IMPLEMENTATION OF AXIOLOGICAL NORMS THROUGH STORIES IN PRESCHOOL

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Abstract. *The strategic goal of axiological education is the development of human personality through and for authentic values such as altruism, respect, tolerance, truth, cooperation, uprightness etc. This goal is achieved throughout the whole educational levels, either through specific or related disciplines.*
Axiological education must begin from preschool level (with age ranges from 3 to 6 years). At this age level, the implementation of values is efficiently done through stories which kindergarten teachers include periodically in their didactic activities. In Romania, the curriculum for preschool contains directions of action expressed through experiential domains and disciplines of study, but does not contain compulsory content. As such, kindergarten teachers can choose, according to the theme of study, the content that suits the best and include it in their activities with the preschoolers.
Our research focuses on the axiological norms the kindergarten teachers consider relevant for contouring children's personality profile. The specificity of this implementation is the use of stories, selected in accordance to children's interests, age peculiarities, and moral values promoted. The study collected the opinions of 100 preschool teachers regarding the most often focussed on moral and behavioural values implemented through stories in the didactic activities. The research methods were the investigation based on questionnaire, the conversation and the systematic observation. The data collected were interpreted using the SPSS analysis. The results of the research could be used to increase teachers' awareness on the necessity of imprinting a nucleus of values on preschoolers which will guide them in thought and action.
Keywords: *axiological education, moral values, stories in preschool.*

Introduction

The concerns for the development of axiological traits in children's personality are consequences of the nowadays emphasis on the material, physical and professional development of the society. It is well known that a society that does not promote true values and does too little to disapprove immoral behaviour will eventually deform and destroy itself. That is why the promotion of axiological norms should be a matter of priority for any society. School is one of the best means to promote authentic values, through specific or related disciplines. The

strategic goal of axiological education is the development of human personality through and for authentic values such as altruism, respect, tolerance, truth, cooperation, uprightness etc. This goal is achieved throughout the whole educational levels, through a judicious organization of the didactic activities which should ensure a correct understanding of the social phenomena, the formation of prosocial behaviours, the education of high moral feelings etc.

Values such as altruism, respect, tolerance, truth, cooperation, uprightness, cooperation, politeness, perseverance, friendship etc. are formed from kindergarten through systematic and organized activities. There are various researches related to the specifics of axiological education at preschool age (Băbuț, 2020; Cucoș, 2022; Fielding, 2000; Florea, 2019; Nicu, 2016), and we have chosen to contextualise its implementation through story-telling. Since preschoolers have potential for decoding the literary texts and the emotional content involved, teachers use stories to familiarize children with a nucleus of values adequate to their ages in activities of language education or education for society or in extracurricular activities which lay emphasis on axiological education, on prosocial behaviour, on the socio-emotional development of children. The stories used have various ethical content and moral messages children can easily identify. The moral issues met in the stories are analysed, dwelt upon. By means of discussion, children understand the consequences of characters' actions. They can be solicited to describe how they would react or behave if they were in character's place, they also have to motivate their choice. As they reflect on the facts and events described in the stories, children learn certain norms of conduct, positive examples which, in turn, will contribute to the formation of correct attitudes and behaviour (Rădulescu, 2019). They also understand that one's behaviour can be adjusted by will.

Starting from the idea that axiological education, as an essential component of education, contributes to the formation and the development of harmonious personality, we consider it is necessary to identify the main values promoted through stories in preschool. The series of values used in our study was put together based on the specific literature from fields such as axiological education, philosophy of education and on the discussions in focus-groups with the kindergarten teachers involved in our study. The specificity of this implementation is the use of stories, selected in accordance to children's interests, age peculiarities, and moral values promoted. The study collected the opinions of preschool teachers regarding the most often focussed on moral and behavioural values implemented through stories in the didactic activities.

Literature review

Friendship is based on mutual affection and involves attitudes of mutual good will, loyalty, trust and support without waiting for a reward (Bocoș, 2016).

Friendship leads to developing skills of cooperation and conflict management. Friendship at preschool age is, most of the times, contextual and unstable (Neacșu, 2010). Children understand the value of friendship from the examples met in stories. They learn that among friends there are displayed wise attitudes based on tolerance, negotiation and renunciation in order to find a solution that all parties may benefit (Boca, Bucinski, & Dulman, 2008).

Cooperation is a form of action by means of which convergent efforts are made in order to fulfil common goals. Cooperation results into mutual influences of the agents involved. Research in pedagogy, psychology and educational sociology have shown that cooperation forms a network of social interaction, a space of communication governed by rules of democratic functioning, a space where various opinions and attitudes confront in terms of acceptance, tolerance, mutual respect, help and solidarity (Bocoș, 2013). For preschoolers, cooperation does not come naturally, so they must be taught to join their efforts to accomplish a common task.

Tolerance is the ability to accept diversity. Tolerance means embracing differences, learning from them, creating bridges over cultures, rejecting unjust stereotypes. From many points of view, tolerance is opposed to prejudice (Andruszkiewicz & Prenton, 2007). Tolerance means acknowledging people as they are, but not accepting negative behaviour. Preschoolers will understand better the concept of tolerance through stories as it essentially means treating others as one would like to be treated.

Perseverance is defined as tenacity, effort made voluntarily in order to successfully fulfil an objective. School perseverance involves trying hard and not giving up easily when performing school tasks. Children need to learn to perform school tasks even if they are difficult or boring. As such, they need to learn to focus on the task, to disregard the physical or intellectual barriers, to check if the solutions proposed are correct (Bernard, 2004).

Politeness is generally defined as respectful behaviour and kindness displayed in relation with people around. It is one of the essential social values that must be imprinted to children from kindergarten. Exercising politeness in daily activities leads to the formations of positive social habits which will become inherent traits of character throughout life (Nicola, 2003). Stories set positive examples through characters' behaviour and guide children's behaviour in everyday life.

Respect is an attitude based on consideration, esteem and appreciation towards somebody. As a moral value, it manifests in several ways: politeness and kindness in communication and relationships, display of understanding, punctuality, correctitude, concern for others' feelings and behaviour. Verbally, respect means formal language, favourable face expressions, visual contact with the interlocutor, warm tone of voice etc. (Ruben, 1979; Butnaru, 2008).

Uprightness, as moral value, refers to the ability of behaving according to rules. It implies respect for truth, honesty in relationships, self-respect, rigour in behaviour (Cucoș, 2022). Children learn from stories that characters that lack this value suffer consequences. This opposition of right and wrong teaches them that moral values transposed into behaviour ensure others' respect and is at the basis of civilized relationships.

Altruism is a moral attitude that implies support, help for the other without any personal gain. Altruism provides the opportunity to interact with other people, to develop friendly relationships and is learned from observing models, through guidance and through exercising such behaviour in different circumstances (Catrinel & Callay, 2010). As for children, altruism is learned from examples set by grown-ups. In preschool, children learn and practice this behaviour through small gestures: sharing toys, offering help, comforting emotionally another colleague etc. The value of altruism, its superiority over selfishness, its positive effects on people around are best illustrated through stories.

Methodology of research

Objectives

The research objectives are a) to identify the axiological norms implemented through stories the kindergarten teachers consider relevant for contouring children's personality profile, b) to realize descriptive analyses of the selected elements in order to determine a hierarchy based on teachers' opinions.

Participants

The sample used for research was made of 100 preschool teachers from different kindergartens from Vrancea County Romania. The participation in the research was done based on volunteering. Teachers' experience in the educational system ranges from 7 to 30 years. This amount of experience allowed the systematic observation of the values rendered through stories with great impact on children's personalities. It also allows them to make an adequate choice of the stories to include in the didactic activities since in Romania, the curriculum for preschool contains directions of action expressed through experiential domains and disciplines of study, but does not contain compulsory content. As such, kindergarten teachers can choose, according to the theme of study, the content that suits the best and include it in their activities with the preschoolers.

Research methods and instruments

The systematic observation done through the years of working experiences with children allowed teachers to remark children's preferences for stories with themes/ topics on certain values. The observations were analysed and debated in focus-group discussions, which, in turn, led to a careful selection of the axiological norms implemented through stories in kindergarten axiological education.

The research was continued with an investigation based on a questionnaire submitted to the sample described above. The questionnaire included eight items: altruism, cooperation, friendship, perseverance, politeness, respect, tolerance, uprightness The answers were variants of a five-step scale: (1) to a very low extent, (2) to a low extent, (3) to an average extent, (4) to a large extent, (5) to a very large extent. Teachers' choices showed each item's importance for the development of the axiological or moral dimensions of children' personalities.

Results and discussion

The SPSS software was used for the descriptive analyses, the t-test for the independent samples.

Table 1 **Means and standard deviation of the axiological norms implemented through stories in preschool** *(made by authors)*

Items of the axiological norms implemented through stories	Kindergarten/Preschool Mean (std. dev.)
Friendship	4.58 (0.667)
Cooperation	4.82 (0.412)
Tolerance	4.42 (1.220)
Perseverance	4.36 (0.724)
Politeness	4.70 (0.914)
Respect	4.60 (0.542)
Uprightness	4.64 (0.904)
Altruism	4.80 (0.846)

With the means included in Table 1 we realised a hierarchy of axiological norms implemented through stories as presented in Table 2. As such, the indicator that ranked the 1st was considered of highly importance for the development of the axiological or moral dimensions of children' personalities, whereas the item in the 8th rank was perceived as less efficient for the same purpose.

Table 2 **Descriptive of hierarchy of the axiological norms implemented through stories in preschool** *(made by authors)*

Rank	Preschool
1.	Cooperation
2.	Altruism
3.	Politeness
4.	Uprightness
5.	Respect
6.	Friendship
7.	Tolerance
8.	Perseverance

According to Table 1, the means obtained in our research vary between 4.82 and 4.36. Their high values demonstrate that teachers consider them all relevant for the development of the axiological or moral dimensions of children's personalities. As shown in Table 2, the first two ranks in the hierarchy, with close means, belong to cooperation (m = 4.82) and altruism (m = 4.80). Cooperation is regarded as collaboration of children in performing some activities. Altruism manifests when the child shares objects/toys with group peers and accepts and offers support when needed. Teachers believe that these values are extremely important for founding children's personalities as, at this age, they need to socialize, to interact in order to form and exercise socio-relational abilities. The emphasis on imprinting them in children's behaviour is determined by the fact that their manifestation influences their popularity among peers (Catrinel & Callay, 2010) and increases the probability of making friends (Botiș & Mihalca, 2007).

Politeness (m = 4.70) ranks third in the hierarchy, which places this value among the most relevant for the intended purpose, in teachers' opinions. Politeness means saying "please" and "thank you", when asking for and receiving things, or greeting people one gets in contact with. Teachers believe it is one of most important values for the axiological development and social integration of children, because polite children are favoured by peers and develop more easily positive relationships within the group.

Uprightness, regarded as honesty, integrity, responsibility, abidance by rules of socializing ranks fourth (m = 4.64) in the hierarchy. This is supported by teachers' opinions who consider that being upright ensures good relationships within the group and brings forth the others' respect. Promoting uprightness in children's behaviour, in all its forms of manifestation, leads to understanding that there is a relationship between a situation and the behaviour one must adopt and that the respective behaviour triggers consequences. This can be easily understood by children if the content of the chosen literary texts promote models of correct behaviour.

Respect (m = 4.60), as a form of consideration approached from multiple perspectives: for people, for others' work and for others' objects, ranks fifth in the hierarchy. In nowadays society respect, as value, seems to have lost relevance. That is why measures to correct these situations must be taken from an early age. Children must learn that respect is at the basis of positive relationships, it is necessary to understand the other one, to cherish their interests and needs.

Friendship (m = 4.58) ranks sixth. This is not placed high in the hierarchy as teachers consider that preschoolers are at the age when they befriend easily and naturally as a result of integration in the group classroom. Generally, friendships allow positive social comparisons ("There are more people who think as I do.") and ensure emotional security, a sense of intimacy, of being helped when in need. At preschool age, children vacillate in their friendships so, through stories based

on this theme, children understand that establishing harmonious relationships based on friendship has multiple benefits in the long term.

Tolerance, ranked seventh (m = 4.42), is perceived in this study as displaying understanding and acceptance of physical, ethnic diversity, of diversity of opinions and attitudes. This value is important as society confronts with major issues regarding prejudice and discrimination. At preschool age, children are less tempted to compare and display negative attitudes in this respect. Their acceptance comes naturally. On the other hand, their behaviour is greatly influenced by grown-ups. In this case, if the teacher promotes correctly the messages of tolerance derived from stories, then children are likely to accept diversity of any kind easily at preschool age and later, in the future.

Perseverance ranks eighth (m = 4.36) in the hierarchy. At preschool age, this trait is still in formation. All through kindergarten this trait of behaviour is mostly insisted upon through different didactic activities. Through stories, the children understand that they need to act systematically in order to reach one's goals in real life.

Conclusions

At preschool age, children's value system is borrowed from adults (Călineci, Păcurari, & Stoicescu, 2009), that is why it becomes extremely important that they should be transmitted a set of values which would ground their moral and axiological profile. Stories are one of the most useful means of transmitting messages with moral depth and, as such, of familiarizing children with values. Although story-telling is mostly a passive activity, it ensures profound personal involvement through the emotions they stir in children. Most of the time, characters' deeds have emotional impact through the antithesis between good and evil. Finding out about characters in different stories provides children with models of behaviour, either positive or negative.

Concepts of value and morality must be formed since preschool because they reflect in the future interaction of children with the people around them. The activities of story-telling with stories based on an axiological nucleus adequate to preschool age support the formation of positive behaviour, the understanding of truth, of uprightness, of beauty as fundamental values, the respect for the ones around, manifesting tolerance and acceptance for the physical diversity, for opinions and attitudes. Internalizing these values leads to a better development of intrapersonal and interpersonal abilities of behaviour adjustment.

At the same time, becoming familiar with moral values and behaviours appropriate from a social point of view is not enough to support the formation of a personality profile with strong axiological principles. It needs to be doubled with close observation of children's behaviour and daily application of different actions with moral character during the didactic activities. The results of the

research could be used to increase teachers' awareness on the necessity of imprinting a nucleus of values on preschoolers which will guide them in thought and action.

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