

MORAL VALUES AS A FACTOR IN THE FORMATION OF MORAL UPBRINGING THROUGH DRAMATIZATION IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL AGE

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)

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Abstract: This study examines dramatization as an educational approach that supports the development of moral understanding in the early years of primary schooling. The research focuses on the relationship between literary narrative, embodied participation and guided pedagogical reflection, showing how these elements create a learning environment in which pupils can engage with moral ideas in a meaningful and emotionally resonant way. The experimental component was carried out in close collaboration with Dr. Teodora Valeva, an acknowledged expert in children's literature and senior assistant professor, whose original tale and book provided the artistic foundation of the pedagogical model. As the author of numerous works for young readers, she contributed both professional insight and creative authenticity to the development of the initiative. Her narrative framework offered a coherent imaginative world through which pupils encountered situations of moral significance that were accessible, vivid and relevant to their emotional experience. The study involved pupils from "Anton Strashimirov" Primary School in Burgas city who took part in observation, role engagement and discussion related to the moral themes of the tale. The cooperation of their teachers Tsvetelina Dimitrova and Darina Planinska ensured a supportive and authentic environment in which pupils responded openly and thoughtfully. Their participation allowed for the identification of clear shifts in the way children interpreted kindness, responsibility and empathy. Through the process of taking on roles, pupils developed a more precise sense of the motives guiding the characters and a more deliberate understanding of the moral implications of each action. The results of the experimental work confirm that literary experience combined with attentive pedagogical guidance strengthens the capacity for moral reasoning and contributes to the formation of early value orientation. Dramatization emerges as an approach that invites pupils to explore the meaning of human behaviour and to relate the observed patterns to their own moral choices. It links the aesthetic and emotional aspects of literary engagement with the cultivation of moral sensibility and demonstrates the potential for a productive partnership between higher education and the school community. The project reveals substantial opportunities for further development of dramatization within educational practice and in the preparation of future teachers, since artistic and narrative forms continue to show their ability to foster moral awareness through genuine personal involvement.

Keywords: *Moral education, character formation, experiential learning, dramatization, children's literature, narrative based pedagogy, early primary school, value orientation.*

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Introduction

Moral upbringing in the early years of primary schooling is viewed as a developmental process in which the child acquires value orientations and builds the capacity for moral judgement. Within the European tradition of moral education particular importance is attributed to experiential approaches that enable pupils to understand moral ideas through personal experience rather than through verbal explanation alone. According to the research of Thomas Lickona, moral qualities are formed most sustainably when pupils take part in situations that require empathy, honesty and a sense of responsibility [1]. This perspective aligns with the work of James Arthur, Kristján Kristjánsson and their colleagues, who describe moral upbringing as the cultivation of character and virtue within authentic social interactions that encourage the child to engage with moral choices and to recognise their consequences [2]. The scholarly positions This is an open access article under the [CC BY-NC](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) license

outlined above suggest that moral upbringing gains depth when the pupil takes part in real or artistically modelled situations in which moral choice carries direct significance. Within this understanding, the role of the teacher involves not only the presentation of moral concepts but also the organisation of conditions that enable the child to act, to experience and to reflect upon their own behaviour. Of decisive importance for the interest of children of primary school age in fairy-tale literature is their growing desire to become acquainted with the phenomena of the surrounding world, as well as their wish to take an increasingly active part in various forms of activity in everyday life. In this sense, fairy tales satisfy this need in a comparatively most complete way. Their significance should not be reduced only to the concrete depiction of characters and circumstances, but should also be understood in terms of their capacity to lead the child from the direct demonstration of actions

towards a gradual insight into the hidden messages and the generalisation of meaning [3]. Such an approach directs attention towards methods that integrate action, emotion and personal engagement, for these are the elements that support the development of an intrinsic motivation for moral conduct. This theoretical perspective establishes a natural connection between moral upbringing and dramatization as a pedagogical method. Through role, plot and interaction, dramatization places the pupil in a situation that requires an understanding of the character's motives, an awareness of choice and a recognition of consequences. In this way, the artistic action becomes a space in which moral orientations are shaped not through verbal assertion but through active participation. This position is developed in the works of Heathcote and Bolton, as well as Winston and Tandy, who emphasise that dramatization provides a protected educational framework for exploring moral situations accessible to the child's sensibilities [4]; [5]. The emphasis on personal experience and role-taking is also consistent with the research of Lawrence Kohlberg, who conceptualises moral development as a sequential process stimulated by engagement with moral dilemmas [6]. Within the artistic context of dramatization, such dilemmas can be presented in a manner that is emotionally resonant while remaining pedagogically structured. Within this theoretical framework dramatization is not regarded solely as an artistic technique but as a pedagogical medium that creates conditions for the formation of moral virtues in the early years of primary schooling. It enables pupils to enter the moral logic of the literary text, to experience the choices of its characters and to transfer the meanings they have internalised into their own behaviour.

Exposition

The audience consisted of pupils from „Anton Strashimirov” Primary School in Burgas city, specifically from year 1 and year 3, who were invited for this occasion with the kind cooperation of their form tutors Tsvetelina Dimitrova and Darina Planinska. The university maintains a long standing partnership with „Anton Strashimirov” Primary School since students frequently observe high quality pedagogical practices there and the teaching staff is recognised for its innovative attitude, professional commitment and openness to collaboration with the academic community. The presence of the pupils gave the performance particular authenticity because the moral message of the tale reached its natural audience, namely children for whom literary storytelling is familiar, genuine and inspiring. The plot of “The beautiful sparrow” was enriched through the inclusion of additional characters such as a lion, a dog, a cat, an owl and a hedgehog. [7]. This artistic decision made it possible to emphasise various behavioural models and to widen the moral landscape of the performance. The lion embodies strength which does not develop into moral support. The dog and the cat represent playfulness that overshadows attentiveness to others. The hedgehog is absorbed in his own concerns and remains indifferent to the needs of another. The owl, introduced as the wisest creature in the forest, appears as the counsellor of Mother Nature and brings an additional moral dimension by guiding the pupils towards the idea that wisdom is inseparable from responsibility.

Figure 1. Visual materials from the dramatisation (Book “Mother’s Tales”)



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Each of these images carries an important educational function because it shows that characters respond differently when placed in the same moral situation, a contrast that mirrors the diversity of human relationships. The activity was organised within a methodological structure that included an initial conversation with the pupils, the dramatisation itself and a concluding dialogue. At the beginning the children shared their own ideas about kindness, helping others and the significance of the characters. Their answers provided an initial picture of their moral orientation. This was followed by the dramatisation. Every scene was arranged to convey a clear moral meaning accessible to the children. Through the figures of the lion, the dog, the cat, the hedgehog, the owl and the sparrow the pupils observed how different characters reacted within the same moral situation and whether they recognised the need of Mother Nature, who appeared in the form of an elderly woman. This approach corresponds to the views of Heathcote and Bolton who regard dramatisation as a protected space for the understanding of social and moral roles through action. In the concluding conversation the pupils answered again the questions that had been asked before the performance.

Figure 2. Pupils from “Anton Strashimirov” Primary School attending the dramatisation



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The comparison between the initial and later responses revealed a clear development of moral understanding. The artistic experience encouraged the children to reflect more deeply on the motives and actions of the characters. Each image in the performance carries an important pedagogical role. The lion illustrated that strength does not necessarily express virtue. The dog and the cat directed the pupils attention to the notion of responsibility. The hedgehog emphasised the idea of indifference. The owl added a dimension of wisdom as the counsellor of Mother Nature. The sparrow expressed modesty and compassion. Mother Nature revealed the wisdom and moral evaluation based on inner qualities rather than outer appearance. This development in the pupils reasoning was reflected clearly in the qualitative analysis.

Table 1. Changes in pupils' moral understanding resulting from the dramatization

Question to the pupils	Answers before the performance	Answers after the performance	Pedagogical interpretation
Who is the most important character	The lion because he is the strongest	The sparrow because it helps	Transition from physical strength to moral action
What is kindness	To be polite	To help when someone is in need	Kindness is understood as behaviour rather than mood
Which character would you choose as a friend	The dog because it is fun	The sparrow because it cares for others	Formation of moral identification
Which character acted correctly	I do not know	The sparrow	Development of moral judgement

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Conclusion

The presentation of the dramatization based on the tale "The beautiful sparrow" showed that the combination of literary narrative, embodied action and guided discussion creates an educational environment in which pupils can approach moral questions with clarity and emotional involvement. The experience encouraged them to move beyond their initial impressions and to enter a space in which moral meaning is formed through observation, personal sensitivity and thoughtful dialogue. In this sense the dramatization served as a means through which children engaged with values essential for their social and emotional development. The interaction among the pupils revealed that children respond most strongly when literary characters come to life in a way that allows them to sense the motives behind their actions and to follow the consequences of the choices they make. Once enacted before them, the story became a lived situation that invited moral interpretation. Through this experience the pupils began to articulate understandings that had not emerged before the performance. The outcome confirms that a dramatised narrative can support the development of moral awareness when it is accompanied by careful guidance and a supportive educational setting. The cooperation between the university and the school community further strengthened the educational impact of the initiative. The presence of the pupils brought immediacy and sincerity, while the academic environment provided depth of interpretation and a coherent framework for reflection. This encounter between theory and practice enriched the educational process and the students' engagement, and at the same time demonstrated that partnerships between higher education and primary schools create opportunities for approaches that respond to the emotional and cognitive characteristics of young learners. The dramatization encouraged the children to view familiar situations from new perspectives. They began to recognise compassion, responsibility and attentiveness as meaningful qualities of human conduct rather than abstract notions. This shift in understanding shows that moral upbringing is most effective when thought and experience are united. Within such an environment pupils start to interpret behaviour through the prism of moral meaning rather than through external appearances. The findings of the initiative stress the broader educational significance of dramatization as a method that cultivates moral sensitivity through emotionally resonant learning experiences. The performance allowed pupils to observe and evaluate moral choices without imposing ready-made answers or predetermined judgements. Instead, they were given the opportunity to discover meaning through their own reflection. This characteristic makes dramatization a valuable element of contemporary moral education, especially when supported by a clear pedagogical structure and well-coordinated cooperation

between school and university. The results of the qualitative analysis showed that the integration of literary narrative, role and reflection can contribute to a deep and lasting understanding of moral principles in the primary school years. The initiative demonstrated that when children are introduced into a carefully organised encounter with a text they develop the ability to reason morally with increasing independence and insight. This perspective is supported by educational literature which emphasises the value of artistic and narrative forms for developing the moral imagination. Literary storytelling has been shown to cultivate attentiveness to others and an appreciation of the motives that shape human behaviour, a point developed in contemporary educational philosophy [8]. Research in moral education also highlights the value of reflective interaction between teacher and pupil, as such dialogue supports the child in forming considered moral judgements and in recognising meaning within interpersonal situations [9]. Taken together, these insights reinforce the significance of artistic and narrative approaches in moral upbringing, since they allow pupils to engage with values through personal participation and through experiences that leave a genuine emotional imprint. This understanding is further supported by studies in moral education which argue that moral judgement develops most sustainably when learners are engaged in situations that invite interpretation, perspective-taking and reflection rather than direct instruction or moral prescription [10].

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