

THEORY OF UPBRINGING AND THE PRINCIPLE OF RESPECT FOR THE CHILD'S INDIVIDUALITY: AN ART EDUCATIONAL MODEL FOR TRANSFORMING FEARS INTO CONFIDENCE IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

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Abstract: The study examines an art educational model grounded in the theory of upbringing and the principle of respect for the child's individuality, with a focus on transforming school related fears into confidence during middle childhood. The model is implemented in a non-formal cultural and natural context that links literary experience, creative production and guided group reflection. The research design contrasts an experimental class that passes through a complete cycle of activities with a control class following routine instruction. School related fear is measured through a brief questionnaire adapted to middle childhood, complemented by self-reports of readiness for school and sense of courage on visual analogue scales. The practical component is conducted with the participation of art therapy expert Teodora Dimitrova, whose facilitation ensures safe symbolic expression and age appropriate pacing. The findings indicate a marked decline in school related fear in the experimental class and concurrent increases in perceived readiness and courage, while the control class shows negligible change. These outcomes align with contemporary literature that links arts engagement with emotional regulation, reflective meaning making and social emotional learning in childhood. The study contributes an implementable sequence for educators that integrates respect for the pupil's autonomy with structured creativity and play, and it outlines directions for replication across settings and for follow up measurement of durability of effects over time.

Keywords: art-educational model, school-related fears, confidence, middle childhood, theory of upbringing, respect for the pupil's individuality, socio-emotional learning, symbolic play.

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Introduction

The present study explores the potential of an art-educational model for transforming school-related fears into confidence during middle childhood. It is framed within the theory of upbringing and the pedagogical principle of respect for the pupil's individuality. This principle requires that the educational process recognise pupils' autonomy, their right of choice, and their need for emotional and social support in accordance with personal interests and lived experiences. Such a value orientation has a clear pedagogical implication: it directs the teacher to create conditions where creative activity functions as a symbolic medium for expressing inner experiences and reorganising the meaning of fear. Recent research on the arts and emotional self-regulation underscores the link between creativity, stress reduction, and the formation of sustainable learning attitudes, outlining a coherent pathway for interventions aimed at socio-emotional development in childhood [1]. In this context, the model presented here was designed as a sequence of interconnected activities conducted in library and natural settings. In the initial phase, pupils identified sources of school-related anxiety and social tension through a short questionnaire and visual self-assessment scales. This stage was followed by a cultural-educational framework, where literary

narratives and structured group discussion promoted empathy and provided opportunities to reinterpret difficult experiences. The third phase involved artistic construction of images and objects that allowed pupils to symbolically embody and rework their fears. The final phase was dedicated to sharing, verbalising meaning, and acknowledging individual progress. The practical component was carried out with professional facilitation to ensure a safe symbolic framework, maintain developmental appropriateness, and provide a suitable working pace. The empirical part compared experimental and control groups under conditions closely resembling school practice. Measurement of school fear relied on a brief scale adapted for middle childhood, while visual analogue scales were employed to assess school readiness and subjective sense of courage. The design of the instruments followed the principle of clarity and brevity in order to minimise testing stress. Theoretical justifications for integrating creativity and play as mediators of emotional transformation can be found both in research on symbolic play and child development and in contemporary frameworks of arts-based learning [2]. The distinctiveness of the proposed model lies in the combination of respect for the pupil's personality with deliberately structured conditions for artistic activity and community reflection. Respect here is not only an ethical norm but also a pedagogical tool that stimulates intrinsic

motivation, strengthens the sense of control, and diminishes the perception of threat. When creative activity unfolds within a supportive cultural environment and is framed by a coherent sequence, it becomes a means of reorganising cognitive and emotional experience. This provides grounds to expect a lasting reduction in school-related fears and the cultivation of greater confidence, resonating with contemporary approaches to socio-emotional learning in the early years of schooling [3]; [4]. From an applied perspective, the study offers teachers a structured framework that can be implemented in classrooms and adapted to libraries, museums, and other non-formal educational institutions. Such environments reduce testing pressure, foster spontaneity, and encourage collective expression. By guiding pupils through a gradual transition from recognising anxiety to symbolic transformation and reflective dialogue, the model enriches existing practices of emotional support in schools. In doing so, it contributes to the contemporary development of the theory of upbringing and reinforces the role of library education as a cultural mediator in child development.

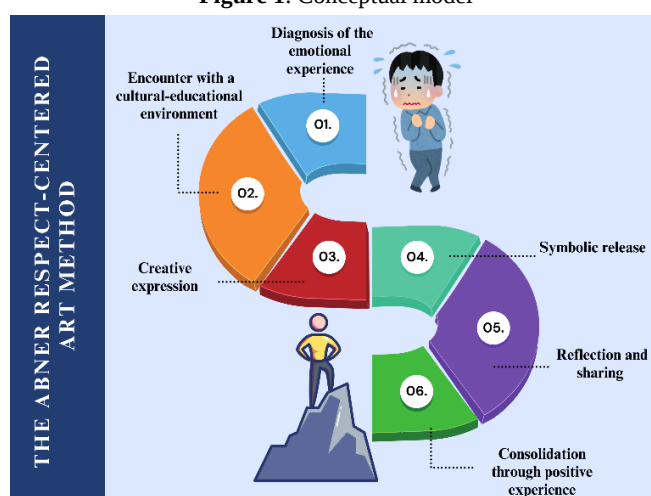
Methods

The principle of respect for the child's individuality, as defined by Siika Chavdarova-Kostova, entails a clear recognition of the significance of the pupil as an educable subject. It obliges the educator to respect the child's right to express opinions on matters that concern them, to make choices, and to develop their potential, while taking into account their emotional and health condition, interests, desires, needs, as well as their cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic specificities. [3]. This principle derives from the philosophy of Shalva Amonashvili concerning pedagogical time ("the accounting of pedagogical time"), where every pedagogically engaged minute is unique, unrepeatable, and immeasurably valuable for the development of the personality. Emphasising a respectful attitude towards the child's individuality requires the educator to demonstrate high emotional intelligence, careful observation, and adaptability to the child's dynamic condition. Competent management of these aspects is a key element in contemporary philosophical and pedagogical models for sensitive and purposeful support of personal growth. The ambitious integration of the principle of respect with a pedagogical and art-

educational approach, as it could be applied in work with middle childhood in the context of coping with fears, is complemented by modern theoretical frameworks. The concept of "slow education" positions children at the very centre of the learning process, with full respect for their natural rhythm of development, their interests, aspirations, and intrinsic motivation. Research conducted in 2023 demonstrates that education through slow pedagogy and a constructivist orientation enhances teachers' professional competence in adopting a child-centered approach and supports them in respecting the unique pace and potential of each child. [5]. In this way, the art-educational model, built upon the principle of respect for the child's personality, is pedagogically justified through the integration of two main directions: on the one hand, recognising the child as an autonomous and significant subject of the educational process with their own pace of development, and on the other, providing conditions for creative activity in which the child may symbolically overcome their fears. Thus, creative expression becomes an educational means of personal affirmation, while the process itself is experienced by the pupil as an act of support and a step towards building confidence and inner security.

The need to develop such a method arises from the increasing manifestations of anxiety among pupils in middle childhood, particularly in situations related to the school environment, new social interactions, and expectations of achievement. Contemporary research demonstrates that fear of failure, social insecurity, and difficulties in adaptation can hinder the pupil's full participation in the educational process. In this context, the educator is called upon to respond not only to the cognitive but also to the emotional needs of the child by creating opportunities for emotional release and the development of resilience. It is precisely here that art pedagogy reveals its potential: through symbols, play, and creativity, it offers the pupil a safe space for expression, reworking, and transformation of inner fears. From this emerges the necessity of a comprehensive educational model that integrates respect for the child's personality with art-based practices aimed at overcoming anxiety. Thus is created the Art-Educational Model for Coping with Fears in Middle Childhood, which is implemented through the following steps:

Figure 1. Conceptual model



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

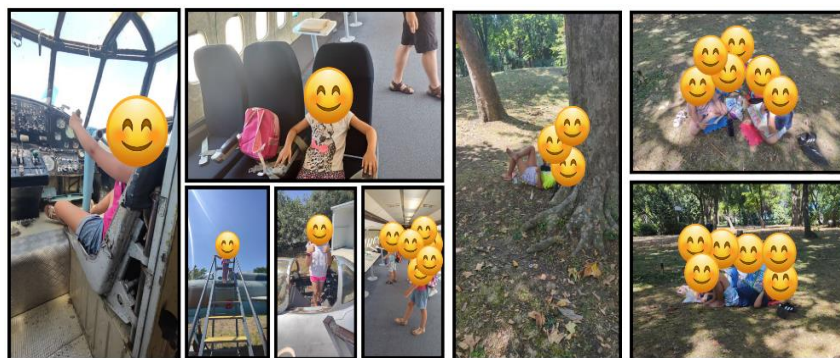
As part of an organised excursion to the Aviation museum at Burgas city, the teacher initiated the educational process by engaging the pupils in a short conversation and using drawings

supported by flashcards to identify their most significant fears, particularly those connected with returning to school after the summer holiday. At this initial stage it was essential that each child

felt listened to and accepted, without being judged or compared. Following the museum visit, the pupils moved to a natural setting in the forest, where they became acquainted with selected books and stories illustrating examples of overcoming difficulties and demonstrating courage. In this way, literature experienced in nature became a cultural-educational context that fostered reflection and empathy. Inspired by what they had seen and read, the pupils then engaged in creative expression, producing small art objects such as paper figures and drawings. Special attention was given to the

making of small airplanes, constructed from lightweight wooden sticks, which symbolically embodied their fears. The freedom to choose materials and forms was left entirely to the pupils themselves, thus preserving the principle of respect for their individuality and autonomy. In the following stage, the airplanes became a medium for symbolic release: the children set them free into the air, transformed them through play, and reshaped them into symbols of courage and self-confidence. This act acquired a cathartic character and gave rise to a sense of inner victory.

Figure 2. Implementation workflow



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The concluding phase of the activity was devoted to reflection and sharing. Gathered in a circle, the pupils described what they had created, what they had “released,” and how they felt after the creative process. The teacher supported each account with recognition and respect, affirming the uniqueness of every experience and emphasising that feelings of fear are natural yet can

be overcome through creativity and encouragement. Finally, a small exhibition and collective game was organised, in which the new symbols of courage were displayed prominently. In this way, the experience became a lasting positive memory that strengthened the pupils’ self-confidence and served as a resource for coping with future challenges.

Figure 3. Operational Process



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At the core of the study lies the assessment of school-related fear, measured through a questionnaire designed and adapted for pupils in middle childhood. The instrument consisted of nine statements reflecting typical situations at the beginning of the school year, such as thoughts about the first school day, anxiety about making new contacts, insecurity when giving oral responses, or anticipation of grades. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from one “strongly disagree” to five “strongly agree.” Higher scores indicated a greater degree of anxiety. For each pupil, a mean score across the nine items was calculated and used for statistical comparisons. Reliability analysis demonstrated high internal consistency, while content validity was ensured through expert evaluation by practising teachers, who reviewed the wording for clarity and age appropriateness. In addition to the school fear questionnaire, two further questions were included. The first asked pupils to what extent they felt ready to begin school after the summer holiday. The second focused on their personal

sense of courage and confidence in facing new challenges. Responses were given on a ten-point visual scale, where zero indicated “not at all” and ten indicated “completely.” Higher values reflected a more favourable state of readiness and self-assurance. The questionnaires were completed individually by the pupils on two occasions: once prior to the beginning of the programme and again immediately after its completion. During the instructions, it was emphasised that there were no right or wrong answers and that the most important task was to express personal experience. The teacher was present solely in an organisational capacity, refraining from any comments on the content of the responses, thereby ensuring a calm atmosphere and safeguarding the principle of respect for each child’s personality. Participation in the study was voluntary. Written informed consent was obtained from parents prior to data collection. Pupils were assured of anonymity and the right to withdraw at any time. Some parents did not wish their children to be photographed during the activities; this was fully

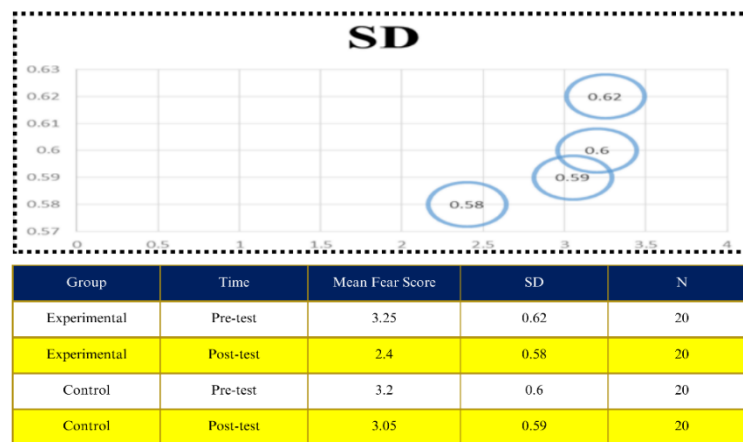
respected, and only pupils whose parents had no objection were photographed. To provide additional protection of identity, the faces of the participating pupils were digitally covered with emoticons.

Results

A total of forty pupils in middle childhood participated in the study, equally divided into an experimental and a control group. The main measure was related to school-related fear. In the experimental group, the mean pre-test score was 3.25 (SD = 0.62),

while the post-test score decreased to 2.40 (SD = 0.58). The reduction of 0.85 points indicates a substantial decrease in anxiety. In the control group, the change was minimal – from 3.20 (SD = 0.60) to 3.05 (SD = 0.59), representing a reduction of only 0.15 points, which cannot be regarded as a meaningful trend. This clearly demonstrates that the method applied in the experimental group led to a genuine reduction of fear, whereas the control group showed no significant change.

Figure 4. Observed outcomes: School-related fear



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Additional findings were obtained through the assessment of school readiness and the personal sense of courage. In the experimental group, school readiness increased markedly from a mean of 5.4 before the programme to 7.8 after its completion. In the control group, the values remained virtually unchanged, from

5.5 to 5.9. A similar pattern was observed in the sense of courage: in the experimental group it rose from 5.6 to 8.0, while in the control group the change was from 5.7 to 6.0, indicating little or no impact.

Figure 5. Observed outcomes: School readiness and sense of courage

Group	Readiness for School (0-10)	Perceived Courage (0-10)
Experimental Pre	5.4	5.6
Experimental Post	7.8	8
Control Pre	5.5	5.7
Control Post	5.9	6

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The collected data provide evidence of a pronounced effect of the art-educational model implemented in a non-formal cultural environment. Among the pupils who went through the full cycle of activities, a significant reduction in school-related fear was observed, accompanied by increased readiness to return to the classroom and an enhanced sense of courage and confidence in facing new challenges.

Conclusion

The art-educational model, grounded in the principle of respect for the child's individuality, demonstrably facilitates the reduction of school-related anxiety and the enhancement of confidence and readiness in middle childhood, when implemented in a supportive, creative setting. Empirical evidence supports that engagement with the arts offers meaningful opportunities for emotional regulation, stress reduction, and the expression of inner experience [6]; [7]. Specifically, structured art-based activities and symbolic play serve

as effective vehicles for helping children symbolically process and release anxiety while developing a sense of agency and inner security [8]; [2]. This model's deliberate integration of cultural context, narrative reflection, creative expression, and group dialogue builds positive emotional memories, reinforces a sense of belonging, and fosters personal affirmation. It aligns closely with frameworks that emphasize arts education as a core contributor to social-emotional learning [4] and provides a robust, field-tested approach for teachers and educators seeking evidence-based strategies to support children's emotional and social development.

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