articulate ethical positions, to accept alternative viewpoints, and to comprehend universal principles of goodness, truth, and justice.

Figure 2. Operational Process

Source: Visual materials are original. All rights reserved.

Findings

In order to evaluate the pedagogical effectiveness of the authorial model entitled "Moral Upbringing through a Creative-Pedagogical Puppet Storytelling Model with Students in Middle Childhood", an experimental study was conducted with 44 pupils. The participants were equally divided into an experimental and a control group (n = 22 in each). Both groups were comparable in terms of age, gender,

and initial level of moral sensitivity. During the intervention, the pupils in the experimental group went through four consecutive pedagogical stages, as structured in Dr. Avi Abner's CPPS Model:

(1) Structuring the group and assigning educational roles; **(2)** Collective construction of a moral story or fable; **(3)** Performing the story through puppet theatre; **(4)** Guided reflection and ethical justification of the moral message. The control group continued its learning according to the standard curriculum, without additional educational interventions. Initial measurements revealed similar mean values for moral sensitivity: M = 28.6 (SD = 3.4) for the experimental group and M = 28.2 (SD = 3.7) for the control group. Following the implementation of the intervention, the experimental group showed a substantial increase in performance: M = 42.3 (SD = 3.9), whereas the control group remained virtually unchanged: M = 29.1 (SD = 3.6). The conducted t-test (t(42) = 10.47; p < 0.001) confirmed a statistically significant difference between the two groups. The empirical data clearly demonstrate the educational effectiveness of the CPPS Model, especially in enhancing moral awareness, fostering empathetic thinking, and developing the ability to make ethically reasoned moral decisions within a creative-pedagogical learning environment.

Figure 3. Observed Outcomes
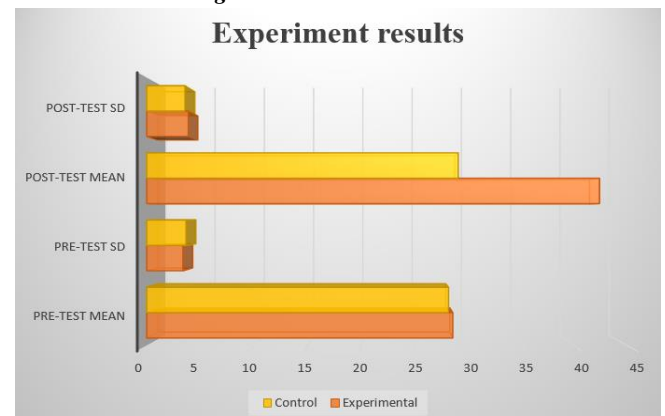
Source: Designed and developed by Dr. Avi Abner. All rights reserved.

Conclusion

The results of the conducted pedagogical research confirm the educational effectiveness of the authorial model "Moral Education through a Value-Oriented Artistic Pedagogical Approach," applied with students in middle childhood. The model stands out for its ability to integrate aesthetic experience, role participation, and moral reflection into a unified educational process that activates the pupil's internal motivation for moral choice. Empirical data demonstrate a clearly expressed increase in moral sensitivity, the ability for empathic understanding, and ethical reasoning among participants in the experimental group, thereby confirming the hypothesis regarding the pedagogical applicability of the model within the school environment. The theoretical foundation of the study, grounded in the cultural-historical paradigm and the constructivist approach, emphasises the importance of cooperative action, symbolic thinking, and meaningful experience within a protected artistic context for the formation of stable moral attitudes. The authorial model offers an innovative perspective on moral education, not merely reproducing traditional ethical norms, but also stimulating the active creation of moral meaning by pupils themselves through storytelling, theatre, and discussion. In this regard, the present study provides a

conceptual and methodological framework for integrating creative educational practices into primary education. The model can be adapted to diverse school contexts and further developed through interdisciplinary collaboration with psychology, art therapy, and drama pedagogy. This outlines the potential for constructing an educational environment in which moral education becomes not a singular act but a sustained process of ethical awareness, shared experience, and personal development.

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