

SPECIFIC STRATEGIES OF MORAL AND CIVIC EDUCATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

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Abstract

The paper highlights the efficiency of some strategies used in the educational process in order to fulfil the desiderata of moral and civic education of primary school students. To this purpose, the following objectives have been established: to know the level of formation of notions and moral-civic skills for very young students; to project and develop an educational approach centred upon students' moral and civic education; to refine the formative and educational values of the activities projected and developed; to evaluate the progress registered by students during and at the end of the applicative stage. The applicative research has been conducted by using several methods and tools: psycho-pedagogical experimental design, observation, conversation and analysis of activity products. The analysis of the data obtained throughout the research confirms the general hypothesis concerning the efficiency of the formative steps projected and taken with primary school students. It also enhances the formative value of the activities focusing on the crystallization of the structural elements of moral conscience and conduct which gradually shape the morality core of personality.

Key words: moral-civic behaviour, moral personality, psycho-pedagogical experiment, strategies for moral-civic education

Introduction

School-based education proposes as an ideal the free, integral and harmonious development of human individuality, as well as the training of an autonomous and creative personality. Cultivating sensitivity to human problems, moral-civic and religious values, showing respect for the environment constitute different educational outcomes and are particularly achieved in moral

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and civic education. In a world characterized by an ever-growing ethnic and religious diversity, moral and civic education suggests to know the identity of the self, but, equally, of other ethnic groups, beliefs and convictions. Moral and civic education promotes mutual respect and valorisation of fellow humans as fundamental principles, and transposing these principles in educational practice contributes substantially to the development of a pluralist society and a harmonious living with peers. In literature, the issue of moral and civic education is approached from multiple perspectives (Nicola, 1996; Cerghit, 2006; Cucuș, 2000, 2006; Dumitriu, 2007; Cojocariu, 2008; Albulescu, 2008; Piaget, 1980):

- as a complex process of progressive structuring of the elements constituent of moral conscience and conduct (see the theories advanced by Piaget, Kohlberg and Erikson on the development stages and levels of moral and civic behaviour);
- as a formative endeavour aimed at modelling moral personality through the knowledge and internalization of moral norms and values and their transposition into a socially desirable moral conduct;
- morality defined by Hegel as “*the inner behaviour of will towards itself*” (Hegel, 1996, p.120). But this will is not like moral will, which is turned absolutely toward itself, but related positively, through objectivation, to other acts of will. The opening to the other is the positive determination of one’s will and this is the only way to reach morality. Individual morality is not a mere result of the social dimension of ethics, but a subjective process through which the human being, due to objective factors based on which he/she acts, asserts himself/herself as a moral personality;
- the construction of an individual’s morality on the basis of social morality, representing, in fact, the active and creative mirroring of the content which is laid on social morality in the individual’s conscience. From this perspective, we can assume that social morality constitutes the ontological basis of moral education. Any educational action must relate to this given, which is both the point of departure, providing its necessary content, as well as the point of arrival, by the criteria depending on which its outcomes are appraised. Moral education aims at converting the given objective (social morality) into personal, subjective acquisition (morality);
- informative-formative values of moral-civic education:
 - *the informative meaning* of moral education points to the assimilation of a moral and civic culture, which includes a set of acquirements, moral notions that turn moral education into a component part of the education for values, of integral education, being strongly connected to

intellectual and aesthetic education and ensuring the spiritual continuity at social and individual levels;

- *the formative meaning* of moral and civic education consists of the involvement of all intellectual capacities in deciphering and experiencing the meanings of existence through the interiorization of moral norms, the valorization of the intrinsic substratum of religious values and their implementation. Seen from the formative role perspective, moral and civic education must promote deep feelings consistently, stimulate and keep on sensitivity and imagination and complete the child's education through a series of character and behavioural features developed in relation to one's self, to peers and to the social community;

- developing an efficient partnership among school, family, NGOs etc. to consolidate a stable and coherent set of values which supports the school in forming the students' favourable conduct, as well as a mentally, emotionally, physically and socio-morally healthy lifestyle (Bunescu, 1991; Nicola, 1996; Dumitriu, 2007; Cucoş, 2000).

Our purpose is to highlight some strategies used in the educational process to the purpose of fulfilling the moral and civic desiderata of primary school students.

2. Research design

2.1. Research hypothesis and objectives

The present research has formulated the following working hypothesis: *Projecting and developing a formative program centred on objectives, contents and strategies for moral education will contribute to developing students' notions, representations and skills of moral and civic behaviour.*

In order to conduct the research and validate the working hypothesis the following objectives have been established:

- to know the initial level of the notions, representations and moral-civic skills of very young students;
- to project and develop an educational approach centred upon students' moral and civic education;
- to refine the formative and educational value of the activities projected and developed;
- to evaluate the progress registered by students at the end of the applicative program.

2.2. Subjects

The research lot has comprised 20 students aged between 9 and 10, of which 11 boys and 9 girls, and there has been applied single-sample technique with measurements before and after.

2.3. The operationalization of the concepts and of the variables

The independent variable is represented by the formative program centred on objectives, contents and moral education of students, while the *dependent variable* consists of the development level for students' notions, representations and moral-civic skills.

The dependent variable was thus developed in specific behaviours.

a. Knowing and respecting the norms necessary for integration into social life, as well as the personal safety rules:

- to accept and comply with the rules of coexistence within groups;
- to manifest team spirit and to collaborate in performing a group activity;
- to introduce members of the family, colleagues, friends and neighbours;
- to introduce and describe oneself;
- to be familiar with and implement personal hygiene rules;
- to be familiar with and implement rules concerning the protection of one's life, of the others and of the surrounding environment;

b. Manifesting the ability of entering relationships, adjusting one's own behaviours to the needs of the group within which he/she lives (family, school, play group):

- to listen to and respect someone else's views;
- to learn how to wait in a given situation;
- to know and to comply with their responsibilities in the micro-group to which he/she belongs;
- to accept and to provide support;
- to manifest care and tolerance toward people with special needs;
- to acquire autonomy in daily work;
- to comply with/apply the rules of social coexistence.

c. Training and manifesting a positive attitude towards oneself and others (appreciating, in concrete situations, certain behaviours and attitudes in relation to default and known rules):

- to assess behaviour in relation to rules of social coexistence;

- to appreciate their own behaviour in relation to other persons, characters and concrete situations;
- to adjust their behaviour to different situations;
- to become aware of the positive and negative consequences of acts of behaviour on oneself and others.

d. To experience positive emotional states in relations to others, to manifest friendship, tolerance, harmony, and to learn self-control at the same time:

- to fulfil promises made;
- to express disagreement with negative attitudes of destruction, disorder and negligence;
- to manifest confidence and courage in relation with oneself and others;
- to accept diversity of opinions and attitudes.

2.4. *Research methodology*

The following methods of research have been used: the psycho-pedagogical experiment, the friendship test, the politeness test, the sincerity test. *The friendship test* has assessed the students' ability to engage in relationships based on friendship, harmony and understanding. Students had to solve the following tasks: to write an essay entitled "My friend"; to draw some objects that they would offer to their friends. *The politeness test* has evaluated the students' knowing and respecting a group's behavioural norms, the usage of different greeting formulae at different moments of the day; the usage of a politeness formula when the person receives something. The students have received the following tasks: to write two greeting formulae used at different moments during the day and to specify the concrete situations in which they say "thank you". *The sincerity test* has assessed the students' awareness of the notions of "sincerity" and "lie", identifying differences between the two concepts and indicating concrete situations in which they have encouraged a colleague not to be sincere. The data obtained through these tests have been corroborated with those provided by psycho-pedagogical observation of students' behaviour in different contexts and with data obtained by individual conversations conducted with the students.

2.5. *Procedure*

The experimental research has comprised three stages: the initial evaluation stage, over a period of two weeks in which several tests have been run to assess knowledge, representations or moral conduct skills; the formative-ameliorative stage, lasting for six months, has included the design and development of an educational approach centred on objectives, contents and strategies used to form concepts, representations and enhance moral-civic skills which shape the students' moral-civic behaviour; the final evaluation stage carried out at the end of the experimental research

implied re-testing the students' knowledge in order to register the progress made since the initial assessment.

Results and discussions

The data collected has been statistically processed and graphically represented in tables and histograms. Table 1 and Figure 1 present the results expressed by scores and averages, obtained by students during the initial and final testing of their moral and civic behaviour.

The general hypothesis is supported because the projection and development of the formative program centred on objectives, contents and moral education strategies has conducted to developing students' moral and civic notions, representations and behavioural skills.

Table 1. *Results obtained in the initial and final evaluation*

No.	Evaluation tests	Initial	Final
1.	friendship	84 m=4.2	104 m=5.2
2.	politeness	83 m=4.15	112 m=5.6
3.	sincerity	81 m=4.05	109 m=5.45

In the friendship test, the score obtained in the final evaluation was 104, but m=5.2, superior to the ones obtained in the initial evaluation, where the score was 84, and m = 4.2. The politeness test registered a score of 112, with m=5.6, higher than the score in the initial evaluation, where the score was 83, with m = 4. 15. As for the sincerity test, the score in the final evaluation was 109, m=5.45, which exceeded the initial evaluation score of 81, with m = 4.05.

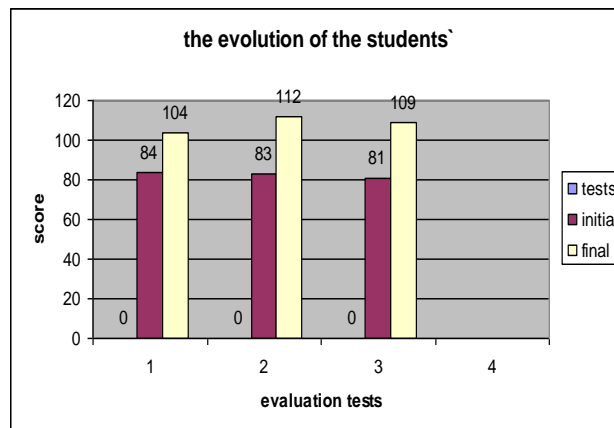


Figure 1. *The evolution of the students' moral-civic behaviour*

Based on the initial evaluation data which have highlighted a modest level of acquisition of knowledge, representations or moral-civic behaviour, there have been designed and carried out a set of activities structured on the correlation of objectives with contents and sent messages, with strategies to achieve and means to assess acquisitions. All activities have been centred on practice and the development of structural components of moral consciousness and conduct relating to:

- knowledge and compliance with school regulations;
- manifestation of a civilized behaviour in the relationship with parents, educators, colleagues, administrative staff of the school;
- training of a moral conduct based on sincerity, courtesy, cooperation, tolerance, work, mutual respect, friendship;
- manifestation of disagreement to negative behavioural elements encountered in colleagues, adults;
- knowledge of consequences of failure to comply with the standards of correct use of water, fire, electrical current;
- adaptation of behaviour in different situations, contexts, using appropriate courtesy formulae;
- respect for the rights of persons belonging to other religions, ethnic groups;
- discrimination between what is good and bad, acceptance of diversity of opinions and attitudes, etc.

Of the strategies used, we can mention role play, didactic game, moral conversation, moral example and exercise, dramatization, movie, trips, visits, sports games etc. Students have shown a high motivation for this kind of activities, and the dialogue at the end of each activity has facilitated the transfer of messages, conclusions with a formative value, centred on moral-civic behaviour. In this respect, there have been organised debates on the moral value of some characters' actions; differences in character traits; moral consequences of their action; motivations involved in positive or negative actions, etc.

Conclusions

Research results confirm the validity and efficiency of the educational program designed and performed with the students. By comparing the results obtained at the end of the formative program with those obtained before it, there have been registered higher scores and averages at the end of the experimental program. Students' moral-civic behaviour has improved, most of

them being polite, sincere, collaborative, friendly, respectful in relation to the others (adults and children), compliant with the rules prescribed for civilized behaviour in society. An important contribution has been brought by activities centred on strategies which have offered students an opportunity to live in the school environment as tidy and active citizens, fulfilling different responsibilities of public interest meant to ensure order, hygiene, aesthetics and well-being in the class. The data correspond to the theoretical premises advanced before and resulting from the literature covered. According to it, the development of human personality is both an individual and a social process. It is individual because it refers to a concrete subject and, starting with a certain age, self-development is implied. It is also social as it is achieved in a given situational context, in which a multitude of external variables distinctly influence human personality development.

“Moral conduct does not simply mean the requirement of renouncing worldly pleasures, but more the solicitous interest taken by somebody to forge a better destiny for the entire mankind.” (A. Einstein)

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